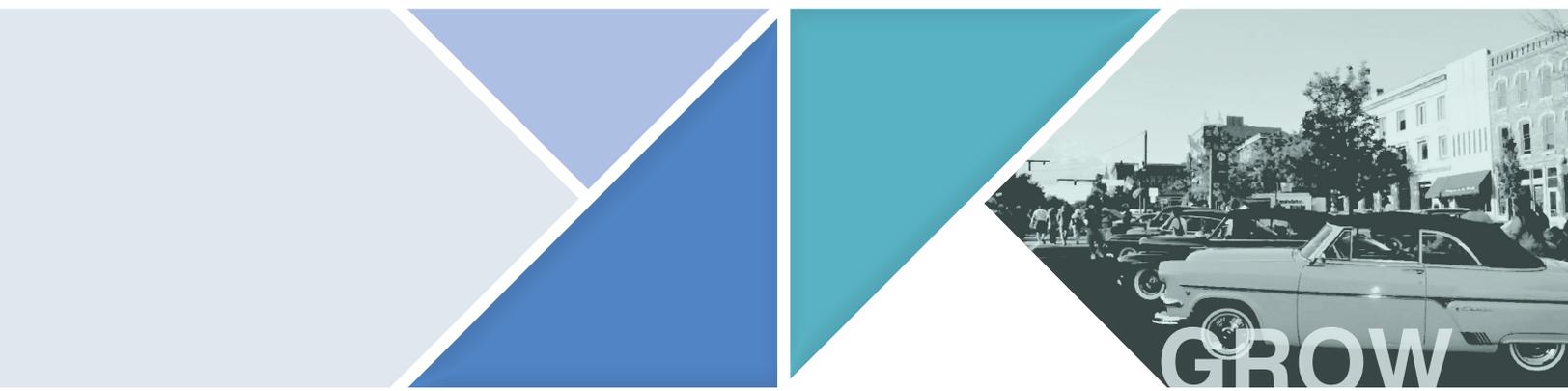




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**WOOSTER
ENVISIONED**
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN
2014

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since the time of the previous Comprehensive Plan's adoption in 2002, the City of Wooster has undergone a number of changes, including new growth, changing demographic conditions, and experienced the impacts of one of the greatest recessions in the Country's history.

With this Plan, City leaders have an extensive resource that provides insight into the state of the City and

recommendations to guide efforts to make Wooster a more prosperous place to live, play, and work. The Plan includes five Plan principles that set the framework for future decision making within the community. These principles also set the framework and direction for the Plan's 21 objectives and 91 actions.

summary of existing conditions

Overview

In looking forward to the future of Wooster, it is important to first take stock of the current conditions in the community. Just as different components of the community are interrelated, so too are the different sections of the Plan. Taking a holistic view of the existing conditions in the City created a strong understanding of how different factors influence one another, allowing for a better integration of the Plan components and a better plan overall.

This analysis of existing conditions helps ensure that the recommendations made later in the Plan are applicable and will address the needs of the community. In conjunction with the public's input, the information summarized in this chapter influenced the planning process and served as a baseline by which the vision and Plan recommendations were developed.

The following are the existing condition key findings for each element of the Plan:

Key Findings

Land Use, Demographics, and Housing

- Currently, the City has a sufficient amount of developable land within the city limits to accommodate projected population growth.
- When considering the environmental constraints, a total of 1,042 acres within the City is actually developable as opposed to the 2,137 acre gross development capacity.
- The sanitary sewer service planning area includes approximately 3,000 acres of undeveloped land.
- Assuming the population growth rate remains steady at 5% per decade, the City will gain an additional 1,305 residents from 2010 to 2020, for a population of 27,424 by the year 2020.
- From 2000 to 2010, an additional 1,148 housing units were constructed, while an additional 455 units became vacant.
- The City of Wooster currently has enough residentially zoned land to satisfy housing demand into 2020.
- Assuming an employment growth of 1% per year, the City of Wooster currently has enough non-residentially zoned land to satisfy demand into 2020.

Transportation

- Wooster has convenient access to surrounding communities and major thoroughfares within the State.
- Significant industrial and commercial growth has occurred within close proximity to the freeways and rail lines within Wooster.
- The City does not currently have a well-connected and complete non-motorized transportation network.
- Destinations that serve as centers of commerce, business, and entertainment are not adequately connected by a non-motorized transportation network.
- Multiple entry points into the City provide opportunities for enhanced gateway entrances to define the image and brand of Wooster.

