

Summary Memo
Round 1 of Public Engagement
January 15, 2019

This document summarizes the first round of public engagement for Wayne County, which was conducted between October 18 and December 31, 2018. Input was gathered in the three following ways:

- Wayne Onward Steering Committee meeting (10/18/18);
- Four (4) “Focus on the Future” workshops held on two evenings (11/13/18, 11/15/18); and
- Online survey (11/16/18 – 12/30/18)

The memo includes the following:

1. Purpose
2. Outreach and Publicity
3. Approach
4. Results
 - Greatest Opportunities
 - Strong / Weak Places
5. Participation and Satisfaction
6. Appendix - Strong / Weak Places Map

1. Purpose

Wayne County launched a process to update its comprehensive plan in August 2018, called Wayne Onward. The County’s last comprehensive plan was adopted in 1997, with an audit conducted in 2007. One of the key inputs to the process is insight from the community. Through the first round of public engagement, multiple opportunities were designed to provide the platform for anyone who cares about the future of Wayne County to help inform the plan. The engagement lays the groundwork for development of the plan’s preliminary goals, objectives and recommendations.

“Thank you for facilitating this process. It's great to live in a county where comprehensive planning is taken seriously.”

workshop participant

2. Outreach and Publicity

Extensive outreach was conducted to spread the word broadly about the opportunity to participate in Round 1 of the public engagement. The Team capitalized on existing networks through community groups, organizations, churches, educational institutions and local governments for outreach. In addition, a press release was distributed to local media outlets. In addition, interviews with key stakeholder groups were conducted during this phase and documented separately. Results included the following:

- 2,500 printed rack cards distributed throughout the County.
- Over 100 groups, organizations or individuals connected to networks of interest were contacted about the opportunity, including schools, nonprofit organizations, interest groups (e.g. Farm Bureau, business groups, etc.), local governments and others.
- Multiple media stories were published, including in The Daily Record and The Budget
- A social media account was created for Wayne Onward and social media posts were shared, by a number of key community organizations, including the Wooster Chamber of Commerce, Wayne County Public Library, and others.
- A booth with information about the planning process was manned at the Kidron Auction for several hours on a day two weeks before the workshops.

3. Approach

Wayne Onward's first round of public input included face-to-face engagement at the four public workshops held throughout the County on two different nights (11/13/18 and 11/15/18). The workshop activities were conducted in small groups of 5-8 at a table, with a volunteer recorder documenting input. Online engagement mimicked the workshop activities through a web-based survey that included an interactive mapping tool.

Engagement at the workshops and online included two main exercises: Greatest Opportunities input and a Strong / Weak Places. During the Greatest Opportunities exercise, participants were asked to answer the question, ***“What are the greatest opportunities for Wayne County?”*** The Strong / Weak Places exercise asked participants to identify strong and weak specific places in the county on a map and to explain why these places were strong or weak.

4. Results

This section summarizes input collected. It draws from a database of every comment recorded (in participants' own words) and is organized around themes and sub-topics.

Greatest Opportunities

The following section includes major themes and ideas provided in response to the question, ***“What are the greatest opportunities for Wayne County?”*** Percentages in parentheses indicate what proportion of comments collected related to the topic. (Note: total percentages totals more than 100% because some comments pertain to more than one topic.)

1. Economic Development (13% of total comments)
Participants provided numerous comments about the importance of the economy in Wayne County. Overall, discussion focused on how to support both agricultural activities and other

businesses, diversify industry, attract jobs and business and develop the existing workforce. A strong sentiment was expressed that there is a solid base in place to grow the economy in Wayne County provided that there is thoughtful consideration of what residents want and need.

- a. Attracting Businesses
 - i. Maintain a business-friendly atmosphere
 - ii. Support local businesses and industry
- b. Retaining Jobs
 - i. Retain “good, steady” jobs
 - ii. Focus on aligning jobs with skill base to support local employment
- c. Supporting Retail
 - i. Grow and diversify local shopping and restaurants to enhance “destination county” status
 - ii. Consider adding general retail options for access to goods within the county, especially in already urbanized areas
- d. Developing the Workforce
 - i. Grow the local workforce through job training (e.g. agriculture-specific)

2. Agriculture (12%)

The economic value and cultural importance of Wayne County’s agricultural industry was expressed by many participants. Participants commented on the need to preserve, promote and support agriculture through a range of programs, policies or projects.

- a. Preserving Existing Agriculture
 - i. Control development to preserve farmland
 - ii. Maintain rural aspects of Wayne County
 - iii. Maintain a clear urban edge condition that separates urban and rural areas
- b. Enhancing Viability
 - i. Support farmers, through incentives, regulations, etc.
 - ii. Strengthen the “family farm”
 - iii. Maintain economic viability of agriculture
- c. Supporting Agricultural Business
 - i. Support agriculture through business services, expertise and resources.

