

Letter to Our Community

On behalf of the Union Township residents and business owners, the Union Township Trustees present the 2024 Union Township Comprehensive Plan, which is an update to and replaces the current comprehensive plan adopted in 1998. Development and growth pressures have significantly increased over the last few years, prompting the Township Trustees to take proactive steps to respond to these trends and prepare for the future. This Comprehensive Plan is a follow-up to an Economic Development Strategy, prepared by the Montrose Group and adopted by the Trustees in 2023, which sets an economic policy framework to help protect the Township's tax base. The overarching purpose of this Comprehensive Plan is to identify land uses that align with the Economic Development Strategy while preserving the rural character and protecting the agriculture roots so dear to this Township.

This plan has been prepared through input from a Stakeholder Committee comprised of residents, business owners, and technical agencies from the local, county, and state levels. A community survey was completed at the beginning of the process and two public engagement meetings were held prior to final recommendations being made. We hope that this plan will set the stage for the future of the Township and help guide us through these challenging times.

Sincerely,

Union Township Board of Trustees

Introduction & Executive Summary

The Union Township Comprehensive Plan is designed to serve as a blueprint for land use and public policy decisions within the township over the next several decades. Union Township sits in a unique position along the Interstate 70 Corridor surrounded by several municipalities including Hebron, Heath, Kirkersville, Granville, and the Village of Buckeye Lake. Unprecedented growth is occurring in Licking County with both logistics and tech-oriented business developments. These types of uses need utilities and zoning that the Township cannot currently provide. Development pressures along the Township’s southern and eastern boundaries could result in landowners seeking annexation from a neighboring municipality if the Township is unable to respond to these infrastructure and zoning requests. Once Township land is annexed into a municipality, the Township loses all control over the regulations of land use and the quality of development. Annexation can also erode the Township tax base.

Union Township has a deep-rooted agricultural history that residents clearly want to maintain. Residents have expressed their desire to maintain the rural character and to limit development encroachments as much as possible. For these reasons, this plan recommends an intentional development approach to balance these growth pressures while maintaining an agricultural heritage as the heart of the Township.

WHAT IS A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN?

A comprehensive plan, also known as a master plan or strategic plan, is a document that guides the land use, development, and direction of a municipality, township, or county for the long term. A comprehensive plan identifies issues, formulates ideas, and proposes policy to inform the community and officials of the direction a community’s zoning, land use, and development should take.

Comprehensive plans identify current issues and trends shaping the community. They also gather information on the current state of the community, such as demographics, housing, land use, open space, recreation, transportation, utilities, and other items. Furthermore, the planning process involves input and feedback from public officials and the residents, which is used to determine the character and direction of the community. The plan develops a vision statement and guiding principles for the community with this information. Finally, these documents propose policies to help guide officials and residents to represent goals related to these aspects. This includes future land uses but can also include recommendations on items such as infrastructure, public services, and sustainability.

Zoning, like comprehensive planning, is related to shaping the long-term development of a community. However, they are separate processes. Unlike zoning, a comprehensive plan is nonbinding: the document holds no legal discretion to regulate land use and development standards. Zoning is the legal mechanism townships use to enact and enforce land use regulations. However, the comprehensive plan is still related to zoning, as it is a manifestation of the goals and ideas of the township’s officials and community. Planners, residents, and other individuals consult the comprehensive plan regarding all zoning and land use matters, from revising the zoning code to approving or denying development proposals.

Comprehensive plans, much like zoning, became mainstream in most US municipalities in the 1920s after Congress passed the Standard State Zoning Enabling Act and Standard City Planning Enabling Act. During most of the twentieth century, the comprehensive plans were mainly the creation of city leaders alone. In recent years, most communities have made efforts to provide residents with a more prominent voice in the comprehensive plan process.

Comprehensive plans typically should be updated no less than every ten (10) years. Additionally, a full planning process resulting in a completely new plan should be completed no less than once every twenty (20) years. This ensures that these plans stay up-to-date to consider current local trends, data, and changes in the population.

VISION STATEMENT & PLANNING THEMES

A Vision Statement is an essential part of any comprehensive plan. All aspects of the plan are compared to the Vision Statement to determine whether they adhere to the vision for the community. The following Vision Statement for Union Township was established after consultation with the Stakeholder Committee, residents and township officials through the public engagement process.

VISION STATEMENT:

Union Township is a community that desires to preserve its rural character, sense of community, and quality of life while balancing growth to diversify its tax base and enhance its services. Union Township will achieve this vision through fostering effective communication channels with residents as well as community and regional partners and being intentional with its development approach.

Four Planning Themes were also established to help guide the planning process. These themes are explained throughout the plan and set the stage for creating the final recommendations for plan implementation. The Planning Themes are:

Submitted for township review – 1.31.2024

1. Balancing Growth and Preservation to Protect and Enhance the Quality of Life
2. Fostering Partnerships to Enhance Community Services
3. Supporting Sustainable Infrastructure
4. Promoting Economic Prosperity

TOWNSHIP HISTORY¹

Union Township is the largest township in Licking County by area, comprising of 21,035 acres. Located in the south-central section of the County, Union Township is home to the Village of Hebron, with a population of 2,355, located at the crossroads of Old State Route 79, or Hebron Road, and US 40, National Road. Also within Union Township is the Village of Buckeye Lake, which lies in the southeast corner of the township. The current population of Buckeye Lake is 2,551. The cities of Newark and Heath are adjacent to the township in the northeast quarter. The City of Columbus lies approximately twenty-five (25) miles to the west of Union Township and is easily accessed via Interstate 70. To the west, the Village of Kirkersville, located in Harrison Township, is also adjacent to Union Township. The Village of Granville lies several miles to the north along State Route 37. Additionally, Union Township is in close proximity to the Intel site in New Albany,

The land of Union Township and Licking County was originally the home of the Wyandot Native Americans. By 1800, their presence had disappeared, and they were displaced by US settlers, who would become the founders of Union Township. Despite the Wyandots' absence, one can still find records of their history, such as artifacts in farmland fields and their signal mounds, which are among the highest points in Union Township.

Due to rich soil, the abundance of wildlife, and a large supply of timber, agriculture has always been the backbone of Union Township. With the construction of the Ohio Canal in 1828, the Central Ohio Railroad in 1834, and the Cumberland National Road in 1853, the township, including its principal town, Hebron, became the Licking River Valley's shipping capital for grain and pork. Agriculture is still the principal product of Union Township and is a vital component of the economy as well as the lifestyle of Licking County and Union Township. Most of the farmed areas are in the western half of the county. The farmed areas in the hilly, eastern part are used mainly as pasture or hay land, but some areas are used as cropland. The principal crops in the township are corn (yellow dent, popcorn, some food grade corn), soybeans, and wheat. Concerning livestock, the township currently has less than 10 dairy farms, some beef and pork confinement facilities, and no major poultry facilities.

The three primary areas of settlement within the township were Union Station, Luray, and Hebron. The first schoolhouse was built in 1816 and was believed to have been located in the northeastern portion of the township. The Luray School followed and was located at the top of the hill on National Road, midway between Luray and Hebron. In 1849, the first Hebron School was built on North Street in the Village of Hebron. The longest running church in the township, possibly the oldest is the Licking Baptist Church, established in

¹ Adapted from the history section on the Union Township website: <https://www.uniontownship-licking.com/about>

1807 with their first building built in 1811. Several other churches were established throughout the township during the mid to late 1800's.

The township also hosted early manufacturing. The first recorded manufacturing site was a mill on the banks of Auter Creek in 1803. The township's manufacturing continued to prosper throughout the late 1800's and early 1900's. The creation of the Newark Industrial Park in the late 1960s provided a significant boost to the township's manufacturing sector. The park continues to grow and employs over 4,000 workers today.²

Agriculture and manufacturing were the foundation of the community which has since diversified itself across numerous sectors. While agriculture continues to be a primary economy for the Township, manufacturing areas have largely been annexed into surrounding municipalities. Balancing these land uses will be a key theme throughout this planning document.

² Kent Mallett, "No Fooling: Hebron Industrial Park Road Improvements Finally Begin," *Newark Advocate*, April 1, 2020, <https://www.newarkadvocate.com/story/news/2020/04/01/hebron-industrial-park-road-improvements-finally-begin/5096868002/>.

EXISTING CONDITIONS & TRENDS

STUDY AREA

The study area for this plan includes the unincorporated area of Union Township. The Base Map in Figure XX shows the borders of the unincorporated Township, as well as the areas for each city or village where land has been annexed from the Township.

Union Township is defined by a few major features including several major roadways that run through the area. Interstate 70 traverses the southern quarter of the Township and has two interchanges at State Route (SR) 37 and SR 79. U.S. 40, the National Road, has 2 lanes and runs parallel to I-70 about a mile north. It intersects with SR 37 with a stoplight, and with SR 79 as a divided highway interchange. SR 79 itself runs north-south through the eastern quarter of the Township. This road is primarily a 5-lane road (2 lanes each direction plus a center turn lane), but it becomes a limited access bypass around the Village of Hebron with the interchanges noted above. SR 37 is the other major north-south road through the Township. This is a 2-lane road.

The other major feature in Union Township is Buckeye Lake. The lake, which includes the oldest State Park in Ohio, is a 3,100-acre freshwater reservoir that is a popular boating, fishing and swimming location³. The Lake itself stretches across three counties (Licking, Fairfield and Perry) and numerous jurisdictions. The southeasternmost corner of the Township intersects with the lake. The entire area has been annexed by the Village of Buckeye Lake, which lies along its northern shore and is the most significant settlement on the lakeshore. This area is accessible from I-70 at the SR 79 interchange, with 79 running through the Village and to the northwestern corner of the lake.

Union Township has several other jurisdictions that have annexed land within its boundaries as shown on the base map. A majority of the eastern quarter of the Township along SR 79 has been developed while the Village of Heath and the City of Hebron have annexed much of the land along SR 79. This corridor has been heavily developed with substantial commercial and industrial development. Residential neighborhoods also lie off SR 79 along with some vacant land still in the area. The Township has an industrial park on the east side of 79 between Heath and Hebron that has not been annexed. Additionally, there is a small area along the I-70/SR 79 interchange between Heath and Buckeye Lake that is still in the Township.

There are two other cities that have annexed land in the Township. Newark and Granville both have small sections of Township land that they have annexed just west of Heath. While these are not a significant presence in the Township today, they provide access to both communities to annex additional land in the northern Union area. Finally, the Village of Kirkersville has not annexed any land in Union Township but borders the Township in the southwest corner.

Place holder for base map – historical boundary

³ <https://ohiodnr.gov/go-and-do/plan-a-visit/find-a-property/buckeye-lake-state-park>

The remaining areas of Union Township that have not been annexed are a mix of agricultural and large lot residential. This describes most of the Township outside the SR 79 corridor, with the southern area along I-70 and US 40 being the least developed area. Much of SR 37 north of Beaver Run Road has large lot subdivisions along its length. Additionally, there are large areas of large-lot subdivisions along the western border and northwestern corner of Union. Overall, this provides the Township with a highly variable development pattern.

The historical borders of Union Township are fairly squared off except where they follow natural features. On the southeast corner the border runs at a 45-degree angle for a bit to incorporate a portion of Buckeye Lake. The eastern border is highly variable, as it follows the South Fork of the Licking River along most of its extent.

The current Township boundaries are different than the historical ones. While there are several communities that have annexed land, two communities have what is referred to as a “paper township”. In Ohio, when a City with a paper township annexes land, it not only removes the land from the Township’s jurisdiction, it changes the borders of the Township itself by transferring the land to a new Township that corresponds to the City’s boundaries. This has the effect of capturing all of the tax base for the annexing jurisdiction, including funds that might otherwise go towards fire services, for example.

Place holder for current township boundary

Figure XX shows the current underlying Township borders. Note that the Cities of Newark and Heath have both taken land out of Union Township when annexing by using a paper township. The other communities, Hebron and Buckeye Lake and Granville, have annexed land in the Township but have not removed it to a paper township. As a result, Union is the underlying Township and receives some tax revenue from land in these communities, while it receives no tax revenue from land in Newark and Heath.

PHYSICAL FEATURES

TOPOGRAPHY AND TREE CANOPY

Overall, the terrain in Union Township is relatively flat to rolling, with few natural barriers. There is a stretch of more rolling land that extends from the northern border of the Township through the center as seen in the map in Figure XX. While this land is more rolling, it is not a significant barrier to development or use of the land in most cases.

Also included Figure XX is a map of the tree canopy cover of Union Township. As shown, the tree cover is concentrated in the central and northwest areas of the Township. Additionally, much of the tree cover in the central area follows the rolling land. The eastern boundary is developed and therefore has little tree cover. The southern area is flatter, has less tree cover and is primarily agricultural, as well as being well-located to I-70 and US 40.

Place holder for topography and tree canopy maps

STREAMS – FLOODPLAINS – WETLANDS

Figure XX is a map of existing floodplains and wetlands, delineating the major water features in the Township:

Place holder for floodplain and wetland maps

The Township has several waterways that run through it. The South Fork of the Licking River runs along the eastern end of the Township for a length, and then curves west/northwest and runs through the southern end of the Township. This area, where it turns west near Buckeye Lake, has substantial floodplain associated with it. This floodplain covers much of the southern area of the Township along I-70 and stretches north to US 40 in some areas. This floodplain must be considered as this area develops in the future.

There are two significant tributaries to the Licking River that run through the Township. Beaver Run flows through the center of the Township, intersecting the Licking River on the eastern border. It has some wetlands associated with it, particularly as it nears the Licking River. Ramp Creek runs through the northern area of the Township and also intersects the Licking River at the western Township border. The stream forks and splits into two stream beds as it runs eastward. Ramp Creek has some wetlands associated with it, but these are not significant.

SOILS

Figure XX is a map of the soil drainage characteristics in Union Township.

Soil type impacts elements of land use such as the quality of farmland, water drainage, and the ability to build structures. The map shows that the southern area of the Township has an abundance of poorly drained soils, despite some veins of well-drained soils bordering the floodplain areas. The best draining soils are in the north central portion of the Township, which corresponds to the rolling land with higher tree cover. The northwest corner is moderately well-drained, and the northeast has a mixture of drainage types.

The presence of a substantial amount of poorly drained soils is fairly typical of soils in Central Ohio. Much of the region consists of poorly drained soils and require additional engineering to ensure suitable construction, foundation stability and drainage. Since the region is familiar with these practices, they are not a significant impediment to construction.

Place holder for soils map

FARMLAND

A majority of the land in Union Township is classified as prime farmland by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Soil Survey Geographic Database (SSURGO) Farmland Classification. Figure XX is a map of the farmland showing the classifications.

The map shows that there is a concentration of farmland labeled “Farmland of Local Importance” through the north-central area of the Township. This farmland is considered lower quality than prime farmland, but still functional. These farmlands correspond with the rolling lands and heavier tree canopy. Additionally, the urbanized areas of the Township are shown as not prime farmland on the map in Figure XX.

Place holder for farmland map

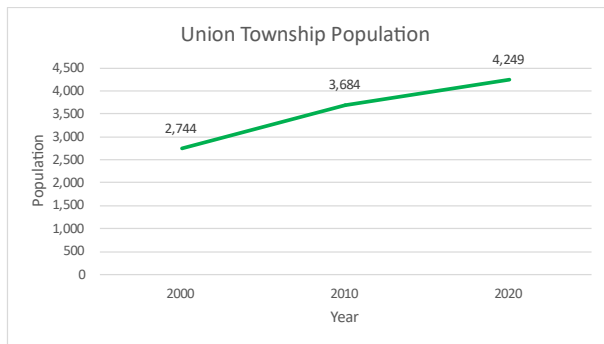
DEMOGRAPHICS

The demographics analysis for Union Township is included below and includes only the unincorporated areas of the Township. This provides a snapshot of the areas over which the Union Township administration currently has the most control.

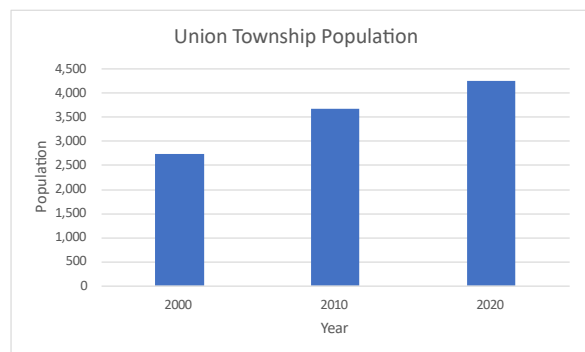
POPULATION

The population of Union Township has increased in recent years. In 2000, the population of the currently unincorporated areas of the Township was 2,744. This increased to 3,684, a 34.3% increase from 2000 - 2010. The Township experienced another increase to 4,294, or a 15.3% rise, from 2010-2020. This is a faster rate of growth than either Licking County or the State of Ohio during this period. Licking County showed a growth rate of approximately half of Union Township in both decades, while Ohio showed minimal growth between 1.5 to 3% per decade, with a rate that actually increased in 2010-2020.