Parks, Recreation, and Open Space

- Wooster's current park system, including those not owned by the City, contains 18 parks that occupy approximately 778 acres. The system also includes three indoor facilities consisting of a community center, an ice arena, and a recreational center.
- While the City is generally well served by community and regional parks, there is a deficit of approximately 24 acres of neighborhood parks and 11 acres of mini-parks when compared to national standards.
- Of the total park space in the City, approximately 34% are active and 66% are passive.
- Many of the residential areas in the west and northeast of the City are underserved by parkland. These areas are outside of ¼-mile and ½-mile walking distances of parkland.
- Approximately 1,300 acres of undevelopable land within Wooster could potentially be used as parks or natural protection areas.

Utilities and Public Services

- A number of water system improvements are planned in order to provide a high level of service to meet current and future demands.
- The City has been actively working to create a dedicated (separated) storm sewer system and to reduce the overall impact on the system through the integration of 'green' stormwater management practices.
- The existing sanitary sewage treatment plant has enough capacity to meet the demands of planned population growth through 2020.
- Emergency services are centrally located near the Downtown, with planned expansion of new fire station locations to improve coverage and response times throughout the City.

summary of public input

Overview

The public was invited to participate in the development of the Plan through several avenues of public input including:

- Two Public Meetings
- Seven Steering Committee Meetings and Workshops
- Interactive internet engagement
- Telephonic Survey

While the existing conditions analysis provides insight into the physical and technical aspects of a community, input from the general public and stakeholders is necessary to create a plan that is intuitively informed by the values and aspirations of the community. The following section outlines some of the key findings garnered from the public input process.

Key Findings

Land Use, Demographics, Housing

- There is a desire for infill and redevelopment before outward expansion through new annexation.
- Enhancing the downtown and surrounding neighborhoods is a priority.
- There is support for high-quality development that integrates green building and planning principles to conserve and protect environmentally sensitive areas, and promote environmental stewardship.
- There is a desire to focus on new high-quality multi-family and single-family residential development in and around the downtown.
- Preservation of older housing/historic housing in older 'first ring' traditional neighborhoods is important.
- There is a desire to attract and promote high-quality vibrant developments that will attract and serve a variety of age groups.

PUBLIC INPUT- BY THE NUMBERS

Online Engagement (Mindmixer)

- 8 months of activity
- 6,421 Total page views
- 1,051 Unique visitors

Telephonic Survey

- 300 Interviews completed

Public Meetings

- 2 public meetings
- 80+ participants combined

Stakeholder Meetings

- 7 stakeholder meetings

Main Street Wooster

- 2 Board/Member Meetings

Transportation

- There is a general desire to alleviate automobile traffic concerns Downtown.
- Citizens want to improve connections between various points throughout the City.
- Citizens support convenient and efficient free parking throughout the City.
- Bike trails that provide connections throughout the City and connect to regional systems are supported by Wooster residents.
- Residents support an assortment of public transportation options to serve a variety of age groups.

Parks, Open Space, and Recreation

- Residents of Wooster are generally satisfied with the current parks, recreation, and open space network.
- Adding green space to downtown will be necessary to further promote the economic success and pedestrian friendliness of the area.

- Citizens were in support of connecting parks throughout the City through greenways.
- Enhancing park security and safety should be a priority to ensure a welcoming atmosphere for all age groups.

Utilities and Public Services

- Residents are satisfied with the current delivery of water and place a high priority on the continued maintenance and expansion of the water system.
- Residents support the integration of new 'green' stormwater management methods.
- Proper sewer maintenance and management in older areas is supported by Wooster residents.
- Increased police presence is a priority among residents.
- Code enforcement should continue to be a priority with a focus in and around Downtown Wooster.

AS A MEMBER OF THE WOOSTER COMMUNITY, MY VISION IS...

“More affordable multi-unit housing in the downtown area.”

“Develop spaces for more public activity.”

“Make Downtown a destination for people other than residents.”

“Enhance/improve what we have before growing outward.”

“Higher standards for rental properties.”

summary of current trends

Overview

This section represents current trends relating to land use, demographics, housing, transportation, utilities, and public services in similarly sized communities throughout the country.