3. Parks, Trails, and Open Spaces (10%)

Wayne County has the potential to expand, improve and capitalize on its natural and recreational areas. A number of participants mentioned that critical to this goal is securing funding for parks and recreation (specifically the Wayne County Park District). Further, comments focused on the creation of a comprehensive park system and the potential new development of trails for a range of activities, provided that it is compatible with other land uses and activities.

- a. Improving and Expanding Trails
 - i. Improve connectivity of trails throughout the County and between communities, taking into consideration other existing land uses and activities
 - ii. Increase investment for new trails

- iii. Improve safety and access for existing spaces
 - iv. Improve communication about trail extension projects between different interest groups
 - b. Supporting the Wayne County Park District
 - i. Fund and expand the Park District
 - c. Green/Open Spaces
 - i. Preserve and maintain open, green spaces
 - ii. Provide opportunities for recreation and outdoor activities (may include OARDC and ODNR land in addition to County and local parks)

4. Transportation and Infrastructure (8%)

Comments about transportation and infrastructure in Wayne County focused on maintaining roadways, modernizing utilities, and investing in more public transportation in strategic locations. Participants noted the importance of creating a connected county.

- a. Improving Roadways
 - i. Improve safety of secondary roadways
 - ii. Invest in maintenance of roadways
 - iii. Increase highway access
 - b. Modernizing Utilities
 - i. Enhance utilities such as fiber, and WIFI.
 - ii. Utilize existing infrastructure, directing development toward it
 - c. Supporting Public Transportation
 - i. Improve public transportation in key locations
5. Health and Safety (8%)
- Participants mentioned how expanding services (mental health, housing, safety, and medical) were critical to the success and growth of Wayne County. Addressing the needs of vulnerable residents is important for Wayne County to consider for a viable future.
- a. Providing Services
 - i. Provide more mental health services
 - ii. Address homelessness and addiction
 - b. Improving Safety
 - i. Expand safety services (e.g. fire and law enforcement)
 - c. Supporting Medical Care
 - i. Maintain quality of existing health services

6. Other

In addition to the top five themes listed above, participants identified a number of additional themes that are important to them, including housing, land use, community character, and other. Some of the comments that emerged from these other themes include the following:

- a. Promoting Fiscal Health
 - i. Consider sharing services between local jurisdictions for cost efficiency
 - b. Retaining and Attracting Young People
 - i. Encourage the development of amenities throughout the County, especially serving younger demographics (e.g. dog parks, restaurants, entertainment,

- convenience shopping).
 - ii. Provide a range of housing options, including housing that might be appropriate for younger people and first-time homebuyers
- c. Encouraging a Range of Housing Options
 - i. Support the development of housing products to support a variety of income levels and lifestyle preferences, including affordable housing
- d. Evaluating Tools for Maintaining Character
 - i. Consider mechanisms through which land conservation and sprawl prevention could be implemented, which may include zoning or other regulatory tools.

Strong / Weak Places

Below is the summary of the Strong / Weak Places exercise performed at the the “Focus on the Future” workshops and in the online survey. The summary includes a number of over-arching themes that emerged through the exercise as well as the top five strong and weak places that were identified, including the most prevalent comments about each. (See Appendix A, Strong / Weak places summary map for all strong and weak places that were identified with the location of the top five for each indicated.)

Key Themes

The following themes emerged from the Strong / Weak Places exercise:

- Natural areas and open spaces are some of the most valued places in the County, including Johnson Woods, Wooster Memorial Park, Killbuck Marsh Wildlife Area, OARDC property, Barnes Preserve and others.
- There is a strong interest in ensuring a clear differentiation between urban and rural conditions throughout the County and specifically in maintaining the urban edge of Wooster so as to prevent sprawl and preserve rural/agricultural character.
- Downtown Wooster is greatly appreciated for its vibrancy, attractiveness and the range of businesses and activities it supports.
- Poor property maintenance and a “run down” look and feel were identified for South Wooster, Rittman, West Salem and Burbank. There is a recognition that these parts of the County are struggling more economically than others and that residential, commercial and industrial areas have suffered from disinvestment unlike other parts of the County. However, many also noted that there have been recent improvement efforts, especially in Rittman, that are beginning to make a difference.
- A number of roadway corridors in the County are identified as problematic due to traffic, access management issues and/or an unattractive physical environment (e.g. Burton City Road, Route 30 Corridor West of Dalton, Lincoln Way East, and Route 57). Similarly, there are a number of intersections that were identified as dangerous and in need of safety improvements.
- Generally, the County’s villages and unincorporated locations (including Apple Creek, Kidron, Smithville) are viewed as having a strong quality of place, as is the City of Orrville. At the same time, specific opportunities for improvement of these places that could help to retain people and draw them to live there were also identified, including more amenities and a variety of good

quality housing options.