This increase in the Township’s population is unsurprising. Union Township is located between Columbus and Newark, a rapidly developing area. The presence of I-70, U.S. 40 and County Road (C.R.) 79 provide ample locations for both business development and associated residential growth. C.R. 79 through and just north of the Township in particular is a growing employment hub, which would generate demand for additional housing in the area. Additionally, the Etna Logistics Park just to the west along I-70 and U.S. 40 has been a rapidly growing jobs hub.



Source: 2000, 2010 & 2020 U.S. Census



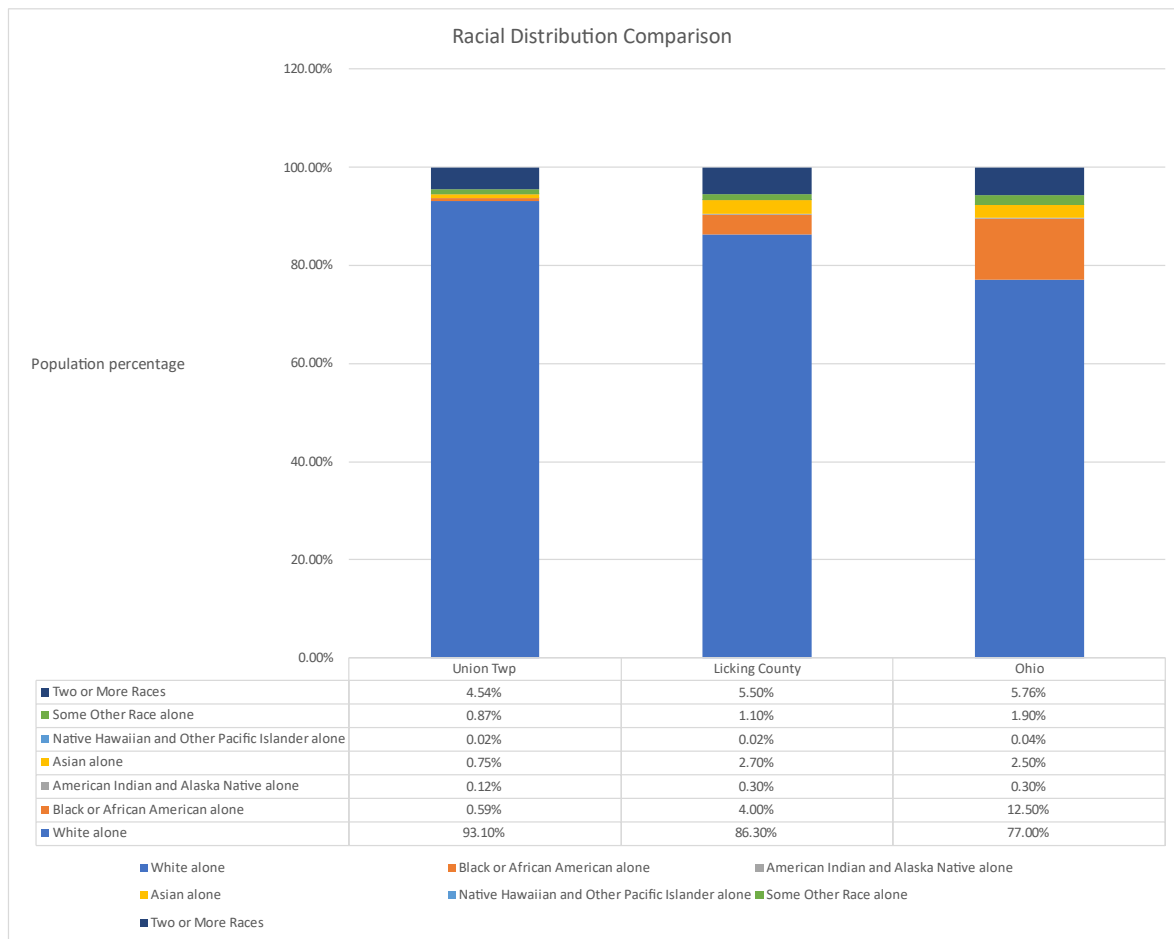
Source: 2000, 2010 & 2020 U.S. Census

The population of Union Township is expected to continue its rapid growth in the near future, driven primarily by the community’s proximity to job centers. The announcement of the Intel semiconductor facility and massive new Amazon data hub in New Albany, along with other significant job growth in nearby Jersey Township will result in rapid development along the S.R. 161/S.R. 37/S.R. 16 corridor between New Albany and Newark. This corridor runs just north of Union Township. Heath and Hebron, situated along C.R. 79 through the eastern portion of Union Township, are positioning themselves to capture a portion of this new growth being generated from Intel and other corporations. Additionally, development in Pataskala and Etna Township to the west is pushing east towards the Township rapidly. Finally, the Buckeye Lake Region in the southeast corner of the Township is benefiting from the recent reconstruction of the Buckeye Lake Dam and

associated improvements. All of these factors should lead to enhanced development pressure on Union Township, including both job growth and the associated residential growth.

AGE – RACE – EDUCATION

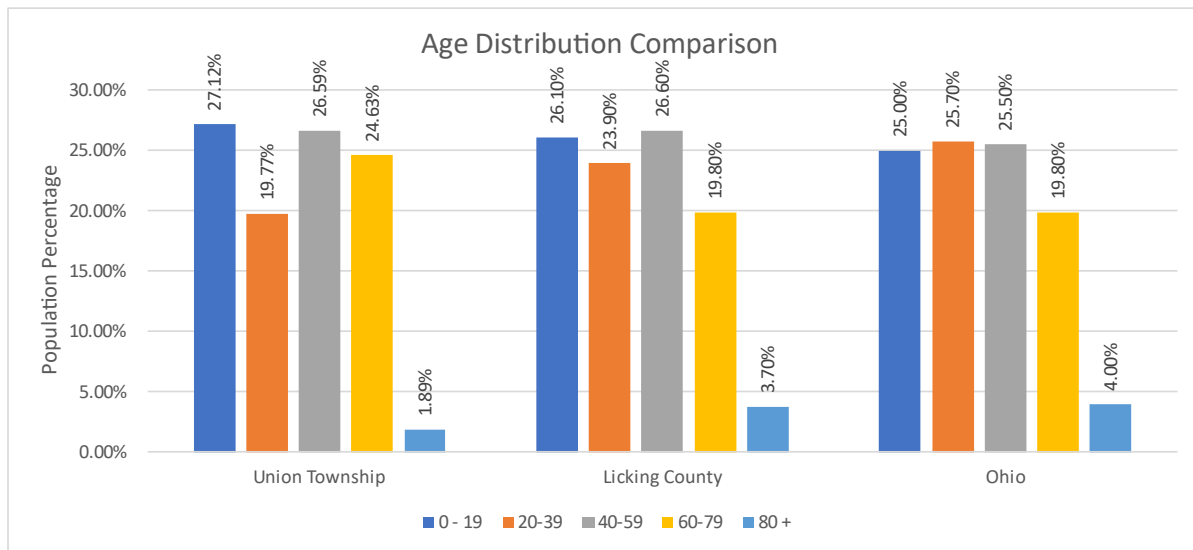
Union Township is more racially homogenous than Licking County or Ohio. 93.1% of the Township identifies as white, compared to 86.3% in the county and 77% statewide. The number of persons who identify with two or more races in the Township is 4.5%, which is close to the proportions in Licking County and Ohio. The demographics of Union Township reflect a more rural demographic profile. However, as residents move in, this profile may become more diverse.



Source: 2020 U.S. Census

Union Township has a fairly balanced distribution of population in age cohorts, and trends fairly closely to both Licking County and Ohio in most age brackets. The Township has between 24% and 27% of its population in the 0-19 age bracket, 40-59 age bracket and 60-79 age bracket. This demonstrates a steady, stable population profile. There is a drop in residents in the coveted 20-39 age bracket, at 19.77%, which is lower than both Ohio and Licking county. This is somewhat expected considering Union Township is a more rural community on the edge of developing areas, and likely attracts more established, married families with children, while young adults leave for

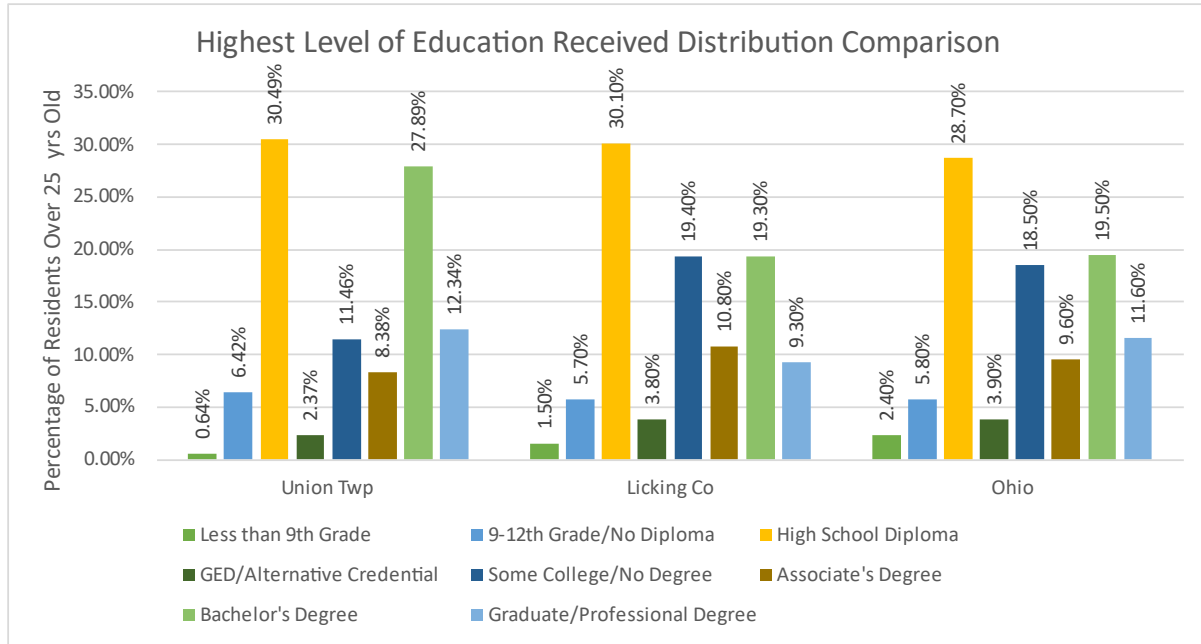
college or to live near other young singles. However, it may also indicate the need for more entry-level housing to accommodate this age group. Clearly empty-nesters residents are also remaining in the area once their children leave. However, there is a significant drop-off in the over 80 population. While this is no doubt the result of higher mortality in this age range, it also may indicate the lack of appropriate housing choices for older seniors. This percentage is about half of Licking County and Ohio’s share of the over 80 population.



Source: 2021 American Community Survey

Union Township has a varied educational profile. The Township has a higher level of residents over the age of 25 with bachelor’s degrees and graduate/professional degrees than both Licking County and Ohio. However, its percentage of those without a high school diploma is also higher than the County and State as a whole. It’s level of those with a high school diploma but no other education is in line with Licking County and slightly higher than Ohio.

A strong economy needs to provide jobs for those at varying educational levels. Union’s educational levels demonstrate that it adheres to what may be considered a traditional profile of blue collar/pink collar trades vs professional employment. While this may be overly simplified, Union should look to provide jobs in professional, trade and service/care industries to help all residents achieve gainful employment locally. Additionally, Union should seek to grow job categories that will be attractive to younger workers to encourage them to remain in the community.



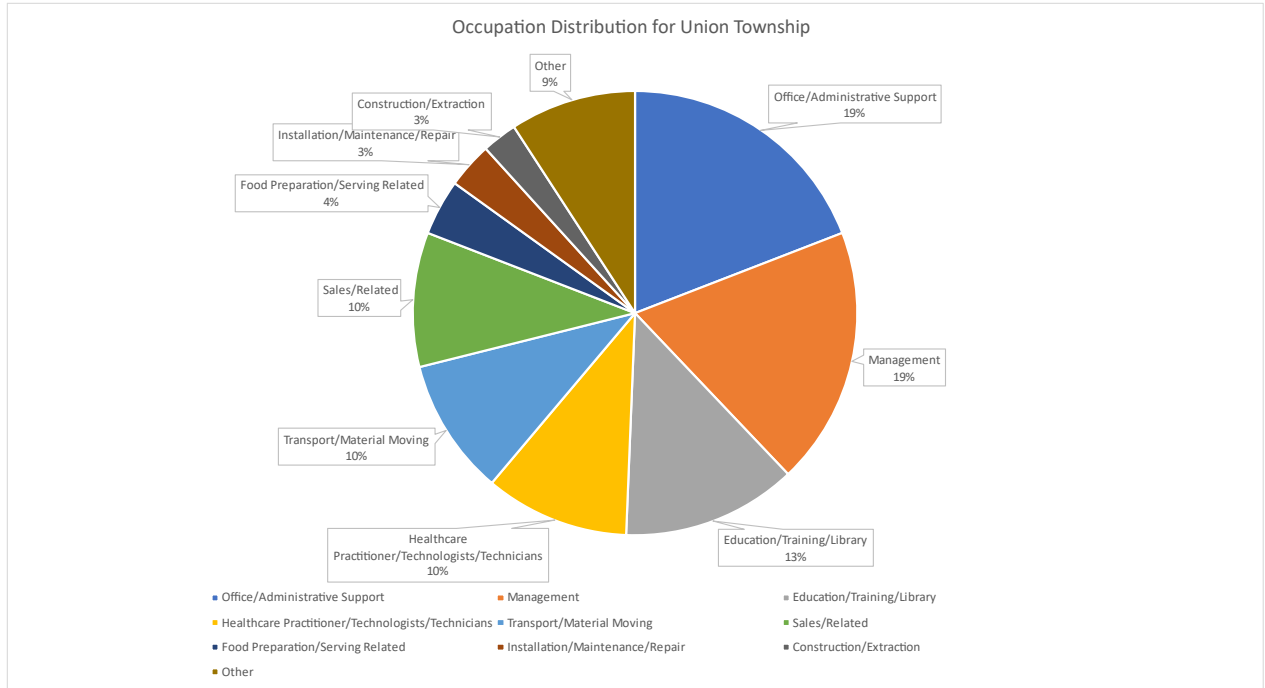
Source: ESRI 2022

ECONOMY

Union Township has concentrations in several industries which appear to match up with the educational cohorts above.

The most prominent occupation groups in the Township are “Office/Administrative Support” and “Management”, both at 19%. Next are “Education/Training/Library” at 13% and “Healthcare Practitioner/Technologist”, “Transportation/Materials Moving” and “Sales/Related” all at 10% each. These occupation groups contribute 81% of the Township’s workforce, demonstrating a highly diversified economy in the area. A majority of these employment groups are also significant areas for the county and state.

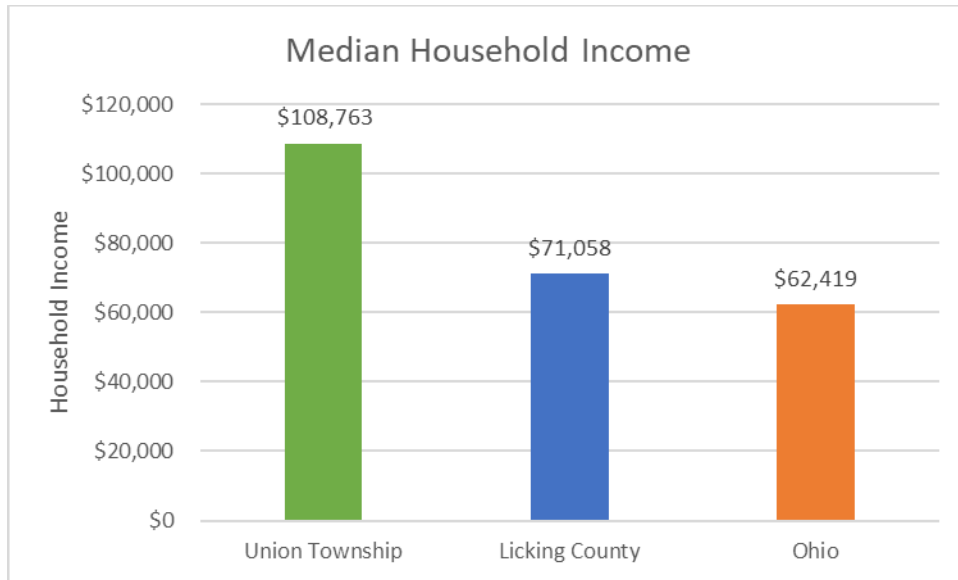
Currently the Columbus metropolitan area is experiencing significant growth in technology manufacturing and logistics. Union Township is well-situated to capture growth from both of these sectors. This could further diversify the economy of the area, although significant further growth in logistics could over-concentrate jobs in the already well-represented “Transportation/Materials Moving” sector.