Key Findings

Land Use, Demographics, and Housing

- There is a growing trend of people wanting to move back into urban settings.
- Millennials and Baby Boomers are increasingly living in more compact and sustainable environments.
- Mixed-use development continues to be a growing trend.
- Public private partnerships are a growing trend that help achieve large and small economic development initiatives.
- Parking is one of the biggest land use challenges facing communities.

Transportation

- Complete streets are designed to accommodate all users, including multiple modes of transportation, ages, and abilities.
- Roundabouts are an alternative type of roadway intersection that can decrease traffic congestion and increase safety.
- Recent transportation planning concepts, including complete streets, have introduced room for cyclists roadway design, including sharrows and dedicated bike lanes.
- The State of Ohio has been one of the leading states in developing regional non-motorized transportation recreation connections.

Parks, Recreation, and Open Space

- Communities are creating new park spaces that are dynamic and engaging, balancing recreation, interactive play, and passive spaces in a dynamic environment that serves a variety of age groups and abilities.
- There is a growing trend to create new urban like public spaces in suburban and exurban communities to serve as places of entertainment and gathering. These spaces are typically heavily programmed with a variety of community events and activities to engage the community and grow the local economy.
- Creating new open space and passive parks and preserves is a growing trend communities are implementing to establish new economical ways of growing local park systems.
- Many communities are creating partnerships with the private sector to create, enhance and maintain parks and public spaces.

Utilities and Public Services

- Bioswales and rain gardens are becoming an increasingly accepted way to reduce the amount of stormwater entering the system.
- Methods of downspout disconnection are particularly beneficial in cities with combined sewer systems.
- Advancements in technology have led to smarter utility delivery and monitoring, creating more efficient utility systems.
- The wide adoption of mobile devices has made updating to a next-generation 911 system a priority for many communities.
- Sharing city services is a cost effective method of reducing repetitive services provided within a service region.

priority development areas

Four Priority Development Areas were selected based on input from City staff, the Steering Committee, and the general public. These areas were identified as places that can act as catalysts for the enhancement of the district, neighborhood, or the community as a whole.

These areas were primarily selected based on public input and the results of an interactive mapping exercise described in the Public Input chapter (see Figure 2.1). The mapping exercises revealed areas in the community that should be protected, enhanced, or transformed. The Steering Committee balanced the output of the map based activity with a general assessment of what they thought had the best opportunities for development and redevelopment.

A combination of factors went into this decision, including the depth of the properties, the success of the current land use, and public response throughout the engagement process. The Downtown, Hospital Area, South Highway Gateway, and East Wooster were selected as the primary focus areas for future development.

1. Downtown

- Enhance connections between the downtown and other destinations, areas of commerce, and points of interest.
- Promote new opportunities for arts and entertainment through carefully planned public spaces.
- Enhance the gateway into Downtown along East Liberty Street.

2. Hospital District

- Create a master plan for the area in and around the Hospital with a focus on creating a strong mixed-use district with a foundation in medical care and services.
- Enhance the streetscape and pedestrian experience in and around the Hospital.
- Create a development incentive package for the redevelopment of Portage Road and Cleveland Avenue.