- A number of attractions and amenities in the County were identified as positive due to their ability to draw tourists and add value for residents, including wineries, bulk/independent grocers, historic features such as cemeteries, structures, and character, small-scale commercial centers and areas with “Amish character.”
- There are differences of opinion with respect to the value of rails to trails effort; while some are strongly in favor of expansion of trails, others have significant concerns, especially in certain agricultural locations.
- There are locations throughout the County that are identified as strong because of the scenic beauty of the rural landscape, including but not limited to the Route 229/Jentes Road corridor heading West from Route 83, the area between Creston and Rittman and the area east of Marshallville, among others. At the same time, throughout the existing rural areas development and uses that are viewed as incompatible are also identified as intrusions that mar the landscape. The proliferation of billboards are a specific recurring concern. These are not limited to any one part of the County.

Top Strong Places

Following are the five most identified strong places (in no particular order).

A. Johnson Woods

- a. Unique old growth forest
- b. Great outdoor area for people to visit
- c. Easy access to forest, trails and recreation

B. Wooster Memorial Park

- a. Outdoor opportunities for trails, hiking and recreation
- b. Attraction for tourists, families, alumni, church organizations and others to enjoy the natural environment

C. Killbuck Marsh Wildlife Area

- a. Preservation of wildlife and wetlands
- b. Opportunities for recreation (e.g. hunting, fishing, birding)

D. Downtown Wooster

- a. Many attractions, restaurants, shopping, activities, etc.
- b. Well maintained

E. Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center

- a. Beautiful location
- b. Public place for higher education and green space

Top Weak Places

Following are the five most identified strong places (in no particular order).

A. Rittman

- a. Area, specifically downtown, is rundown
- b. Decreasing opportunities and loss of industry

- c. Some recent efforts to improve have been made
- B. West Salem**
 - a. Run down, needs “cleaning up”
 - b. Not accessible to US 71
- C. North Wooster**
 - a. Growth not well managed, sprawl, traffic
 - b. Development is unattractive, strip malls
 - c. Annexations and further growth expected to occur
- D. Burton City Road**
 - a. Safety concern with narrow, roads, deep ditches
 - b. Eyesore, needs “cleaning up”
- E. South Wooster**
 - a. Run down area that does not reflect Wooster

5. Participation and Satisfaction

Participation in the workshops and online met high expectations for the process, with approximately 250 people participating in the first round of engagement. Participants who attended the public workshops filled out an exit questionnaire about their experience and themselves. Of those who participated, 164 people completed the exit questionnaire (approximately 65%). Additionally, online participants answered a few key questions. The following insight is based on responses.

Key Takeaways regarding participation and satisfaction

- Newspaper articles (42%) and word of mouth (37%) were most common ways people heard about the “Focus on the Future” workshops.
- Over 700 unique comments were collected from the workshops and online input (including Greatest Opportunities, Strong / Weak Places exercise and general comments).
- There was age diversity among participants, with over-representation of people over 45 years old.
- Those with a higher education and higher annual household income were overrepresented relative to the County’s population.
- Participants were drawn from Wayne County’s cities (39%), townships (43%), and villages (11%).
- Participants varied in the amount of time they lived in the County, ranging from long-time to recently moved residents.
- Workshop satisfaction rates were very high; 97% of participants in the workshop said they felt comfortable working within the small groups, and 99% felt that their input was heard.
- 97% of participants said they will stay involved with the planning process for Wayne Onward.
- Many participants noted that they felt satisfied with the process, making comments such as “I thought the planning session was well organized and purposeful” and “Presenters and group leaders seem genuinely interested in our thoughts and ideas.”

6. Appendix – Strong / Weak Places Map

Following is the Strong / Weak Places Map, which includes all places identified through the workshops and online. The map will be one input into an “opportunity map” which will provide a foundation for a future land use plan for the County.

“I see a great opportunity to use new ideas to shape the future of Wayne County.”

workshop participant

Strong / Weak Places

Strong places are identified as desirable to visit, represent conditions you'd like to see more often, and reflect well on the community. Weak places are identified as undesirable places to visit, are aesthetically unpleasing, or reflect poorly on the community. This map combines results from online and in person public engagement. This map will be used in combination with other data to identify potential future opportunities and to inform the land use plan.

Top 5 Strong Places

- A. Johnson Woods
- B. Wooster Memorial Park
- C. Killbuck Marsh Wildlife Area
- D. Downtown Wooster
- E. Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center

Top 5 Weak Places

- A. Rittman
- B. West Salem
- C. North Wooster
- D. Burton City Road
- E. South Wooster

Legend

- Strong Place
- Weak Place
- Town / city
- Facility planning areas