Source: 2021 American Community Survey

INCOME

Union Township is a fairly affluent community, with a median household income greater than Licking County and Ohio. This is likely the result of residents with higher-paying occupations in skilled trades, medical and management field. Therefore, it is likely that most of the families do not have significant issues brought on by a lower socio-economic status. However, there are still lower-income residents, and their needs and interests are still important for the Township’s future.

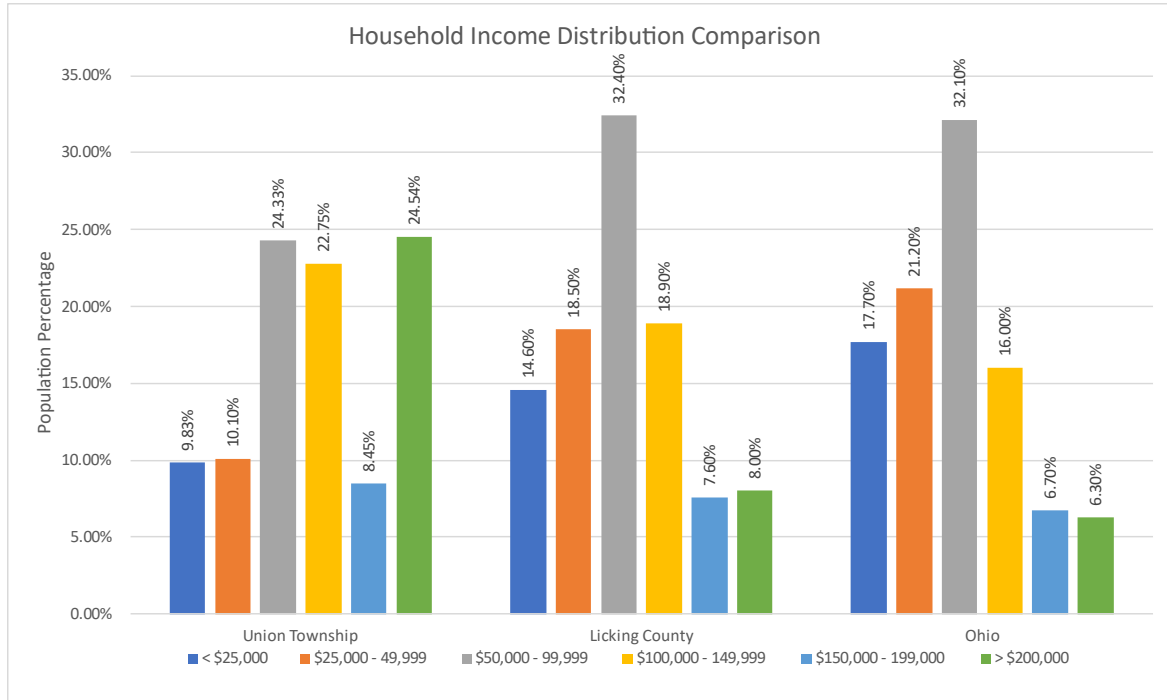


Source: ESRI 2022

The distribution of income shows that Union has a distribution profile that concentrates in the higher income brackets. Over half of the Township has incomes over \$100,000, vs. about 28%-30% for Ohio and Licking County. While Union does have about the second highest number of households in the \$50,000-\$99,000 bracket, this is still much less than Licking County and Ohio, where this bracket is clearly the largest by at least 10%. Union also has significantly fewer households under \$50,000 than Licking or Ohio.

This level of income helps support the large number of single-family homes on large lots that are the predominant form of housing in the unincorporated Township. Although it is likely that much of the new housing will also cater to higher-income residents, it is possible that more modest-income families may relocate to be closer to service jobs along I-70, U.S. 40 and County Road 79.

It's important to note that Union has nearly 20% of households earning below \$50,000. While a single-person household earning in the high 40,000's may be stable, many multiple-person families will suffer from the effects of poverty. This is a group that should not be neglected as the Township plans for the future.

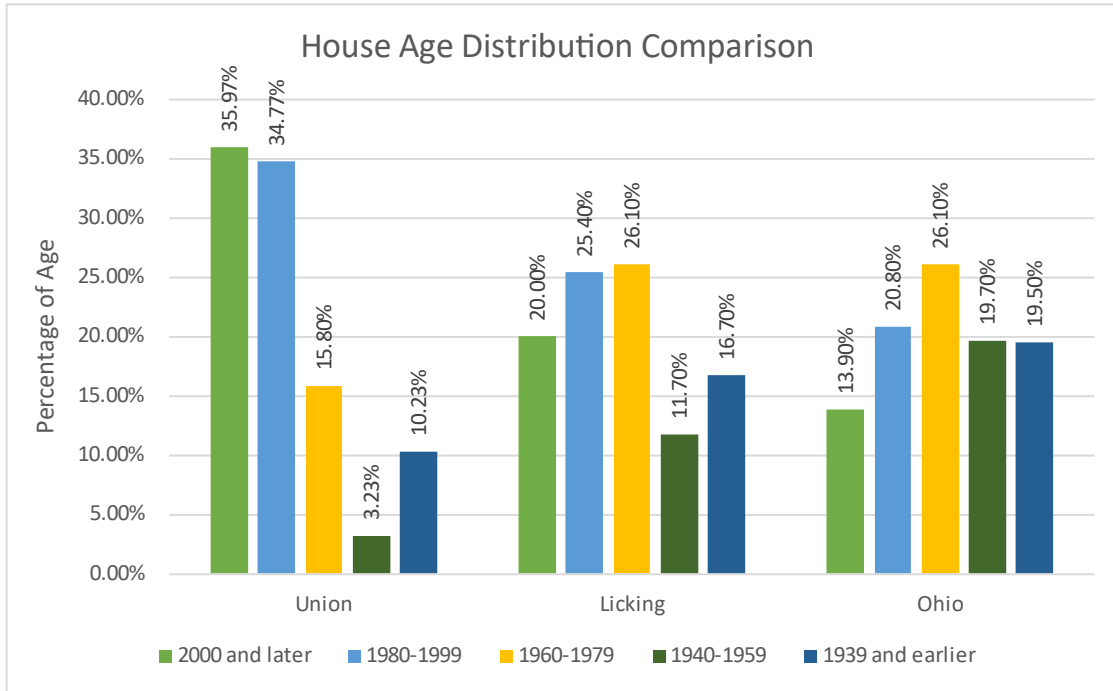


Source: ESRI 2022

HOUSING

Housing supply in the Township is limited primarily to single-family homes, with a majority on large lots of several acres. This serves the current community well, as it provides them a quiet, country setting close to the job centers in nearby Columbus and New Albany.

However, the current profile does not provide a variety of housing options to residents. For example, older residents that are aging out of single-family homes will likely seek to move out of the community in order to find compatible housing, such as apartments, condominiums or assisted-living. Additionally, with the likely growth of service and retail jobs, there are some workers that may not be able to find housing in the community in which they work, and the Township should consider their housing needs as well.



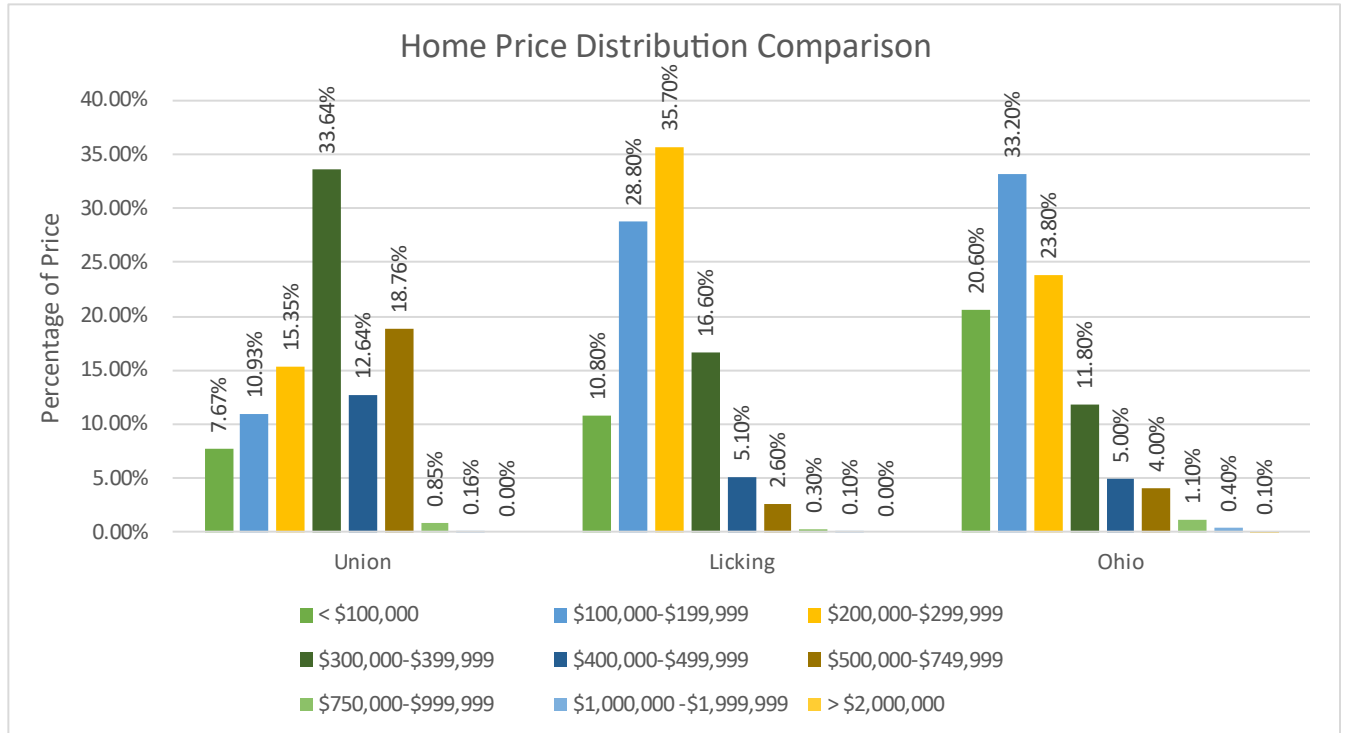
Source: 2021 American Community Survey

A large majority of the houses in Union Township, nearly 70%, were built after 1980. This indicates a community that has been growing recently, which is likely the result of the growth south along C.R. 79 in Hebron and Heath, as well as along I-70. As the Columbus metro area has pushed south, it's also likely that some residents have relocated to Union, either to split the commute time between Newark and Columbus for dual-employed families, or simply for larger lots in a more rural setting.

The distribution of housing prices below shows that Union has a large proportion of housing in the \$300,000 to \$399,000 range. This is somewhat higher than the Columbus Metro area, where the median home price was \$290,000 in 2022⁴.

Surprisingly, Union has a relatively large number of homes in the data listed below \$100,000, particularly with 7.67% below \$50,000. While this is slightly lower than Licking County as a whole, and much lower than Ohio, it is still surprising given the higher income profile of the area and its proximity to jobs. As noted in the Income Distribution chart in Figure XX, although Union has a relatively higher income profile as compared to the County and State, nearly 20% of the residents earn less than \$50,000. It is likely that many of these families live in lower-cost housing units.

⁴ <https://www.dispatch.com/story/business/real-estate/2023/01/20/whats-in-store-for-the-2023-columbus-housing-market/69822296007/>



Source: ESRI 2022

The development trends in the area are expected to have a significant impact on housing demand and prices. Union has already seen its fair share of development as a result of the growth between Newark and I-70. However, with the recent increase in economic development activity, particularly the presence of Intel in Licking County, development pressures and demand are escalating.

The market has reacted accordingly. Per a recent article in the *Columbus Business First*, land and housing prices have increased significantly in the past year:

The influx of suppliers looking for space has been good news for commercial real estate brokers and developers such as Park Shai of Shai-Hess Commercial Real Estate, based in nearby Granville. He said his business has seen a 68% boost in the past year.

“The demand is incredible,” Shai said. “Licking County especially is pretty much on fire.”

And buyers are paying a lot.

Land in the Licking County area is selling for significantly more compared to a couple years ago, he said. Shai estimated that industrial clients are paying \$75,000 to \$125,000 per acre in Licking County, with some paying as high as \$150,000.

That land used to sell for \$25,000 to \$50,000 an acre.

“I’ve been doing this for 30 years, and I would have never guessed we’d see this kind of market,” Shai said. “The market today is on a level we’ve never seen.”

And not just for industrial lots. He said residential and office real estate is selling high as well.

Shai said land values for multifamily and single-family housing is reaching \$100,000 per acre, with some going for as much as \$125,000. Not long ago, residential sold for \$50,000 or less per acre.

On the office side, 2,000 to 10,000 square feet of existing Class A or B office space that used to cost \$10 to \$11 a square foot now is going for \$14 to \$15. New Class A office buildings are even costlier – \$30 or more per square foot.

“Everything is going like gangbusters,” Shai said. “And this is just the beginning.”⁵

Despite the increase in interest rates and increase in construction, demand for new housing units is still quite high. Prices have not fallen due to interest rate increases, as the construction pipeline is over 6,000 units per year short of meeting the demand⁶. This indicates that prices will continue to be high or even increase, and development will continue and move farther out to communities that have buildable land. Given the momentum that has been built to the east due to Intel, the Etna I-70 business park and other developments, Union can expect to see continued development into the near future.

SERVICES

SCHOOLS

Union Township is served by two school districts, The Granville Exempted Village School District and the Lakewood Local School District. Below is a table highlighting key information about each district. This data comes from the Ohio Department of Education’s 2021-2022 Report Card.⁷

Place holder for school district boundary map

⁵ <https://www.bizjournals.com/columbus/news/2023/02/03/intel-impact-one-year-later.html>

⁶ <https://www.bizjournals.com/columbus/news/2023/03/03/central-ohio-housing-starts-2022-bia-report.html>

⁷ <https://reportcard.education.ohio.gov/home>

School District	Number of Schools	Enrollment	Attendance Rate	Graduation Rate
Granville Exempted Village School District	4	2,479	94.7%	98.1%
Lakewood Local School District	4	1,626	90.3%	91.4%

GRANVILLE EXEMPTED VILLAGE SCHOOL DISTRICT

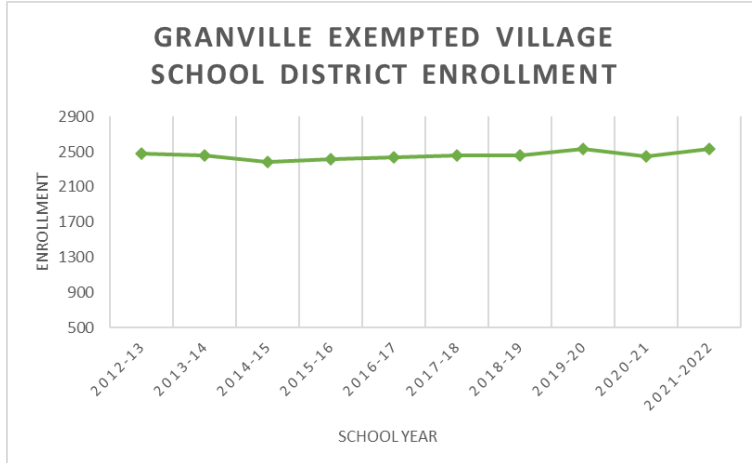
The Granville Exempted Village School District (Granville School District) serves the northern portion of Union Township. There are four schools in the Granville School District, an elementary, intermediate, middle, and high school. The table below shows the average classroom sizes for different grade levels in the district.

Grade	Class Size
K-3rd	22
4 th -6th	25
7 th -12th	25
Self-Contained Special Education (All grades)	10

A capacity report was generated by Cooperative Strategies for the Granville School District. The following table comes from information included in their official report and is based on program capacity. Program capacity shows the number of students a facility can house based on the current use of each space, regardless of what it was originally designed for.

School	Capacity Level
Granville Elementary School	89.0%
Granville Intermediate School	99.8%
Granville Middle School	78.7%
Granville High School	80.9%

The following graph shows an overview of enrollment over the past decade. Enrollment has been generally steady over the past ten years with an uptick in recent years. Despite this steady trend, some growth is expected to occur within the next decade with an expected projection of over 2,700 students as compared to about 2,500 students today.