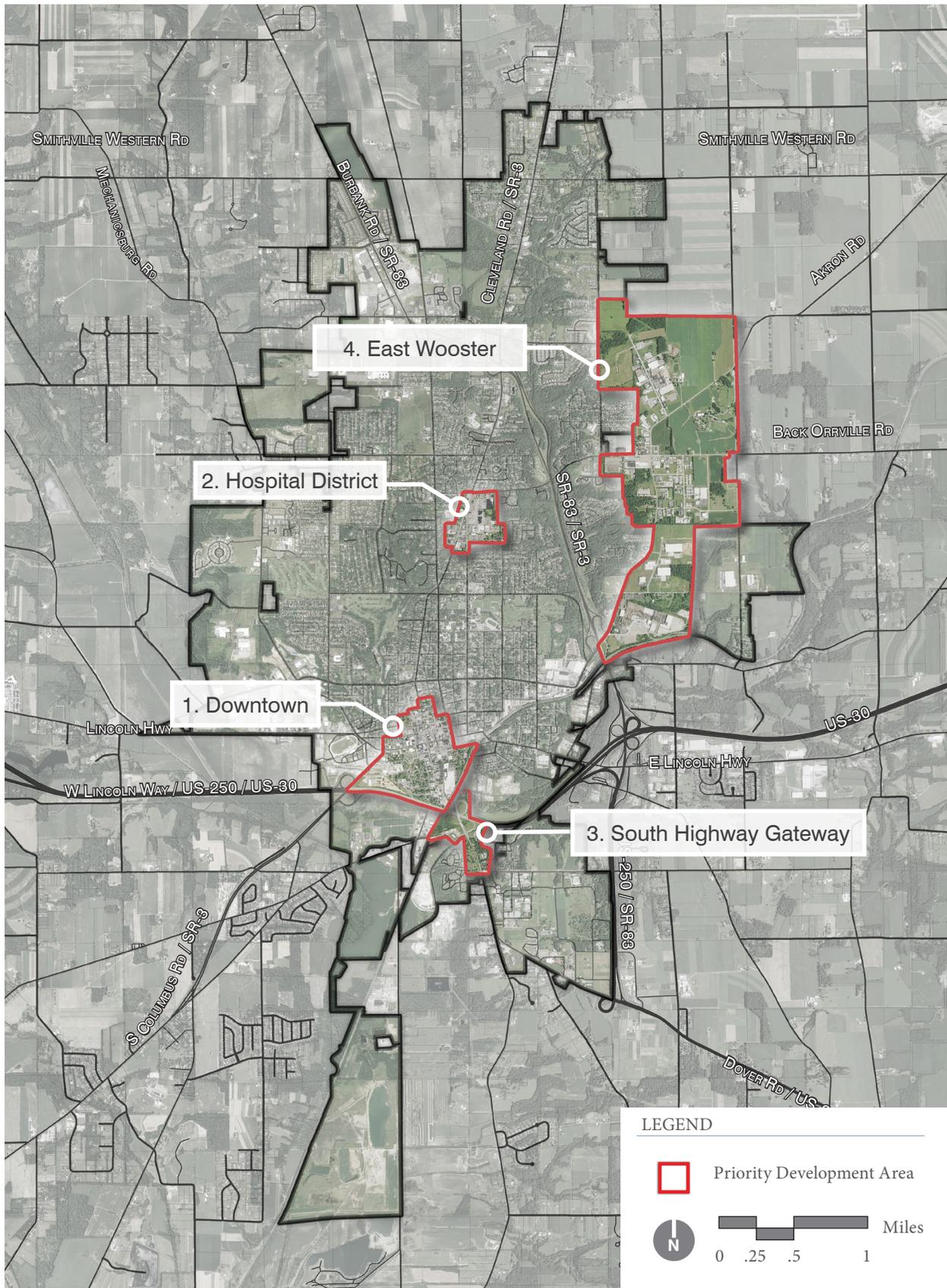
3. South Highway Gateway

- Define the entrance to the City and facilitate the efficient flow of traffic.
- Create a welcoming entrance that draws visitors and welcomes residents.
- Better utilize properties on major transportation routes to create infill opportunities.

4. East Wooster

- Create and promote opportunities for dining and personal services in the area to support continued economic growth.
- Enhance existing commercial/retail areas in the 585 Corridor (e.g. Hawkins Plaza).
- Promote multi-modal transportation options along the 585 Corridor to provide opportunities for pedestrian, bicycles, and automobiles.
- Plan and promote future development opportunities around the Rubbermaid factory.

Focus Area Map



plan framework

Following the analysis of existing conditions, the public input, and current trends, a series of Plan principles were identified for each chapter of the Plan. These principles represent the large scale, broad outcomes that the community wishes to achieve. The objectives that follow the principles identify the tasks necessary to achieve the principle.

The following principles represent the overall framework for each chapter and serve as the underlying direction for the objectives and actions.



A prosperous and well-balanced community that ensures the small town character, green areas, and downtown atmosphere are preserved and enhanced, while carefully planning for the growth and development of existing and emerging economic centers and neighborhoods.

Objective LU.1

Continue to enhance the downtown.

Objective LU.2

Promote continued economic growth along the 585 Corridor through newly planned light industrial and manufacturing, research and development, and office space.

Objective LU.3

Promote new residential development that includes traditional neighborhood characteristics.

Objective LU.4

Improve rental housing.

Objective LU.5

Expand housing opportunities.

Objective LU.6

Enhance and plan for the area around the Hospital.

Objective LU.7

Responsibly manage growth outside the City limits.



2 TRANSPORTATION

PRINCIPLE: STAY CONNECTED

A safe, efficient, and balanced transportation network that includes a variety of mobility choices, connects land uses, enhances the environment, and improves the quality of life for those who live and work in the community.

Objective TR.1

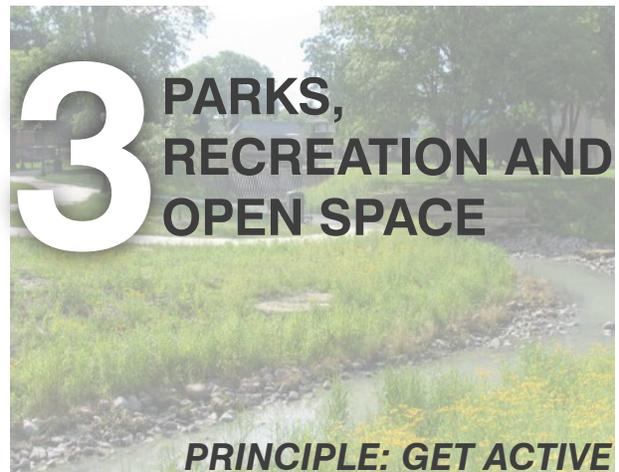
Make Wooster a more connected and walkable city.

Objective TR.2

Facilitate the flow of traffic and parking in and around the City.

Objective TR.3

Promote alternative modes of transportation.



3 PARKS, RECREATION AND OPEN SPACE

PRINCIPLE: GET ACTIVE

Quality parks and public spaces with diverse opportunities for physical activity, social interaction, and education for a variety of age groups and abilities.

Objective PR.1

Preserve and expand open space areas.

Objective PR.2

Be a leader in environmental stewardship.

Objective PR.3

Maintain and enhance the existing park network.

Objective PR.4

Partner with the private sector, local organizations, and civic groups to help support new and existing park spaces, programming, and public events in the City.

Objective PR.5

Protect and enhance the Little Apple Creek greenway.



High quality public services and utilities that serve residents effectively and support future economic growth and expansion.

Objective US.1

Ensure the expansion and improvement of the City's infrastructure is a priority when making future planning and policy decisions.

Objective US.2

Promote 'green' stormwater management methods when improving or expanding the existing stormwater management system.

Objective US.3

Encourage above ground stormwater facilities with dual purposes including naturalized open spaces and public recreation.

Objective US.4

Develop projects, programs, policies, and procedures to enhance the overall quality of the local watershed.

Objective US.5

Emergency services should be carefully expanded to ensure resident health and safety.

Objective US.6

Code enforcement should be a focus in and around the downtown.



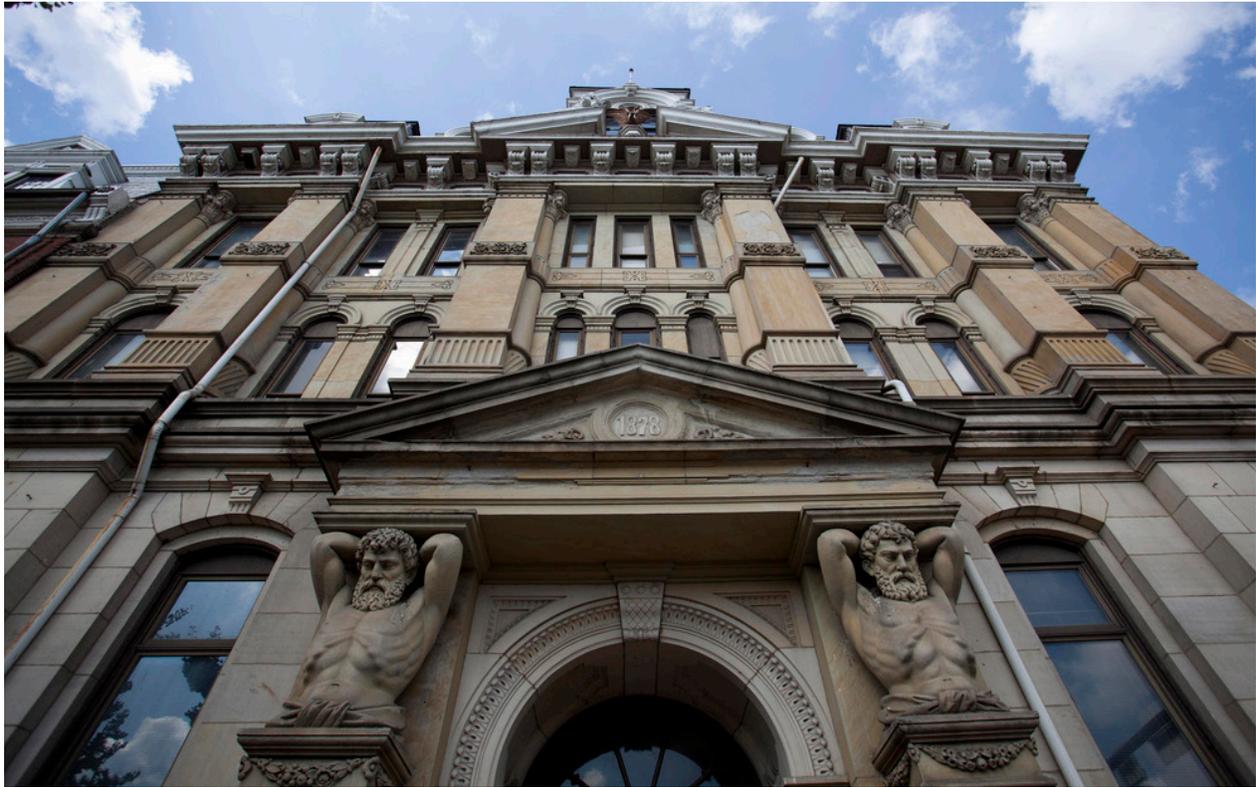
Plan for key development and redevelopment areas by supporting a balance of land uses in a vibrant and integrated development pattern to improve the economic and social characteristics of the community.