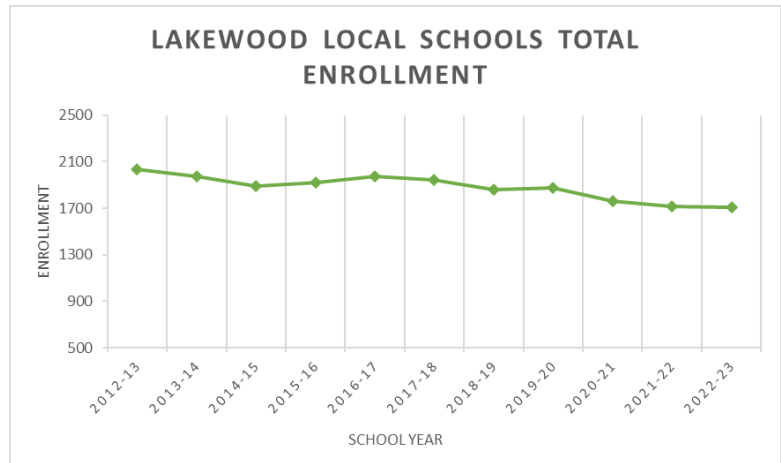
While there are no immediate plans for a new building, Granville School District has established a Strategic Planning Committee to begin the planning process to time conversations regarding new construction with the growth of the Granville School District. Superintendent Jeff Brown highlighted that the Granville School District should be able to accommodate some growth with the current land use and zoning in the

district. However, as land use and zoning are updated, the Granville School District may see more effects and more students. Superintendent Brown discussed the importance of working with developers to support the school system. For example, when a developer comes into the area, having requirements in place such as land donation for schools or the establishment of a New Community Authority can be instrumental for the Granville School District, especially at a time when school districts are having trouble competing with developers when purchasing land.

LAKWOOD LOCAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

The southern portion of Union Township is served by the Lakewood Local School District (Lakewood School District). There are four schools within the Lakewood School District, an elementary, intermediate, middle, and high school.

Right is a graph highlighting enrollment numbers for the past ten years. There is a slight downward trend in enrollment in the Lakewood School District. Superintendent Mark Gleichauf cites multiple reasons for this decline, but namely



says that the district has a large number of empty nesters which may be a reason for fewer students entering the district. With a lack of senior living options in Licking County, many of these residents are likely to stay in their homes. However, as Union Township and elsewhere within the district grows and develops, this downward trend is not expected to last.

Because enrollment numbers have been on the decline, there is room for growth within the current facilities to an extent. However, there is a need within the district for a new elementary school. This need has yet to be addressed as a bond issue has been attempted five times within the past ten years and has failed to pass each time. Superintendent Gleichauf discussed how the Lakewood School District will be active in monitoring and reacting to growth in the district. He highlighted the

importance of keeping the lines of communication open between the Lakewood School District and Union Township to understand what types of development are entering the district. Superintendent Gleichauf also described how students are being prepared to succeed in the workforce, which is increasingly important as job growth is occurring rapidly around Central Ohio. Lakewood School District offers a Manufacturing Skills Standards Council Certified Logistics Technician credential and offers Innovation Lab courses for Manufacturing Operations, Engineering Design, and Robotics.

UTILITIES

COLUMBIA GAS

Columbia Gas services many areas of the Township. In conversations with Columbia Gas, they have stated that they would have no barriers to expanding their services within Union Township. New developments, whether that may be single family, commercial, or light industrial should be able to be serviced by Columbia Gas without any significant updates being needed.

SOUTH CENTRAL POWER

South Central Power (SCP) provides a portion of the electricity utilized by Union Township. Figure XX is a map showing the electric infrastructure and service area in the southern portion of the Township. The areas in yellow are serviced by SCP. SCP is able to provide any electric service desired or required within their electric service territory within the Township.

Place holder for electric service area map.

Figure XX is a high-level summary provided by South Central Power representatives.

Existing SCP Distribution Three Phase 12.47kV <ul style="list-style-type: none">• SR 37 (~3MVA)• SR158 (~3 MVA)• Blacklick Rd (~5 MVA)• Expandable As Required by Specific Load Request
Existing SCP Distribution Single Phase 7.2kV <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Palmer Rd (~250 kVA)• Expandable As Required by Specific Load Request
Existing SCP/AEP Transmission 138kV <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Crossing Palmer Rd• Crossing Blacklick Rd
Existing SCP/AEP Transmission 345kV <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Adjacent to Licking / Fairfield County Line
Long Range Planning (Load Growth Contingent)

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• SCP Palmer Rd Distribution Substation (~25-50 MVA)<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ Property Siting 2023-2024• SCP Palmer Rd Three Phase 12.47kV Expansion
Large Load Support Capabilities (Contingent on Specific Load Request) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• SCP/AEP 138 kV Load Delivery Point (As Required, ~10's of MVA)• SCP/AEP 345kV Load Delivery Point (As Required, ~100's of MVA)

SOUTHWEST LICKING COMMUNITY WATER AND SEWER DISTRICT

The Southwest Licking Community Water and Sewer District (SWLCWS) is looking to expand its Gale Road wastewater treatment plant. This expansion would allow the SWLCWS to service a large portion of Union Township if residents or developers so desired. The challenge the SWLCWS has is ensuring that they are able to serve everyone with water. The key here, SWLCWS describes, is partnering with other communities to create interconnections that allow two-way water transfers between entities. The SWLCWS has a Joint Economic Development District (JEDD) and a Tax Increment Financing District (TIF) in place with Union Township which is in partnership with the City of Heath as the taxing authority. The SWLCWS is a beneficiary of these agreements which allows them to lay waterlines in the Luray area. The parcels who receive this service pay for the installation and maintenance of these lines. The SWLCWS does not have plans to expand in Union Township other than along the State Route 37 and U.S. Route 40 corridors and potentially at the intersection of Gale Road and Columbus Road SW where Union, Harrison, St. Albans, and Granville Townships intersect.

FIRE SERVICES

RECENT HISTORY

The Refugee-Canyon Joint Fire District was established in 2019 between Union Township and the Village of Hebron with the goal of reducing response times by fire and EMS services. Union Township attempted pass a 5-year 8.5 mills levy in 2021 twice, with both attempts being unsuccessful. The failure to pass these levies resulted in a reduction of \$435,000 in revenue for the Refugee-Canyon Joint Fire District.⁸ This resulted in staff reduction and the closure of the station at 6265 Lancaster Road, and ultimately, the dissolution of the Refugee-Canyon Joint Fire District with operations ending on August 15th, 2022.⁹ The termination of the Refugee-Canyon Joint Fire District resulted in Union Township entering contracts with the Granville Township Fire Department (GTFD) and the West Licking Joint Fire District. The GTFD returned serving the northern areas of Union Township it was serving before, and the southern portion of Union Township is now served by the West Licking Joint Fire District.

⁸ <https://www.hebronvillage.org/village-news/a-note-from-refugee-canyon-fire-district>

⁹ [Resolution 22-09](#)

GRANVILLE TOWNSHIP FIRE DISTRICT

Union Township is served by the Granville Township Fire Department (GTFD) by contract for the areas of the Union Township north of the train tracks. GTFD is staffed by 16 full time firefighters, 23 part time firefighters, and a part time fire inspector who handles fire code enforcement and prevention. Most of the firefighters are paramedics, while the remaining staff are EMTs.

The department contains a single firehouse, where the GTFD has been housed since 2020, which contains a 1500 Gallons-Per-Minute (GPM) with Compressed Air Foam System (CAFS) pumper, a 1500 GPM with CAFS rescue/pumper with a full complement of auto extrication, high-angle rope, water and ice equipment, a 93-foot aerial platform, and a 2000-gallon tanker. Additional trucks and apparatuses consist of two advanced life support ambulances, a grass truck, a utility vehicle and two staff vehicles. Currently, GTFD does not see a need for an additional station, but this is subject to change as development increases. The type of development is important in this decision to build a second station. Certain uses such as assisted living facilities or large commercial facilities have higher run volumes associated with them than new single-family housing, for example. The GTFD is currently sourcing a new ladder truck and will be replacing one of the ambulances as soon as 2026. Watching the growth of Union Township and the greater GTFD service area will be important as equipment can take over three years to build and receive.

The table below shows the runs per year for the entire service area and for Union Township alone as well as response time. The number of runs for Union Township have increased dramatically in recent years and are expected to increase as development occurs.

Year	Union Township (Runs)	All Service Areas (Runs)
2020	6	1,869
2021	2	2,044
2022	91	2,421
2023 Year to Date	36	902
Response Times (Minutes)	7:10	5:01

The GTFD was contracted from January to June of 2023 for \$225,000 and has recently been contracted for an additional \$225,000 to serve the Township for the rest of the calendar year. Beginning in 2024, a 5.5 mill rate will be assessed for the territory the GTFD covers in Union Township.

The biggest concern the GTFD has is in regard to staffing. The small hiring pool for fire fighters is a state if not nationwide issue which is proving to be the GTFD's biggest challenge. Besides staffing, the GTFD feels well positioned to serve Union Township and states that they have the ability to absorb more run volume and cover distance in a timely manner even as development increases.

WEST LICKING JOINT FIRE DISTRICT

The majority of the Township is served by the West Licking Joint Fire District (WLFD). The WLFD has 86 full time firefighters, 25 part time firefighters, and has recently received funding to hire 9

additional full time firefighters. The majority of firefighters in the WLFD are paramedics and the remainder are EMTs.

The WLFD has a total of six firehouses. The table below describes the equipment that each facility has. In addition, the stations have additional support vehicles. The Battalion is headquartered in Station 401 along with the grassfire truck which has a 100-gallon tank. The ladder truck at Station 403 has a 200-gallon tank and a 2,000 gallons per minute pump.

Station 401	Medic, Engine, Grassfire Truck
Station 402	Medic, Engine
Station 403	Medic, Ladder Truck
Station 404	Medic
Station 405	Medic, Engine
Station 406	Medic, Engine, Watercraft

In 2022, the WLFD had over 8,000 runs throughout their entire service area and expect this number to increase. From August 15th, 2022, to May 17th, 2023, the WLFD has had 574 runs in Union Township alone. The WLFD’s response time to emergencies in Union Township is 5 minutes and 22 seconds.

The WLFD is currently collecting 8.8 mills to service Union Township. WLFD’s contract with Union Township, which began after the dissolution of the Refugee-Canyon Joint Fire District, is a 5-year contract at \$1 million dollars a year.

Moving forward, the WLFD is looking at the eastern side of Harrison Township or the southwestern side of Union Township for a potential new station as the growth in this area, and in southern Union Township continues. As new commercial or higher density development occurs in this area, the WLFD may need to get an additional ladder truck to be housed at Station 406. The WLFD stated that high density and commercial development supports the fire department less than single-family development and encourages the Township to balance economic development tools such as tax abatements with service providers needs.

Placeholder for conversation with the Sheriff’s office.

RECREATION

NATUREAL AREAS – PARKLAND – RECREATION

Union Township has several parks within and near its borders. Parks within incorporated areas of the Township are included below as they can be accessed by Township residents:

- The Licking Park District operates Infirmary Mound Park in the northern area of the Township. This 316-acre park has a number of nature areas, including fishing ponds, hiking trails, equestrian areas, playgrounds, shelters/picnic areas and a dog park. the park is also home to a Native American burial mound.

- The State of Ohio operates Buckeye Lake State Park, the first State Park. Buckeye Lake, a 3,300-acre manmade lake, is one of the most popular inland boating and fishing lakes in Ohio. It also has several on-shore areas, including one main area within the Village of Buckeye Lake. This area has parking, fishing, picnic areas, restrooms, a boat launch, a small swimming area and open space. This connects to the new 4-mile shoreline walk that caps the recently rebuilt dam. This runs through most of the southeast area of Union Township.
- Near Buckeye Lake lies the Hebron Fish Hatchery. This area has portions open to the public, with bird watching, trails and a shooting range.
- The City of Heath has several parks:
 - Canal Park, which contains an old canal lock.
 - Dorsey Mill Park, a nearly 9-acre park with picnic areas and green space
 - Forry Preserve, a 200-acre preserve
 - Gellar Park, a 51-acre park with sports fields, open areas, shelters and playgrounds, as well as a winter sledding hill
 - Hitchcock Park, a 3-acre park with a playground, basketball courts and picnic areas.
 - Hoback Park, a 20-acre park including ballfields, a basketball court, picnic and playground areas and shelters, and hiking trails.
 - The Heath Water Park, which includes a pool, slides, a lazy river and a water playground.
 - Heath also has a bike trail that winds its way through the community in roughly a square. Although there are some gaps, the trail runs through Hoback and Geller Parks, connect to the Forry Preserve trails system and connect to the TJ Evans Trail that runs west through the County, as well as the Buckeye Scenic Trail that runs south towards Buckeye Lake.
- The Village of Hebron has two parks:
 - Canal Park, which contains a gazebo, playground, picnic shelter and walking paths.
 - Evans Park, which contains basketball courts, sports fields, a veterans memorial, picnic/playground areas, a jogging/walking trail and Frisbee golf.
 - The Ohio Canal Greenway runs from Hebron south towards Buckeye Lake for 3 miles.
- The Village of Buckeye Lake has two local parks:
 - Ryan Braden Park: A park with ball fields, skate park, basketball court, and park shelters. The park also has an indoor recreation center.
 - The Pavilion and Water Tower Park, with an outdoor pavilion and open space.
- Union Township is home to National Trails Raceway, a drag strip that hosts race competitions and associated events. It once hosted the National Hot Rod Association (NHRA) annual Spring Nationals, one of its most prestigious events. Although this event has since been moved, the track continues to operate and host events.

As shown above Union Township has a number of recreation options within its vicinity. However, the Township itself does not have a parks system. This has led to the concentration of parks in the eastern portion of the Township in Hebron, Heath and Buckeye Lake. With the exception of National Trails and Infirmiry Mound Park, residents must travel to the eastern end of the Township or to neighboring communities to access parkland.

STREAM & WETLAND FOUNDATION

The Stream and Wetlands Foundation has nearly completed an 82-acre swamp forest restoration project in Union Township on Swamp Road north of I-70 and south of State Route 40. This restoration project is an In-Lieu Fee Program which provides “wetland and stream mitigation credits through the restoration, enhancement, and protection of aquatic resources.”¹⁰ This project has resulted in 50,000 tree plantings within the project area and the removal of levies so that stormwater flows onto the property, recreating a wetland. This parcel, as well as a majority of the southern portion of Union Township lie within the 100-year flood plain and drainage is a noted issue. By restoring this wetland, the Stream and Wetland Foundation hopes to improve the wider drainage issues in the area.

Place holder for stream and wetland project map.

GRANVILLE RECREATION DISTRICT

The Granville Recreation District (GRD) provides recreation opportunities and comprehensive community programming to residents within the boundaries of the Granville Exempted Village School District, which encompasses the northern portion of Union Township. The GRD is a joint recreation district established under Section 755.14 of the Ohio Revised Code. The GRD is a joint district between the Village of Granville, Granville Township, and the Granville Exempted Village School District and was created in 2008. The joint recreation district model allows recreation services and their costs to be spread out across a wider population, creating more sustainability regarding funding sources. There are 5 board members, with 3 of these members being representatives of each entity involved and 2 of these seats being held by at large individuals. The GRD collects their own taxation, has their own fiscal officer, and the levies they impose are the GRD's name. The GRD is funded by a permanent millage, effective in 2010, of 1 mill which generates about \$550k per year. In 2020, they passed a .75 5-year mill which generates about \$475k per year. They use some of their funds as matching funds to secure grants for additional revenue sources and have effective cost recovery for their programs making many if not all of their programs cost neutral. The GRD's programming was typical at its inception; mostly youth sports and some community programming such as a public concert series. It has since expanded its programming and acquired programming from other organizations. This includes youth sports, day camps, public concert series, drivers' education programming, visual arts, and more. Each year, the GRD ranges between 7,000 and 8,000 registrations annually for community programming.

A joint recreation district is an effective method to provide public recreation to a greater jurisdiction. In addition to the Granville Recreation District, Bellefontaine, Ohio has an established joint recreation district that could serve as a model for Union Township. This type of district has the opportunity to create a very comprehensive parks department, with programming opportunities that go beyond providing green and open spaces. The joint district model allows the benefits of public recreation to reach a greater audience while also making the costs more attractive to residents as it is spread over more than just a single village, township, or other district. The

¹⁰ <https://streamandwetlands.org/in-lieu-mitigation/>

southern portion of Union Township may have the ability to explore creating a joint recreation district with entities such as the Village of Hebron and the Lakewood Local School District. Crossroads Community Planning, LLC (“Crossroads”) recommends Union Township inquires with these entities about a possibility to create a joint recreation district that could provide expansive recreation benefits to the greater community.