1. INTRODUCTION

Located in the rolling hills of northeast Ohio, the City of Wooster is known as a regional center for industry, education, agriculture, and community. The City is home to a nationally recognized liberal arts college, The College of Wooster, along with a research branch of one of the largest universities in the country, The Ohio State University. The City also boasts one of the best preserved,

best functioning, and economically vibrant historic downtowns within the State of Ohio. In the words of one resident, Wooster offers “big town amenities with a small town feel.”



1.1

introduction

The success of Wooster did not happen by accident. It is the culmination of a long history of careful planning, wise policy decisions, and continual community involvement. The comprehensive planning process is meant as an incremental step in identifying and prioritizing what is most important to the community. It is a way for City leaders and residents to assess the current state of the City and chart a course for the future of the City. It is the document by which all future policy and budgetary decisions should be evaluated.

WHY DO CITIES PLAN?

Cities plan in order to better understand their challenges and opportunities, define a vision and goals for the future, and establish and prioritize steps to achieve them. After a plan has been adopted, city leaders and staff work to implement the recommendations of the plan, while guiding development and making decisions that follow the plan. As codified ordinances and policies are changed and infrastructure and private development is constructed, a community will reap the benefits of the planning effort. Most decisions have a range of influences which will likely impact future revenues and expenses. The planning process can help city leaders

make informed decisions by defining and prioritizing community goals and aspirations. This is especially true for complicated decisions such as deciding where development should be encouraged and where infrastructure improvements should be made.

WHAT IS A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN?

A comprehensive plan is a broad policy document intended to guide decision making in order to manage long term development and growth. Comprised of policy statements, principles, objectives, actions, maps, and tables, a plan guides the physical, social, and economic development of the municipality and its environs. A comprehensive plan guides city officials, community organizations, and both private and public development entities. A comprehensive plan is implemented over time through many distinct decisions including annual budgeting, departmental work programs, rezoning, and subdivision of land.

A comprehensive plan is the chief policy instrument for:

- The administration of zoning and subdivision regulations;
- The location and classification of streets and thoroughfares;
- The location and construction of public and semi-public buildings and related community facilities and infrastructure (water, storm and sanitary sewers, gas, etc.);
- Promoting economic development;
- The acquisition and development of public and semi-public properties such as parks and open spaces; and
- The initiation of new programs, such as those in the areas of housing rehabilitation and economic development, to address pressing community needs (Source: Ohio Planning and Zoning Law).

This document is not a new plan; rather, it is an update to Wooster's past planning efforts. The updated Wooster Comprehensive Plan builds upon The 2002 Wooster Comprehensive Plan, as well as other documents, and introduces new guidance and concepts where relevant. Over the life of this Plan, it should be reviewed and updated on a regular basis to ensure that it meets the changing needs of the City and continues to advance the goals of the community.