EXISTING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT INCENTIVES

Community Reinvestment Area (CRA) – “The CRA program allows counties and municipalities to designate areas of its community for real property tax abatement for the remodeling of existing structures and the construction of new structures. ... The tax abatement provided under the CRA program exempts from taxation the assessed value of a new structure or the increase in assessed value of a structure that has been remodeled. The program does not provide an exemption from taxation of the increase in the value of the land underneath the new structure or remodeled structure, nor does it allow for the exemption from taxation of existing taxes on the tax duplicate.”¹¹ Two separate designations of CRAs exist – the “pre-1994” and “post-1994.”¹² CRAs with the “pre-1994” designation can only be amended twice and still operate under the pre-1994 laws, with a third amendment resulting in a changed designation to apply “post-1994” rules.¹³

Enterprise Zone (EZ) – “The EZ program allows counties, municipalities, and townships to designate an area of its community for real property tax abatement for businesses that are looking to renovate existing commercial and industrial structures or construct new commercial or industrial structures.”¹⁴ Retail (unless located in an impacted city) and residential projects are not eligible.¹⁵

Tax Increment Financing District (TIF) – “The TIF program allows counties, municipalities, and townships to use real property taxes created from the increase in the assessed value of land, new structures, and remodeled structures to pay for the provision of public improvements. ... Counties, municipalities, and townships may establish a TIF district for a period not to exceed ten (10) years and for exemption of not more than seventy-five percent (75%).”¹⁶

Joint Economic Development District (JEDD) – “A JEDD is meant to create a partnership between local jurisdictions and provide economic development to both parties in the form of revenue sharing.”¹⁷ The JEDD splits income tax at an agreed upon percentage between the township and the city, while also including anti-annexation covenants so that all parties will maintain their own autonomy.

¹¹ The Montrose Group, “Union Township Economic Development Strategic Plan” (2022), at p. 51.

¹² Id.

¹³ Id.

¹⁴ Id., at p. 53.

¹⁵ Id.

¹⁶ Id., at p. 54.

¹⁷ Id., at p. 61.

In 2022, Union Township implemented a TIF in the southern portion of the Township, which aligns with the recommended borders for the South Gateway Overlay Area (the “Gateway Overlay”) in the Land Use Map. This allows the Township to capture future gains in real estate values to finance new public infrastructure. This is a 10 year 75% TIF and was created alongside the development of the Economic Development Strategy completed by the Montrose Group (the “Montrose Plan”). The TIF was the first tool in Union Township’s economic development toolbox to help pay for future water and sewer infrastructure. In 2023, Union Township updated the pre-1994 CRA to expand to the newly created TIF boundaries resulting in a 15 year 100% CRA.

Place holder for economic incentives map(s)

To follow up the TIF and add a crucial tool to the economic development toolbox, Union Township implemented a JEDD on March 25, 2023 in partnership with the City of Heath and the SWLCWS. The JEDD creates the ability to charge an income tax of 2%, corresponding to Heath’s income tax, on new businesses within the JEDD area. The three entities partnered through the JEDD share the revenue where the City of Heath collects an administrative fee of \$0.05 per dollar. Of the remaining \$0.95, Union Township collects 70%, SWLCWS collects 20%, and Heath collects 10% (Personal Communication with Trustee Roger Start, on 1,16, 2024). Joining the JEDD is voluntary, and individual landowners within the JEDD boundaries sign on to have their land recognized as a part of it. The JEDD also disincentivizes annexation as the income tax imposed through the JEDD does not go away if a property is annexed into a municipality, meaning the property owner would be paying double income tax – one to the JEDD and one to the City if a property were to be annexed. This is an additional safeguard against annexation which will allow the Township to retain control over the development of a property and will provide financial benefit to the Township. The JEDD is another major tool for supporting infrastructure, but the money collected from the JEDD can be used for more than just water and sewer, increasing the potential options and benefits to Union Township and potentially offsetting the need for additional township wide taxes.

AREA COMMUNITY AND TRANSPORTATION PLANS

The plans of communities adjacent to or within Union Township can have a substantial impact on the community and its own plans. New developments can lead to increased traffic that could spill over to the Township, impact the tax base and create demand for additional development or services. Some communities may have plans to annex more land from within Union Township, which impacts the control over and taxes generated from these areas.

Below is a summary of significant plans for a number of area communities and entities, with a description of how they might impact Union Township.

TRANSPORTATION

Efficient transportation and the improvement of road systems Union Township is a vital piece of the puzzle as more development occurs within the Township, bringing with it new residents, visitors, industries, and employees.

ODOT

The Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) is planning improvements in Union Township which will help bolster the road system in the Townships borders. ODOT is beginning a project in 2023 at the intersection of U.S. Route 40 and State Route 37 for intersection improvements including adding turn lanes on each Route. ODOT currently does not have any major plans for State Route 37 and Interstate 70 corridors besides preservation work such as resurfacing and pavement repair. There are no plans here to add capacity. However, in ODOT’s long-range planning efforts, they have identified a need to eventually widen the Interstate 70 corridor in Union Township to three (3) lanes going each way. ODOT representatives have also noted the flooding that occurs in the southern portions of Union Township. This flooding has been impactful enough in some cases to shut down portions of Interstate 70. Recognizing this, ODOT is discussing conducting a study to understand and develop mitigation tactics for the flooding. ODOT representatives noted the Thornwood Drive corridor will mostly be updated and improved by Heath and Newark and ODOT’s role will be mainly as an overseeing body. Throughout other areas of Union Township, ODOT’s plans include typical resurfacing and bridge preservation projects.

ODOT’s 2023 Future Programmatic includes a study to evaluate the SR 37 Corridor between I-71 and SR 161. This study will evaluate and provide recommendations for improving the existing conditions to accommodate the anticipated traffic demand resulting from the development and land use changes associated with Intel.

Additionally, a safety study has been conducted on the S.R. 37 and Beaver Run Road intersection, which has been discussed by residents many times throughout this Comprehensive Planning process as a difficult and dangerous intersection. This study was prepared by Burgess & Niple for the Ohio Department of Transportation and evaluated the safety and potential improvements of this major intersection within Union Township. The following short, medium, and long term improvements were identified:¹⁸

Place holder for table that summarizes the below short – medium – long term recommendations

Short-Term (CREATE TABLE IN PUBLISHER)

- Trim trees and brush on the northeast corner of the intersection to improve sight distance for westbound traffic to southbound traffic.

¹⁸ SR 37 and Beaver Run Road Safety Study, Burgess & Niple

Submitted for township review – 1.31.2024

- Restripe the stop bars. The current stop bar lines are faded and worn.
- Total estimated cost: \$4,000 (2023 dollars)

Medium-Term

- Construct an exclusive northbound right-turn lane which would eliminate northbound right-turning traffic from slowing and stopping traffic along S.R. 37.
- Total estimated cost: \$440,000 (2026 dollars)

Long-Term

- Replace the stop-controlled intersection with a single-lane roundabout. Existing volumes warrant a single-lane roundabout. However, as volumes continue to grow, a roundabout with two northbound and two southbound lanes could be constructed to accommodate a future configuration of SR-37.
- Total estimated cost: \$2,781,000 (2028 dollars)

This study also discussed the potential to slightly realign the eastbound leg of Beaver Run Road to match the westbound leg and reduce elevation change at the intersection. This would entail only a minor widening. Ultimately, ODOT decided to postpone applying for a safety funding application as the future of S.R. 37 is in flux. S.R. 37 is anticipated to be evaluated in the SR 161/I-70 Connection Study which will analyze options for a higher-capacity north-south connection to future growth areas (Personal communication, Joshua Otworth, ODOT District 5, 1/24/24).

LICKING COUNTY AREA TRANSPORTATION STUDY (LCATS)

The Licking County Area Transportation Study (LCATS), the local Metropolitan Planning Organization in charge of distributing federal transportation funding, is in the process of updating their Thoroughfare Plan. This plan is a study of collector, arterial, and local roadways to develop a greater understanding of the County's transportation needs, including congestion, capacity, safety, and connectivity. The Thoroughfare Plan will also map existing conditions and future identified improvements. LCATS will then indicate the types of improvements needed and will note the areas with the most pressing needs. The County's Thoroughfare Plan will determine the classification of each road within the County, including Union Township. The Township's zoning setbacks should be updated to be measured from the proposed right-of-way as determined by the County's Thoroughfare Plan to ensure buildings are not constructed within these future corridors.

LICKING COUNTY TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT (LCTID)

Thornwood Drive, bordering Union Township's eastern boundary, is planned to undergo intensive improvements. These improvements were sparked by Intel announcement and the understanding

that the Intel site in New Albany would need a way to access Interstate 70 quickly and easily. The Licking County Transportation Improvement District (LCTID) assessed four (4) different scenarios to determine the shortest and fastest route. The LCTID Route Map in Figure XX shows the number of miles and minutes each scenario would take for traffic to reach Interstate 70 from Intel and vice versa. The Thornwood Drive Corridor is tied for the lowest number of miles taken with the State Route 37 scenario but may take up to five (5) minutes less to travel the same distance. From this information the LCTID identified seven (7) areas of improvement for the Thornwood Drive Corridor to prepare the roadway for increased traffic volumes.

The seven (7) projects along the Thornwood Drive Corridor are shown in the LCTID Detailed Thornwood Drive Corridor map in Figure XX. Detailed updates on each project from the LCTID can be found in Appendix [x]. Detailed funding breakdowns can be found in Appendix [x].

Place holder for Thornwood Drive Corridor Map and TID Project Map

To date, the first and second projects, the Interchange at State Route 16 and Thornwood Crossing and the Cherry Valley Road Bridge connection Thornwood Crossing and Thornwood Drive have been completed. The major focus currently lies with the project three (3), The Hill, which encompasses the roadway between River Road and Faye Drive just northeast of Union Township. Due to changes in the scope of work from the initial project, updated right-of-way costs, and inflation, the project cost increased to \$15 million dollars. Funding for this project has fallen short by approximately \$7 million dollars. The LCTID has stated that they are continuing to advocate for this project and target funding options from within the Ohio state budget and federal grants.

A project between the railroad tracks and Hallie Lane has been awarded full funding for improvements to the roadway, including intersection improvements adding turn lanes and a traffic signal at Hallie Lane and Thornwood Drive. This is a \$2 million dollar project.

Funding has been secured for improvements from Hallie Lane to Lees Road with a total for \$2,929,916. This project is currently in the design phase and will include resurfacing and shoulder widening between Irvingwick Drive and Lees Road.

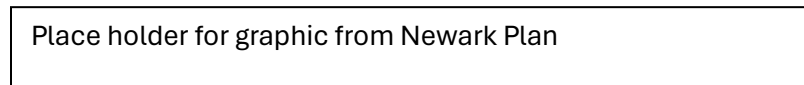
WHAT ARE OTHER COMMUNITIES PLANNING?

The news of Intel and other developments have caused many communities in Central Ohio to update their plans. It is important to understand the plans of communities surrounding Union Township in order to determine how they will impact the Township. Other communities or organizations may have plans that do not align with Union Township’s desires, conversely, other plans may plug in well with Union Township, and give rise to future collaborations and partnerships.

PLANS FROM 2000

DESTINY 2020 – NEWARK COMPREHENSIVE PLAN (2002)

The Destiny 2020 plan was developed in 2002 and has a timeframe through 2020. Although this time period has passed, this is the latest plan for the area. A majority of the plan does not impact Union Township. The major recommendation that might impact Union is the development of the Thornwood Business Park (p. 7-18). This park would involve the annexation of some land in Union, as seen in a portion of the future land use plan below. The purple area labeled “13” is the proposed expansion for the business park:



The plan also proposes a new high-capacity connector around the west side of the City, as shown by the gray dotted line in the map in Figure XX. As noted above, the Licking County TID has indicated that a capacity expansion of Thornwood Drive between S.R. 161/16 and I-70 would provide the quickest route between the Intel site area and I-70 leading out to eastern markets. If improved, Thornwood Drive would likely provide ample new sites for development, furthering the annexation pressure.

HEBRON – LURAY AREA PLAN (2014)

Licking County Planning and Development authored the Hebron-Luray Area Plan¹⁹ (Area Plan) in 2014 which includes a portion of southern Union Township. The Area Plan highlighted many of the same areas of improvement that are included in this Comprehensive Plan’s goals. Namely, addressing the lack of variety in the housing market, improving roadways to mitigate congestion, protecting prime farmland, and promoting business development in strategic areas of the Township. Similar to the recommendations of this Comprehensive Plan, the Area Plan also noted that development would be attracted to the area due to the location, access, potential for infrastructure expansion, and high quality of life, and hence should be strategically planned to avoid sprawl and to retain prime agricultural operations and core rural character of the area while simultaneously bringing in revenue, jobs, and creating a sense of place. The Area Plan proposed a Conceptual Future Land Use Map (Conceptual Map) to achieve these goals, shown in Figure XX.

¹⁹ <https://lickingcounty.gov/civicaX/filebank/blobdload.aspx?BlobID=104883>

Place holder for area plan conceptual future land use map

BUCKEYE LAKE LAND USE PLAN AND TRANSPORTATION FOCUS PLAN (2016)

Developed by Licking County Planning & Development and the Licking County Area Transportation Study, This plan focuses on creating tourism opportunities for Buckeye Lake (p. 10-15), particularly in Licking County. This includes the Village of Buckeye Lake and the southeasternmost portion of Union Township.

Enhancing Buckeye Lake’s status as a tourism magnet will bring either direct or ancillary impacts to Union Township. Developing tourism destinations along with higher-density development would draw a large number of tourists that would increase traffic and require more services, as well as increasing the demand for housing in the nearby area. This would create spillover demand into Union Township.

The plan also has specific recommendations that would impact Union. Specifically:

- The primary entry corridor along S.R. 79 south of I-70 in the northern section of Buckeye Lake. Uses would include auto-oriented retail, services and hotels, with the potential for office.
- A secondary entry area along S.R. 79 on the west side of Buckeye Lake. Uses would include auto-oriented similar to a primary entry corridor, but smaller-scale and less intense.
- A central business district in downtown Buckeye Lake. Uses would include mixed-use pedestrian-scale development focusing on smaller commercial such as restaurants and tourist shops.

Place holder map showing connection to fishery

The trail would connect the Village of Buckeye Lake to the Ohio Greenways Canal Trail and the nearby fish hatchery (p. 49).

The plan also has recommendations for event spaces, camping and lodging. These recommendations could have a significant impact on Buckeye Lake and the surrounding communities if they are all implemented.

LICKING COUNTY PLANNING

The Licking County Planning Commission has indicated that they do not have any specific land use plans that focus specifically and solely on Union Township. Additionally, the County does not have suggested, recommended, or predicted land uses other than what the Township has previously indicated to them.

The County described that most of the substantial development in and around Union Township has occurred in the Hebron Industrial Park. There are several new and revitalized businesses in the park and there is some construction occurring for manufacturing and industrial facilities. The County

also highlighted that there has been increased business interest and development along U.S. Route 40.

LIVING LOCALLY – VILLAGE OF HEBRON COMPREHENSIVE PLAN (DRAFT, 2023)

“Living Locally” is the title and main theme of the ongoing update to the Village of Hebron Comprehensive Plan. They define it as the “mindset that prioritizes engaging with and supporting the immediate community and its resources [and promotes] participating in the local economy and [social and cultural events] while minimizing reliance on external or distant sources” (p. 6). Living Locally plan includes the Village of Hebron and the surrounding area, which includes portions of Union Township.

Place holder for STUDY AREA MAP FROM HEBRON PLAN

Hebron connects their Living Locally theme to the 15-minute city idea “where residents can access essential services and amenities within a 15-minute walk or bike ride from their homes” (p. 11). This coincides with promoting mixed-use development (including diversity in housing types and densities), less dependence on private automobiles for travel, pedestrian-friendly infrastructure, and public transportation (p. 11-12, 19).²⁰ Hebron also desires to expand and update roads, water, and sewer services “to strategically direct growth” (p. 19). However, the plan also lists preserving natural resources, farmland, and the rural community character as goals (p. 19). In addition, the plan states that Hebron “should consider multi-jurisdictional impacts” for decisions that might have impacts outside their community (p. 18).

Place holder for Hebron Future Land Use Map

Comparing the map above to the Hebron-Luray Area Plan, the land uses recommendations are similar overall. The Hebron-Loray Plan did not have a Village Center category, and instead identified these as various density residential uses. Additionally, there are minor differences in the borders between the Planned Employment and Neighborhood Commercial boundaries and the Commercial and Business & Industry boundaries in the Hebron-Luray plan. However, the overall land use themes of both plans align well.

Living Locally identified nine Priority Growth Areas (PGAs), which are regions that have “significant potential for development and growth” (p. 38-40). Six PGAs are wholly or partially within Union Township. These PGAs are listed below, with the number corresponding to the areas on the map below them:

²⁰ An increase in public transportation should be notable as 0% of Hebron residents listed public transportation as their primary mode for commuting to work (p. 22).

1. Newark Industrial Park: Explicit desire to annex the existing business park, as the Village currently services the area with water and sewer. The plan notes that the Village charges a 100% premium on water and sewer for users outside the Village boundary, which could be an incentive for property owners in the industrial park to annex.
2. Heritage 40 Business Park: A new business park along U.S. 40.
3. Northern Village Gateway: Commercial and retail development that would link Hebron Village to PGA 1: Newark Industrial Park.
6. Ours Neighborhood: Potential to expand “traditional neighborhood patterns of the old village” while connecting PGA 9: Western Village Gateway with pedestrian and vehicular access.
7. Far West: Potential manufacturing and/or rural residential uses.
9. Western Village Gateway: Potential to continue the village core’s grid style and walkable development, with commercial uses lining US 40.

Place holder for Hebron Priority Growth Area Map

Living Locally also identified ten recommended intersection improvements (p. 44). Numbers 1-7, and 10 are within Union Township; see “Table 3” and “Map 6.” The plan also lists seven proposed road extensions, of which four are wholly or partially within Union Township (p. 46). These extensions are:

- A. Enterprise Drive
- D. Canyon Road Drive
- E. W. 3rd Avenue
- G. [Not yet given a name in the draft, but it is along SR 79]

Place holder for Map 6 Road & Intersection Improvements map from Hebron Plan

Place holder for Table 3 Intersection Improvements from Hebron Plan

The points of the current draft of the Village of Hebron’s Comprehensive Plan that are the most relevant to Union Township are:

1. The Village is planning for economic development and growth within and outside their boundaries within Union Township, including annexing significant areas of adjacent land.
 - a. The Newark Industrial Park (PGA 1) is an area that Hebron could annex. This would significantly reduce the tax base of the Township.
 - b. The Village has the potential to annex Union Township land further than PGA 1.

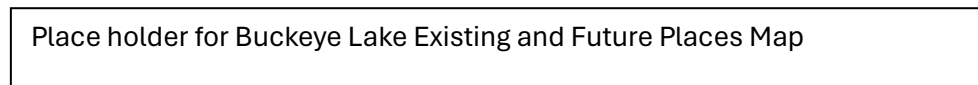
2. The Village wants to promote the 15-minute city model for their future development, including walkable infrastructure, mixed-use development, diverse housing types, and public transportation, by both developing existing areas and expanding.
 - a. This could mean increased traffic and usage of public transportation (like buses) and rideshares (like Uber).
 - b. This could also coincide with an increase in tourists, cyclists, and hikers.
3. The Village has indicated they will consider “multi-jurisdictional impacts” for their decisions.
 - a. The plan indicates a desire to preserve farmland and rural character, showing that urban-style development will not cover the entire planning area.
 - b. However, Living Locally still formulated extensive, detailed plans for development and improvements within unannexed areas of Union Township.
 - c.

BUCKEYE LAKE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN (2023)

The Village of Buckeye Lake recently completed a new comprehensive plan to guide growth and development in the community. The Village has had a long history of tourists enjoying the lakeshore. However, issues like the closure of the village’s amusement park in 1970, various floods, and aging infrastructure have posed challenges for the community (p. 17-18). Therefore, promoting tourism and economic development are important aspects of their comprehensive plan (p. 4, 18, 43-45). The recent completion of the Buckeye Lake Dam reconstruction has created new amenities, including a multi-mile lakefront walking trail, and has stimulated renewed tourism and new development in the area.

Buckeye Lake’s comprehensive has no explicit provisions for annexation and growth outside the village; they plan to promote infill growth with mixed-use buildings and active transportation, rather than sprawling, horizontal growth (p. 4, 11). Although the plan is not binding, this can provide some assurances to Union Township that the Village will not be actively targeting growth at the Township’s expense. The plan does indicate that the Village has recently increased the capacity of its water and sewer system to accommodate additional growth (p. 32).

Below is the future land use map from the Buckeye Lake Plan. Called the “Existing + Future Place Types”, it has broad recommendations for preserving land uses in certain areas, encouraging development in other areas and preserving open space:



There are several portions of the plan that are relevant to the township:

1. As the Village of Buckeye Lake wants to promote tourism, this could mean increased traffic through the township in the future. The village also has plans for their borders with Union Township. The plan recommends an “Interchange Commercial” district on the south side of the I-70/S.R. 79 interchange, which separates the village from the township. This district would be for “small to medium-scale commercial [and] multifamily residential” uses. Their recommended land-use ratio is 60% commercial and 40% office/residential, with “10 to 20 units per acre for residential [uses]” (p. 64).

2. The comprehensive plan also recommends preserving the open land on the western end of the village for rural and open space land uses (p. 56). This area includes significant amounts of floodplain. A portion of this area could become parks, which could attract tourists who would travel through Union Township.
3. The comprehensive plan recommends constructing new signs, such as wayfinding, identification, and highway signs (p. 47). This includes signs on the village's border with Union Township on Walnut Road and by the I-70 exit (p. 112). Other signs may appear outside the village in the future.
4. Buckeye Lake's attractions currently favor adults, so the comprehensive plans wish to include more family-oriented activities in the village (p. 48-49). This could change the demographics of the tourists that travel through Union Township.

Still, Buckeye Lake maintains they will “consider the entire geographic area, including neighboring townships, county, and regional initiatives,” for their planning process. Therefore, Union Township can potentially work alongside Buckeye Lake during various planning projects and phases.

GRANVILLE COMMUNITY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN (DRAFT 2023)

The Village of Granville and Granville Township have been working to update their comprehensive plan and published a draft in 2023. The image to the left shows their future land use map, which defines land uses by intensity, rather than naming the use type. The majority of the areas bordering Union Township are listed as low, very low, or rural density/intensity with an area on the southwestern side of Granville Township designated as medium density/intensity. Medium density development includes neighborhood scale commercial development, which would mimic downtown Granville and be pedestrian oriented.

The draft plan also recommends the development of an “Employment Corridor Overlay” which would promote commercial and industrial development along Route 16, near the northern portion of Union Township. Development in this corridor would be of a larger-scale and not residential in nature. The plan is clear that heavy industry would be restricted while allowing for clean commercial and industrial uses.

The plan describes Route 37 at the Union Township line as a “Secondary Gateway” into the Granville area, meaning that this road is less traveled to enter Granville than Routes such as 661. Regardless, these Secondary Gateways are recommended to have signage and landscaping that convey the character of the Granville area.

The Granville draft plan has many similar goals to Union Township revolving around protecting farmland, creating opportunities for more types of residential development that meet the needs of the entire community, integrating open space and preserving it, and promoting intentional economic development. Overall, the draft Granville plan does not conflict with Union Township’s comprehensive plan, and these plans may be able to work in tandem to create an area within Licking County that shares many development and aesthetic goals.

Place holder for DRAFT FUTURE LAND USE MAP GRANVILLE

GROW LICKING COUNTY

GROW Licking County is the County’s leading economic development organization. GROW works to attract new businesses, leads a retention and expansion program for existing businesses, promotes workforce development, and works with local communities in preparedness efforts that ultimately lead to increased economic development activity. Additionally, they have implemented a strategy with ambitious goals to reach by 2025 including adding 5,000 new jobs to the county, raising the median county-wide income by \$5,000, creating \$200 million in net new payroll, and generating \$750 million in capital investment. GROW has published a map showing the current economic development incentives in place in the community – see Figure XX.

Place holder for economic incentives map to be created by Natalie

As shown in Figure XX, most of Union Township is included in Enterprise Zone 091C. Small areas are also included in Enterprise Zones 079C and 101C. Furthermore, Community Reinvestment Areas (CRAs) in Hebron, Heath and Newark also reach into Union Township. Both programs provide tax relief in exchange for economic development. Enterprise Zones provide personal property (equipment) tax abatements in the area. CRAs provide real property tax abatements for investments. Both of these programs may incentivize development in Union Township and may impact the tax receipts of the Township.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Crossroads conducted a survey in May of 2023 via a mailer sent to each household with a QR-code link to the survey. Paper copies of the survey were also available at the Union Township Hall. This survey gathered demographic information such as age and length of time living in the Township. The survey also gathered information aimed at understanding residents’ reasons for living in Union Township as they were asked what attracted them to Union in the first place. Crossroads then asked a series of development related questions, asking residents what types of development, if any, they would like to see and where they would like to see it. Finally, a series of questions were asked about the quality of services, housing, parks, and roads within the Township. These questions help to identify the priorities of Township residents and give focus to the planning efforts.

The survey gathered that residents valued the rural, open vistas, high quality schools, privacy, quiet, and proximity to cities and interstates. The three most favored forms of development were mixed use (35.5%), clustered single-family (34.35%) and no development (32.82%). When asked about recreational opportunities, an overwhelming 67.18% of respondents said they would like to utilize trails and multi-use paths along the roadways. These responses directly funnel into the recommended overlay district, where multi-use paths are required, and mixed-use development is a key land use. Additionally, the recommended overlay was created with the goal of preventing development sprawl, and thus protecting the remainder of the Township from high intensity development, that over 30% of residents did not want to see. Additionally, the desire to see clustered-single family housing prompted the recommendation to create a preservation-rural residential overlay in the future to allow for this use.

Placeholder for relevant charts and graphs from the survey.

On November 14, 2023, Crossroads Community Planning, LLC (“Crossroads”) hosted an open house for the residents of Union Township to learn more about the vision and goals for the comprehensive plan. To aid in the process of creating the comprehensive plan, Crossroads requested visitors to complete a questionnaire detailing thoughts and recommendations in response to the information presented. The dominant theme of the evening was to conserve the rural identity of the township and collaborate with local governments and farmers to ensure purposeful development that respects the Township’s

aesthetics. Many respondents shared concerns about the floodplain and well water. Respondents provided mixed opinions about commercial and single-family residential development and were strongly opposed to warehouses and multi-family developments. Table “X” summarizes these responses with a more detailed summary located in Appendix “X”.

Place holder for TABLE SUMMARIZING COMMUNITY DESIRES
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Crossroads hosted an additional presentation for the Township on January 11, 2024. Crossroads presented a recap of the open house on November 14th, provided information on how feedback from the previous meeting was incorporated into the plan, and elaborated on the next steps of revision and finalization. In order to provide the residents with a better understanding of the importance of the comprehensive plan, Crossroads discussed threats of annexation from the Township’s bordering municipalities and the comprehensive plan’s steps to mitigate these risks. Most attendees left the meeting with a better understanding for the proposed development strategies now knowing the development strategies employed within the comprehensive plan are being used to best support the Township’s vision to retain its rural identity.

Key Theme #1 – Balancing Growth and Preservation to Protect and Enhance the Quality of Life.

Goals:

- Create a comprehensive strategy that outlines specific growth areas and targets commercial, industrial, mixed-use, and housing developments towards areas with existing or planned infrastructure, transportation networks, and utility services.
- Collaborate with local government agencies, agricultural organizations, and stakeholders to develop policies that protect farmland from conversion to non-agricultural uses (outside of the targeted growth areas) providing farmers with additional options for the legacy of their land.
- Enhance the wellbeing of Union Township by creating an atmosphere that is conducive to the development of various types of attainable housing to respond to current market demands and housing needs that blend with the inherent rural character of the Township.
- Implement strategies to preserve open space for interested landowners while allowing for responsible and sustainable development.

Union Township, a traditionally rural and agricultural community, sits at an advantageous location at the crossroads of Interstate 70 and State Route 37. Additionally, Union Township is located just a few miles from Intel. This proximity to these major routes and major development is a boon to development but may also heighten community nerves about the potential to lose the rural, quiet, and scenic quality of life that makes Union Township a great place to live. In fact, over 100 acres are being annexed out of Union Township and into Hebron for the development of a new Microsoft data center facility just off State Route 79.

***Insert discussion about population projections ***

However, as development occurs within and around Union Township due to factors not limited to proximity to major routes and other communities, new infrastructure, and high-quality land, there is a critical opportunity for Union Township to shape its own future regarding development by targeting certain areas for growth, and certain areas for preservation. Through this approach, Union Township can retain its rural character in the majority of the Township area while accommodating development in strategic areas to diversify the Township’s tax base and prevent annexation. This is an opportunity for Union Township to set its own destiny through design and development standards that reflect the community character desired by the residents instead of allowing development to occur only on the developers’ terms.

The future land use map shown in Figure XX and in Appendix X highlights this targeted approach to development and broad goal of preservation of farmland and rural housing.

Place holder for FUTURE LAND USE MAP

The Gateway Overlay shown in the Future Land Use Map is where most of the development will be targeted within Union Township. One key factor in the identification of this area are the existing plans for infrastructure expansion by the SWLCWS along US Route 40 (from Gale Road to State Route 37) and State Route 37 (from US Route 40 to Interstate 70) through the unincorporated areas of the Township. This expansion of water and sewer services allows higher intensity developments to occur without annexation, which will allow the Township to capture the tax revenue while having greater control over the design and types of development permitted. To give the Township this ability to control development, the creation and implementation of an overlay district that will allow expanded permitted uses is highly recommended.

Place holder for South Gateway Overlay Map

The Gateway Overlay, detailed in Appendix X, will allow expanded permitted uses and more favorable densities for developers while imposing design and development standards which promote the desired quality of life identified by Union Township stakeholders and residents. This overlay district approach will allow Union Township to guide and control development pressure in the following ways:

- Reducing the likelihood of annexation to a surrounding municipality by providing favorable zoning and desired infrastructure such as water and sewers.
- Retaining control of the design of the development through standards vetted by Union Township stakeholders and residents such as:

- A 200-foot woodland buffer, or no-build zone along Canal Road.
- Requiring the use of natural materials and colors that blend with the existing rural landscape.
- Creating more walkability within Union Township through multi-use path requirements.
- Retaining green space within mixed use developments through 30% open space requirement for parks, playgrounds, schools, or other public areas.
- Requiring architectural elements to prevent blank walls visible from the public right of way.
- Requiring parking lot screening to not be seen from the public right of way.
- Clustering multi-family residential development within the mixed-use overlay subareas allowing up to 12 units per acre, but not exceeding an average of two units per acre for the entirety of the mixed-use subareas.
- Diversifying and increasing the Township’s tax base utilizing a (JEDD to make improvements within Union Township.
- Creating additional jobs within Union Township.

In addition to the Gateway Overlay, smaller areas have been identified for additional development such as Northeast growth area, originally identified in the Montrose Plan. Additionally, commercial and industrial areas have been identified in the Future Land Use Map on the far east side of the Township (See Appendix X). These areas have been identified as containing existing commercial or industrial uses and are best suited to continue growing with their respective forms of development to retain and expand upon their current character.

By targeting growth to these specific areas of Union Township, the remainder of the Township can retain the rural character that residents care about, either as agricultural land or rural residential housing.

Union Township can even develop an additional overlay district focused on “preservation residential” housing, where single-family housing would be clustered together on smaller lots with larger amounts of open space, enhancing rural viewsheds within the Township. This would be done by utilizing existing large lots within the Township but allowing housing to be clustered at 1.5 acres per dwelling unit instead of 3 acres per dwelling unit, effectively reserving the remaining land as permanent open green space.

Place holder for visual aid of rural clustered housing

Additionally, farmland would be protected from development outside of these target areas. Some Union Township farmers may be interested in preserving their land as farmland in perpetuity, and there are a few methods that can be utilized to achieve this goal.

CLEAN OHIO LOCAL AGRICULTURAL EASEMENT PURCHASE PROGRAM (LAEPP)

Agricultural easements encourage current landowners to preserve their property for agricultural use in perpetuity. An Agricultural Easement program provides a payment to landowners in return for the granting of an easement over the property which restricts the property from being used for anything other than agriculture or open space. This is a tool that can legally prevent development of certain areas while providing a farmer with some financial benefit. For example, the Clean Ohio Local Agricultural Easement Purchase Program, or LAEPP, will pay up to \$2,000 an acre with a maximum cap set at \$500,000 per farm. The challenge with this program, and subsequent agricultural easement programs, is that the market value of land can and often does supersede the payment offered through LAEPP. Therefore, this option is best suited for areas of the Township where development pressures do not yet exist as they value of land will be lower.

- \$2,000 an acre with a maximum cap set at \$500,000 per farm.
- Farmland must meet program requirements including size requirements and enrollment in CAUV and the Agricultural District Program.
- Landowners must apply through a “local sponsor” such as the Township, county, Licking County Soil and Water Conservation District, or a charitable organization.
- Ensures the land is used for agricultural purposes in perpetuity.

AGRICULTURAL SECURITY AREA (ASA)

Another option for farmland preservation is to utilize the Agricultural Security Area (ASA) program. While this tool does not provide any direct payments to farmers, it does provide potential tax benefits for investing in new real agricultural property. This program requires both the county and the township to pass a resolution not to initiate, approve or finance any development for non-agricultural purposes such as residential, commercial, or industrial development, including the construction of new roads and water and sewer lines within the ASA for 10 years. This ten-year commitment can sometimes be more attractive than a perpetual easement due to its flexibility. ASAs have been successfully utilized on prime agricultural land such as in Fairfield County where an ASA was established in 2007 and renewed in 2017, which has extended the agreement to 2027.

- Must have 500 acres of contiguous land and agreement from all landowners.
- Landowners must be enrolled in CAUV and the Agricultural District Program.
- Landowners within the ASA may request a tax exemption on new investments in a building, improvement, structure, or fixture used for agricultural purposes.

AGRICULTURAL EASEMENT DONATION PROGRAM (AEDP)

Another agricultural easement option is the Agricultural Easement Donation Program (AEDP) in which easement rights would be donated to the Ohio Department of Agriculture. This program ensures that the land would be retained as farmland in perpetuity, but lacks much of a financial incentive, besides a tax deduction.

- Farmland protected in perpetuity.
- Farmer retains ownership and easement stays attached to the land if the farmer sells.
- Ohio Department of Agriculture enforces the easement with a local entity/partner.

AGRICULTURAL CONSERVATION EASEMENT PROGRAM (ACEP) - AGRICULTURAL LAND EASEMENTS (ALE)

Additional programs include the Agricultural Land Easements (ALE) component of the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) through the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NCRS). Through the ACEP-ALE program, the easement must be held by an eligible partner, while the landowner will retain ownership and may continue farming the land. Eligible partners can be found through the [Farmland Information Center](#) Farmland Protection Directory or through [the Land Trust Alliance](#). Partners could potentially include the Licking Land Trust, the Licking County Soil and Water Conservation District, the Appalachia Ohio Alliance, and others.

- All agricultural easements must be facilitated through a land trust.
- Through the program, the NCRS may contribute up to 50 percent of the fair market value of the land within the agricultural easement.
- Provides permanent farmland protection.

CONSERVATION RESERVE PROGRAM (CRP)

The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) through the USDA Farm Services Agency aims to improve water quality, prevent soil erosion, and reduce wildlife habitat loss by protecting environmentally sensitive land. Through this program, an enrolled farmer is paid a yearly rent to remove environmentally sensitive land previously used for agriculture out of production. In 2021, the Farm Services agency raised their payment rates and bases these rental rates on the relative productivity of the soils within each county and the average cash rent using data provided by the National Agricultural Statistics Service.

CREATE GRAPHIC IN PUBLISHER

- Contracts for CRP range from 10-15 years in length, providing more flexibility for landowners.
- Options for general sign up and continuous sign up, depending on the landowner's goals.

- Prevents environmentally sensitive areas from being farmed but protects open space and vital habitats.

By pursuing a mixture of development focused and preservation focused paths, Union Township will be able to balance growth and development with the deep-rooted rural and agricultural character of the Township valued by both Township leaders and residents. Permitting and guiding development to key areas of the Township will not only protect the majority of the Township from scattered and sprawling development but will diversify Union Township's tax base, spark infrastructure improvements, create new jobs, and provide additional amenities to Union Township residents and the greater community.

BALANCING GROWTH AND PRESERVATION TO PROTECT AND ENHANCE THE QUALITY OF LIFE RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Create an overlay district (aligning with borders of existing Heath/Union JEDD as shown in **Figure X**).
- Align the overlay district's boundaries with the location of future utilities and the TIF, as shown in **Figure X**, created from the previously completed economic development strategy
- Create future boundaries for expanding the overlay to future JEDD boundaries.
- Include various types of housing, mixed-use, commercial, and industrial uses within the overlay district.
 - Target new forms of housing, such as mixed-use developments, within strategic areas of the overlay district.
 - Cluster multi-family developments to reduce sprawl over the Township and maintain an average of 2-dwelling units per acre within the overlay district subareas that permit residential uses.
- Ensure rural design standards are implemented within the overlay district to retain the rural character of the Township's housing stock and future developments.
- Utilize existing economic development tools to promote development within this overlay district.
- Further conversations with neighboring municipalities to effectively plan for growth and minimize annexation.
 - Utilize econ dev tools such as JEDDS, CEDAs, and NCAs to foster these partnerships.
- Determine possibility of developing a JEDD with the Village of Hebron.

- Retain and promote industrial development along the east side of Hebron Road to align with existing uses along this corridor.
- Update the Township’s zoning code to align with current trends and future land uses for the Township.
 - Integrate open space requirements into future zoning regulations.
- Target aging-in-place housing types such as condos and assisted living facilities.
- Retain large lot zoning for existing housing in strategic locations to retain the rural character of the Township.
- Develop a rural preservation overlay district to cluster housing and enhance open spaces.
- Help protect the visual appeal of existing roadways and rural viewsheds through landscaping requirements.
- Target multi-use paths to future development areas to retain large agricultural tracts by avoiding going through or being located close to farms.
- Provide a list of options for interested landowners regarding preservation and agricultural easements.
- Recognize farms as essential greenspaces.

KEY THEME #2 - FOSTERING PARTNERSHIPS TO ENHANCE COMMUNITY SERVICES

GOALS:

- Coordinate and balance development and growth with the adjoining municipal areas in Union Township.
- Create partnerships with water, sewer, and other utility providers to help ensure the township goals are reflected in their public improvement policies.
- Collaborate with local fire, law enforcement, and school districts to ensure future township plans are accounted for in their long-term strategies.
- Collaborate with landowners and regional partners to preserve floodplains where practical and incorporate sustainable and resilient drainage practices in areas where development is proposed.

Creating new partnerships and enhancing existing partnerships within and beyond Union Township will be a keyway to support the existing community character, quality of life, and enhance the Townships services and economic development. These partnerships will allow the Township to pursue a variety of economic development tools and expand upon the tools already implemented within Union Township. Partnerships serve a dual purpose. First, they allow the Township to engage with surrounding county and regional partners to ensure Union Township's interests are included in broader plans. Second, they serve to preserve the integrity of the Township through partnering with neighboring communities to accommodate intentional growth, share revenue, expenses, and services all while preventing annexation.

Union Township has already taken essential steps to develop important partnerships, such as the creation of the JEDD in 2023 in collaboration with the City of Heath and SWLCWS. The specifics of the JEDD's development are discussed in the Existing Conditions section of this Comprehensive Plan. This important partnership disincentivizes annexation and allows Union Township to retain control over development, as well as enforce high quality standards. This partnership lays the foundation for the success of the recommended overlay district and the creation of future partnerships for Union Township.

Future partnerships should be investigated with the Village of Hebron as their Future Land Use Map in their Living Locally 2023 Comprehensive Plan shows land use plans for areas of Union Township, such as the areas identified on Union Township's future land use map for Commercial and Industrial development in the eastern portion of the Township. Additionally, Hebron has identified 9 Growth Areas with areas 1 and 3 located within the Commercial and Industrial areas of Union Township and areas 2, 6, 7, and 9 either partially or entirely within Union Township. A JEDD could be established with the Village of Hebron to share revenue and costs associated with development, while Union Township would be able to retain control over what this development would look like. This potential JEDD is recommended to focus on Growth Areas 2 and 9 as identified in Hebron Townships Priority Growth Area (PGA) Map within the 2023 Comprehensive Plan.

Water and sewer provided by SWLCWS is a catalyst for development. While there are already initial plans for the expansion of services into Union Township, this partnership should be expanded by having regular meetings with SWLCWS to identify the Township's priorities regarding water and sewer. Additionally, this will allow Union Township to keep SWLCWS involved and up to date on Township planning efforts and initiatives. Future partnerships should be pursued with the school districts and fire departments serving Union Township. As Union Township grows and adapts, these essential services will too have to acclimate to the new Township environment. The Township has already begun to open communication channels with the schools and fire departments by gathering information through stakeholder interviews to understand their current state, challenges, future vision, and concerns. Additionally, members from these entities participated on the Stakeholder Committee responsible for guiding the creation of this Comprehensive Plan.

This planning process highlighted the need for schools to be thought of as infrastructure, which opens the door for closer partnerships between Union Township and the school districts. As the school districts grow and reach building capacity, new schools will need to be built. This process can be extremely challenging as land in Union Township, and in the greater Licking County area, is prime for development, driving up prices. Union Township can support its high-quality school districts by building in requirements within the recommended overlay district for required open spaces that can be utilized for new school buildings. This would ensure that schools are being factored into the equation and included in the conversation when developers approach the Township.

Additionally, different land uses have different effects on the schools and fire departments capacities. For example, commercial or industrial development does not bring as many new students as a large single-family home development would. Regarding fire departments, single-family homes do not use as many fire resources as assisted living facilities or large commercial developments. Striking a balance of land uses within Union Township will be important in supporting schools and fire services within the community and prevent the stretching of resources. Union Township should retain and enhance close

communication channels with these entities to ensure they have a seat at the table when development is planned to occur within the Township.

WATER AND SEWER

Partnerships should also be created regarding floodplain and wetland management. Much of the land that is prime for development is located within the floodplain on the southern portion of the Township, however; economic development strategies such as the TIF and JEDD have been implemented in this area, and water and sewer infrastructure are prepped to expand into this area. Allowing intentional development in this area is the best path forward for the Township, but it should not come at the cost of flooding or mismanaged natural resources. While the developer would be responsible for ensuring proper floodplain management on their property, the Township has a duty to ensure the highest standards and best practices are being adhered to. Entities such as the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency (OEPA), Army Corps of Engineers, Licking County Soil and Water Conservation District, and Licking County Planning Commission have regulations and recommendations regarding floodplains, stormwater, and wetlands.

Standards should be put in place within Union Township's zoning that references these entities and ensures proper management. Additionally, conversations with these entities can help the Township gain insight on specific standards and recommendations to implement Township wide. The recommended overlay district should also promote measures to improve stormwater drainage and even improve stormwater runoff as development occurs. The recommended Gateway Overlay should include standards for the promotion of green infrastructure such as pervious pavements, green roofs, rain gardens, and naturalized retention and detention basins. The Gateway Overlay is also recommended to require developers to ensure no downstream impacts occur due to removing land from the floodplain through creative and innovation engineering practices. This would be completed in conjunction with adherence to standards published by the OEPA, Army Corps of Engineers, Licking County Soil and Water Conservation District, and Licking County Planning Commission.

Additionally, as sewer and water infrastructure enter the Township, conversations should be started SWLCWS regarding cost assistance to connect Union Township residents to water and sewer. SWLCWS has worked with other communities in the past to come up with creative solutions for those residents wishing to connect into the system. Union Township should contact SWLCWS to discuss potential partnerships that can be beneficial to all parties involved including the Township, the residents, and SWLCWS.

Transportation partnerships will be important for Union Township as studies and projects regarding as Thornwood Drive is expected to undergo substantial improvements to prepare it as a key corridor for connecting this area to Intel, as specifically described and shown in **Figures X and X** in the Existing Conditions section of this Comprehensive Plan. Communications with the Licking County Transportation Improvement District (LCTID)

have been instrumental in preparing this Plan and understanding forces at work within the region. Communications with the LCTID should be continued by the Township through quarterly meetings as plans continue to evolve. In preparation for growth in Union Township, we recommend establishing building setbacks within the recommended Gateway Corridor Overlay District from future rights-of-way (ROW) that consider potential future road improvement projects at the following widths:

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- Principal and Minor Arterial Roads: 100-foot ROW
- Collector Roads 72-foot ROW
- Minor Collector Roads: 60-foot ROW
- Local Roads: 50-foot ROW

Partnerships and flowing communication channels between Union Township and internal and external entities will be key as growth occurs within the Township. Ensuring all voices are heard will result in better planned development, but also improved infrastructure, relationships, schools, fire services, and floodplain and wetland management.

FOSTERING PARTNERSHIPS TO ENHANCE COMMUNITY SERVICES RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Utilize knowledge gained from reviewing surrounding municipalities Comprehensive Plans to build collaborative methods to reduce the likelihood of annexation.
- Continue to utilize existing JEDDS and identify partnerships for future JEDDs.
 - Investigate creating a new JEDD with the Village of Hebron in key areas that have been identified for growth.
- Improve communication channels with the Village of Hebron to create a closer partnership.
 - Initiate a meeting with the new mayor to establish these channels early and minimize misunderstandings.
 - Develop an understanding of commonalities and areas of disagreement, using these to further conversations to align views.
- Identify priorities of the Township regarding water and sewer.
 - Continue to actively include representatives from these agencies in Township planning efforts.
 - Hold quarterly meetings with each of these agencies.
 - Work with SWLCWS to create a partnership to reduce the cost to Union Township residents to connect to water and sewer.

- Continue to think of schools as infrastructure and include them as part of funding packages for future development.
- Allow required open space within the overlay district to be used for future school buildings.
- Recommend the use of green infrastructure in developments within the Gateway Overlay and beyond.
- Adhere to the highest standards of stream and wetland protection through regulations provided by OEPA, Army Corp, Planning Commission, etc.
 - Incorporate these standards into a future zoning code update.
- Identify opportunities to incorporate innovative engineering practices to accommodate development while minimizing environmental impact.

KEY THEME #3 - SUPPORTING SUSTAINABLE INFRASTRUCTURE

GOALS:

- Promote safe and efficient transportation routes to connect residents to surrounding employment, schools, retail, and recreational destinations.
- Expand multi-use trail networks with new development without encroaching upon the adjacent farming community.
- Guide future water and sewer infrastructure to strategic locations that minimize sprawl and protect existing farmlands while ensuring efficient and sustainable development.
- Protect natural resources that provide an ecosystem of service.
- Protect ground water resources of Union Township through preservation and development guidelines and regulations.

The intersectionality of sustainable infrastructure crosses all the key themes represented in this plan, and therefore, the proposed recommendations within this section provide another path to support the Township’s vision of balancing growth while preserving its rural lifestyle and landscape.

Most of the Township’s land will remain under an “Agricultural/Preservation Residential” designation to retain the Township’s rural identity. However, the southern section of land within the Gateway Overlay. This area exhibits prime developable land for the Township due to its access to Interstate 70 and State Route and US 40. The Township and the SWLCWS are targeting this area for water and sanitary sewer services in the near future. This prime land located within the Gateway Overlay presents an opportunity for the Township to pursue and support sustainable infrastructure and development that will not only enhance the economic future, but also preserve the quality of life and rural aesthetic of the Township.

SUSTAINABILITY AND WATER

CONCERNING THE FLOODPLAIN

The land that the Gateway Overlay falls within is a Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) floodplain, which is a critical factor that must be considered as the Township continues to focus development towards this area. The existence of the floodplain does not inhibit the economic potential proposed within the plan because there are multiple sustainable best practices that developers must follow to certify “No Impact” upon the floodplain.

Development within the floodplain is governed by the Flood Damage Prevention Regulations for Licking County, Ohio (2022) (the “Flood Regulations”) as found on Licking County’s webpage for floodplain management.²¹ The Flood Regulations are enforceable under Ohio Administrative Code Rule 1501:22-1-04 “Floodplain Management Criteria.”²²

- Pursuant to Flood Regulations Section 3.3 “Floodplain Development Permits,” specific permits must be attained before development can begin within the floodplain.²³
- Flood Regulations Section 3.4 “Application Required” provides further guidance where engineer certifications, technical analyses by design professionals, and all other standards for floodproofing and flood carrying capacity are required.²⁴
 - Technical analyses by design professionals include the following list found under 3.4(F): floodproofing certification; fully enclosed areas certified to automatically equalize hydrostatic flood forces; description of watercourse alteration or relocation; a hydrologic and hydraulic analysis (“H&H Study”) for cumulative effects of proposed development and any impacts on flood heights; and generated base flood elevation(s) and floodways for subdivisions, major developments, and where they cannot be determined by other sources.
- Furthermore, the Flood Regulations provides for use and development standards for flood hazard reductions, wherein Sections 4.1-4.2, standards set forth prohibitions of private water supply system development within the floodplain and that the new water/wastewater systems installed to minimize, or eliminate, infiltration and discharge of water that would in any way affect the floodway.²⁵

²¹ Flood Regulations: <https://lickingcounty.gov/civicax/filebank/blobdload.aspx?BlobID=105604> (Found under: <https://lickingcounty.gov/depts/planning/planning/floodplain/default.htm>)

²² <https://codes.ohio.gov/ohio-administrative-code/rule-1501:22-1-04>

²³ Flood Regulations.

²⁴ Id.

²⁵ Id.

The previously mentioned permitting process requires both (1) a “Floodway ‘No Rise/No Impact’ Certification” as approved by the Township,²⁶ and (2) an “Engineering ‘No-Rise Greater than 0.01 Feet’ Certification within the Flood Fringe” as approved by the Licking County’s Engineer’s Office.²⁷ These certificates must be made by a duly qualified engineer licensed in the State of Ohio.

Developers also have the option to complete a H&H Study and apply for a Letter of Map Revision (LOMR) or Letter of Map Revision-Based on Fill (LOMR-F) to bring the structure out of the floodplain through reengineering the landscape to accommodate development. FEMA notes that “the issuance of a LOMA or LOMR-F does not mean the structure or lot is safe from all flooding; it means that the risk of flooding is not as high as it is in the [Special Flood Hazard Area].”²⁸

The process that governs floodplain management ensures that any development within the floodplain is approached with assurances, certificates, and design requirements that are intended to prevent and eliminate impacts within the floodplain. By doing so, the Township’s floodplain will be protected and still allow for its residents to enjoy the economic benefits from the Gateway Overlay.

CONCERNING UNION TOWNSHIP’S WATER WELLS

The sustainability of existing wells is a major topic of concern for residents. Surrounding development pressures and their impacts upon wells were consistently discussed during feedback with the residents of the Township. The rural identity of the Township runs with its water resources and the Township’s residents often rely on their own water systems. As mentioned previously, most of the land in the Township will fall under “Agricultural/ Preservation Residential” and will not require residents to give up their private water systems. However, the looming demands for water as development pressures in Licking County create stresses on not only Union Township’s water, but much of the region as well. As an example, some predictions are being made regarding the risk of “residential wells and ponds in the Alexandria area running dry” should the millions of gallons required by Intel be met via a water source near the Village of Alexandria.²⁹

The stresses on the Township’s water table in light of the Township’s own development can potentially be mitigated through the infrastructure expansion by the SWLCWS into the Gateway Overlay. **[Await further information regarding SWLCWS water source.]** An additional recommendation is to amend the Township’s zoning regulations as appropriate

²⁶ <https://lickingcounty.gov/civicax/filebank/blobdload.aspx?BlobID=105618>

²⁷ <https://lickingcounty.gov/civicax/filebank/blobdload.aspx?BlobID=105617>

²⁸ <https://www.fema.gov/flood-maps/change-your-flood-zone/loma-lomr-f>

²⁹ <https://www.thereportingproject.org/new-albanys-search-for-water-for-intel-goes-far-beyond-granville/>

to require connections to central water and sewer services for all new large-scale developments. By having the Township target locations where dense development is most likely to occur through using economic tools and based upon purposeful planning, the Township can accomplish its priorities regarding the location of water and sewer infrastructure to develop an actionable plan and reduce sprawl.

Wells running dry due to these development pressures are not the only concern on resident's minds. The surrounding development's demand for new water drilling operations have led to a growing concern for Granville Township's water supply due to its vicinity to a Superfund Site that contains a plume of printing and dry-cleaning chemicals that were left behind by the Granville Solvents Company in 1986.³⁰

A Superfund Site is land that has been designated under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA) as being contaminated "due to hazardous waste being dumped, left out in the open, or otherwise improperly managed" that will then be managed by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) following designation.³¹ It is called a "Superfund" because that is the name of CERCLA.³²

This persistent plume poses a potential danger to Granville's water supply because increased drawing of water to meet the demands of surrounding development may lead to an increased drift of the plume towards Granville's aquifers potentially polluting both Granville and Alexandria's water supply.³³ A risk of this magnitude has evidently placed a great burden on Granville's community and has led to political frustrations with neighboring New Albany.³⁴

This Superfund Site may not directly affect Union Township, but it does create an indirect concern about regional water availability for western Licking County should Granville and Alexandria's water supply be polluted. The Township should collaborate with Granville, SWLCWS, Licking Soil and Water, Ohio EPA, and other parties to further understand the potential impacts of the Superfund Site on ground water quality.

³⁰ Id.

³¹ <https://www.epa.gov/superfund/what-superfund>

³² Id.

³³ <https://www.thereportingproject.org/new-albanys-search-for-water-for-intel-goes-far-beyond-granville/>

³⁴ Id.

SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

RECENT AMTRAK ANNOUNCEMENTS

Amtrak has recently announced plans for an expansion of passenger rail that will bring four new lines to Ohio. One of these routes will potentially be between Chicago-Columbus-Pittsburgh and will have a stop in Newark along this route.³⁵ The existing railroad connecting Columbus and Newark passes through Newark Township. This expansion is still in the early stages of planning, but it is recommended that the Township revisit this plan and update based upon any study recommendations by Amtrak. The Township should aim to keep communication channels with MORPC and Licking County as open as possible to stay up to date with any information regarding the development of this line. With this communication, the Township should advocate for the assurances of buffers placed along the tracks near residential areas to reduce excessive noise should it be decided that these passenger lines will be developed.

ALTERNATIVE TRANSPORTATION OPTIONS

According to the Union Township Economic Development Strategic Plan by the Montrose Group, LLC (the “Montrose Plan”), the Township lacks alternative forms of transportation such as walking and biking trails.³⁶ A recommended plan for expanding multi-use trail options should be able to enhance the resident’s quality of life while not interfering with the Township’s rural quality. As relayed in the Montrose Plan, “the development of bike paths promotes healthy lifestyles, provides access to local parks, work, and provides youth alternate mode of transportation to school.”³⁷

The Township currently enjoys the presence of the 2.8-mile multi-use Ohio Canal Greenway and recreational space at the Infirmary Mound Park. However, the paths that exist within these areas offer very little pedestrian or cycling connections to the rest of the Township.³⁸ Another connector opportunity may exist with nearby Buckeye Lake. The potential to create an accessible trail network within the Township only increases with the introduction of development within the Gateway Overlay because of the ability for the Township to place required standards for the inclusion of multi-use paths when those areas develop.

³⁵ <https://www.ideastream.org/2023-12-07/amtrak-expansion-in-ohio-is-expected-to-jobs-and-revenue-but-not-for-a-while>

³⁶ The Montrose Group, “Union Township Economic Development Strategic Plan” (2022), p. 32-33.

³⁷ Id., at p. 32.

³⁸ Id.

PRESERVATION – CONSERVATION – SAFETY PRACTICES

The residents of the Township have expressed concerns for the preservation of their rural community and improvements in transportation safety measures. To address these concerns, it is recommended that the Township focus development within the Gateway Overlay where preexisting economic tools are in place to encourage economic growth as discussed in the “Existing Economic Development Incentives” section of this plan. By creating the Gateway Overlay, the Township will be able to utilize greater control over the standards for how development will proceed and reduce sprawl to best preserve the rural community and safety of its residents. These standards may also be used to target existing trees and natural landmarks for preservation within the Gateway Overlay.

Outside of the Gateway Overlay, it is recommended that the Township create a five-year capital improvement plan that identifies necessary road improvements. In addition to this improvement plan, the Township should plan setbacks for potential increased right of ways due to potential road widening. By being proactive in measures for road improvements, the Township should advocate for more safety measures for busy intersections that have been addressed by Township residents. The Beaver Run – SR 37 intersection discussed in the “Transportation” section of this plan is a recommended example for the Township to promote safety measures. Like in the Gateway Overlay, the Township should also identify natural buffers, such as the wooded buffer along the South Fork Licking River, for preservation that will help conserve sight lines and natural aesthetics.

SUPPORTING SUSTAINABLE INFRASTRUCTURE

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Amend zoning regulations in all necessary locations to require connections to central water and sewer services for all new large-scale developments.
- Identify Township’s priorities regarding location of water and sewer infrastructure to develop an actionable plan and reduce sprawl.
- Collaborate with Granville, SWLCWS, Licking Soil and Water, OEPA, and other parties to understand the potential impacts of the Granville Solvents Superfund Site.
- Plan for the proposed Amtrak services that have the potential to run through the Township. Ensure buffers are required along the tracks to reduce excessive noise and assess the impact of traffic on 37 with increased train crossings.

- Increase the feasibility of different transportation modes in the Township through the development of multi-use paths.
- Require multi-use paths within the Gateway Overlay standards.
- Utilize proposed Gateway Overlay boundaries as development buffers to guide development into key areas.
- Utilize the Gateway Overlay to target development into a specific area of the Township and minimize impact on greater natural resource systems in the Township.
- Implement standards within the Gateway Overlay to retain existing trees and natural resources.
- Create a five-year capital improvement plan that identifies necessary road improvements and helps plan financially for it.
- Plan setbacks for potential increased right-of-way due to potential road widening.
- Preserve wooded buffer along the South Fork Licking River.

KEY THEME #4 – PROMOTING ECONOMIC PROSPERITY

GOALS:

- Incentivize developments that are in line with Union Township’s vision to locate in key locations using various zoning and economic development tools.
- Develop cost effective strategies for road improvements and maintenance.
- Embrace the unique tourism attractions and cultural assets adjacent to the Township.
- Create a vibrant and welcoming southern gateway into the Township, enhancing its appeal, accessibility, and economic potential.

For the rural setting of Union Township (the “Township”) to continue to exist within the comprehensive plan, the Township must provide a way to prevent annexation by its many surrounding municipalities. Once annexation occurs, the municipality determines the zoning and all development standards while the Township loses control over these areas. The solution to preventing annexation lies in promoting the Township as a place of economic prosperity through using economic development tools and creating zoning that is attractive to developers but allows the Township to set protective standards to foster a thriving community.

These economic development tools are outlined in the Union Township Economic Development Strategic Plan by The Montrose Group, LLC (the “Montrose Plan”). The Montrose Plan’s assessment of the Township indicated that development would best be suited along the I-70 corridor, especially where the existing Tax Increment Financing (TIF) exists.³⁹ This recommended area currently is where the comprehensive plan has labeled the South Gateway Overlay Area (Gateway Overlay) and will be where the development within the Township will be predominantly located. Since the Montrose Plan’s completion, a Joint Economic Development District (JEDD) with the City of Heath has been implemented overlapping much of the same land as within the TIF.

OVERVIEW OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT TOOLS

³⁹ The Montrose Group, “Union Township Economic Development Strategic Plan” (2022), at p. 46 and 54.

Currently, the Township has been using these economic tools to foster economic growth while also creating an environment that allows it to set standards that are prohibitive towards annexation. The TIF and JEDD currently in use along the I-70 corridor where the Gateway Overlay is located exhibits how these economic tools can be used to lead the way towards building the necessary infrastructure to set a foundation for economic prosperity that represents the vision the Township desires. Also, as previously discussed, the non-annexation provision within the JEDD between the City of Heath and the Township discourages annexation from other municipalities because annexation by a different municipality leads to double taxation, since the existing JEDD would not be dissolved with annexation. Double taxation would be cost prohibitive; therefore, landowners and developers would most likely not seek annexation so long as the JEDD is enforceable.

By placing the Gateway Overlay where these economic tools are in use, the Township will be in a strong position to promote development in a manner that fits its vision by setting standards that create visual appeal and highlight its rural identity. Additionally, the Township gains the added benefit of keeping more unincorporated land rural by providing a space for targeted development within this Gateway Overlay.

TOURISM AND HOTELS

The Township's approach towards tourism should center itself around its rural identity. By focusing on pastoral landscapes, sprawling farmland, heritage sites, and outdoor recreation, the Township cultivates an identity for itself that can be advertised as the idyllic countryside that should persist for future generations. The following tourist sites exhibit existing places that may attract visitors to enjoy Union Township:

HEBRON STATE FISH HATCHERY – 10517 Canal Road SE Hebron, OH 43025.⁴⁰

- A 230-acre property hosting 25-acres of wetlands, 50-acres of wooded area, and 2.5 miles of nature trails.
- Operated by the ODNR Division of Wildlife, the Hebron State Fish Hatchery produces 44 million fish yearly, which are used to support Ohio's fishing opportunities statewide.
- Self-guided tours are permitted Monday-Friday from 8:00 AM-3:00 PM.
- Maintains an archery range available to the public every day from sunrise to sunset, free of charge and with no permit required.

INFIRMARY MOUND PARK – 4351 Lancaster Road, Granville, Ohio.⁴¹

⁴⁰ <https://ohiodnr.gov/go-and-do/plan-a-visit/find-a-property/hebron-fish-hatchery>

⁴¹ <https://lickingparkdistrict.com/infirmary-mound-park/>

- A 316-acre park hosting 7 miles of horseback riding, hiking, and mountain bike trails.
- Contains the prehistoric cultural site – Infirmary Mound of the Hopewell Tribe.
- Maintains several playgrounds and a dog park.
- Permits fishing, canoeing, and kayaking at Mirror Lake.
- Hosts special events such as equestrian events, 5k events, cyclocross events, Outdoor Adventure Series hosted by Licking County, and the annually hosted Harvest Moon Festival in October.

OHIO CANAL GREENWAY – 101 Canal Road, Hebron, Ohio.⁴²

- A 2.8-mile multi-purpose trail that starts in Hebron and terminates at Walnut Road near Buckeye Lake.
- Noted for its excellent birdwatching, fishing, and hiking.
- Travelers cross a wooden covered bridge built in 1992.

OHIO NATIONAL TRAIL RACEWAY – 2650 National Road SW Hebron, OH 43025.⁴³

- In operation since 1964, Ohio National Trails Raceway hosts drag racing events from April through July.
- Recommended to keep communication channels open with the owners to remain up to date about the future of this site.

These tourist sites represent education and recreational opportunities that demonstrate the rural character of Union Township as something to celebrate. However, the Township is not limited to existing sites to attract tourism. Working alongside the agricultural community to create a base of agritourism also generates these opportunities while also expanding the economic utility of farmland. The U.S. Department of Agriculture defines “Agritourism” as “a form of commercial enterprise that links production and/or processing with tourism to attract visitors onto a farm, ranch, or other agricultural business for the purposes of entertaining or educating the visitors while generating income for the farm, ranch, or business owner.”⁴⁴ Examples of agricultural events include, but are not limited to, “you-pick” farms, farmer’s markets, community festivals, corn mazes, hayrides, and other fun or educational activities that are agriculturally related.⁴⁵ However, Ohio courts have clarified that agritourism laws do not extend towards weddings hosted on farm property.⁴⁶ Agritourism presents a way for the existing agricultural landscape to persist despite development pressures by providing an added revenue source for farmers as well as a way to further generate community pride.

⁴² <https://explorelc.org/directory/ohio-canal-greenway>

⁴³ <https://nationaltrailraceway.com/event-listing>

⁴⁴ <https://www.nal.usda.gov/human-nutrition-and-food-safety/local-foods-and-communities/agritourism>

⁴⁵ <https://ocj.com/2020/10/ohio-court-of-appeals-confirms-decision-not-to-allow-weddings-on-hay-farm-as-agritourism/>

⁴⁶ Id.

With the promotion of these places as tourism opportunities, the Township's economic and cultural prosperity becomes even more connected to the land, and with that, the Township is much better suited to attain its vision for keeping its rural identity. Additionally, by using the intentional growth mindset developed by the standards set forth in the Gateway Overlay, the Township will be able to guide development in a way that highlights its identity even further. This presents opportunities to bridge tourist destinations in nearby Buckeye Lake or Granville and create a rural recreational network.

In the Gateway Overlay, to accommodate tourists and travelers, it is recommended to create a hotel district around the intersection at I-70 and SR-37. This hotel district would not only provide a place for travelers and tourists, it also provides revenue to the Township in the form of a 3 percent excise tax on all transactions within the unincorporated territory of the Township for hotel lodging (excluding Air BNBs) per the existing Township bed tax.

PROMOTING ECONOMIC PROSPERITY

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Utilize Gateway Overlay to direct purposeful development to align with the Township's vision to retain a rural identity.
- Continue to establish TIFs, JEDDs, NCAs, and CEDAs where appropriate.
- Offset costs and avoid tax increases through using the revenue generated from TIFs, JEDDs, and NCAs.
- Implement high quality standards with the Gateway Overlay for landscaping, setbacks, design standards, etc. that create visual appeal as you enter the Township from the south.
- Allow additional uses with the Gateway Overlay not previously seen in the Township to expand economic potential and options.
- Promote the Township's historical, natural, and cultural heritage sites (such as the Hebron Fish Hatchery, Infirmary Mound Park, Ohio Canal Greenway, and Ohio National Trails Raceway).
- Keep communication channels open with the owners of National Trail Raceway. Engage owners about the future of the site.
- Promote agritourism operations within the Township to highlight its rural character.

- Capitalize on proximity to Buckeye Lake – hotels, boating industry (south of I-70).

IMPLEMENTATION MATRIX

Place holder for IMPLEMENTATION MATRIX

APPENDICES

To be added later