WHY PRODUCE A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN?

A comprehensive plan is a blueprint that defines a community vision and provides the framework to guide the coordination of multiple plans and infrastructure systems to achieve the vision. The result is a unified approach where the resulting changes in policies, city code, and zoning work together to help achieve common community goals. In addition, cost savings and increased efficiency are likely to be found when assessing the costs of building and maintaining infrastructure such as roadways, waterlines, and sanitary sewers in a coordinated manner.

In many communities that plan, the traditional approach is to study specific aspects or systems of the city, such as the thoroughfare network or water and sewerage systems, and develop plans for those systems. Such plans are reactive in nature, building upon assumptions made in previous (land use) plans and allow for incremental improvements to each system. Instead, this Plan is proactive and informed by community values and goals.

WHY UPDATE THE PLAN?

The 2002 Comprehensive Plan has guided the community to address a variety of growth and redevelopment issues. However, new information and technologies are available to strengthen the Plan and the community faces new development that must be managed in a responsible and respectful way to protect and enhance Wooster's small town character while maintaining economic and social vitality. A concerted effort was undertaken to update the Plan to provide direction to elected and appointed decision makers that describes priorities for future development. This included extensive public involvement which validated the community's vision for the future.

1.2

planning approach

Overview

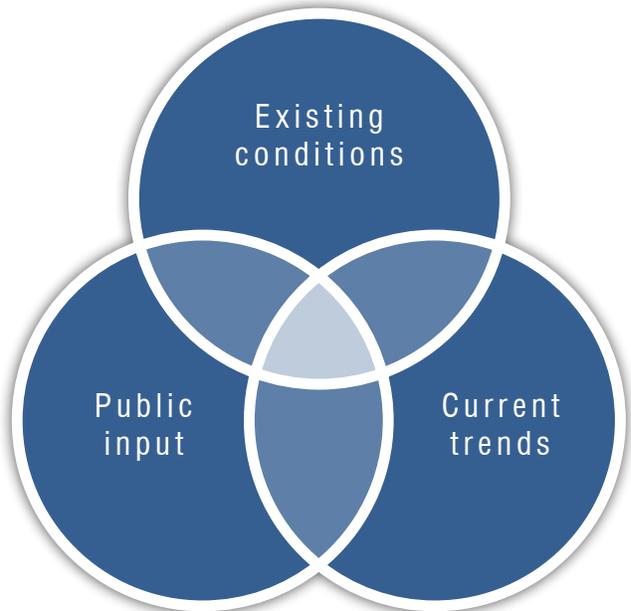
The planning process to prepare Wooster’s Comprehensive Plan Update was based on a balanced approach that included public input, existing conditions analysis, and consideration of both regional and national trends. Participation from a broad array of community stakeholders including key property owners, business owners, and City officials, ensures the Plan embodies the community’s identity and earns public support. The public process incorporated an extensive effort to engage the broader community through an online engagement tool, public meetings, and a telephonic survey.

Plan Structure

The Wooster Comprehensive Plan Update is comprised of nine chapters followed by supporting appendices including existing conditions and public input information. Each element contains a plan principle and multiple objectives that relate to that principle. Each objective has specific actions that should be used to achieve the objective. Figure 1.2 shows the hierarchy of the Plan’s implementation organization.

A total of five plan principles, 21 objectives, and 91 actions are described within the nine chapters of this Plan, the contents of each chapter are detailed to the right.

Figure 1.1 - Planning process elements



CHAPTERS 1-2

Includes the introduction of the planning process, the plan framework, and a description of the public input process and vision for the Plan. These chapters are the foundation upon which the rest of the Plan was formed.

CHAPTERS 3-6

Focuses on individual components of the Plan such as land use and transportation. Each of these chapters begins with an introduction and a discussion of the existing conditions followed by an analysis of current trends and public input. The existing conditions result from technical analysis and extensive research of each component. An overview of the current trends pertinent to each component serves as a guide to anticipate future changes within the City. The public input section highlights results from the public input process, categorizing results into each of the Plan chapters, and is considered a foundation for the development of plan actions. A single overall planning principle concludes each chapter. The principle is supported by a series of objectives that outline the specific actions needed to achieve the desired outcome.

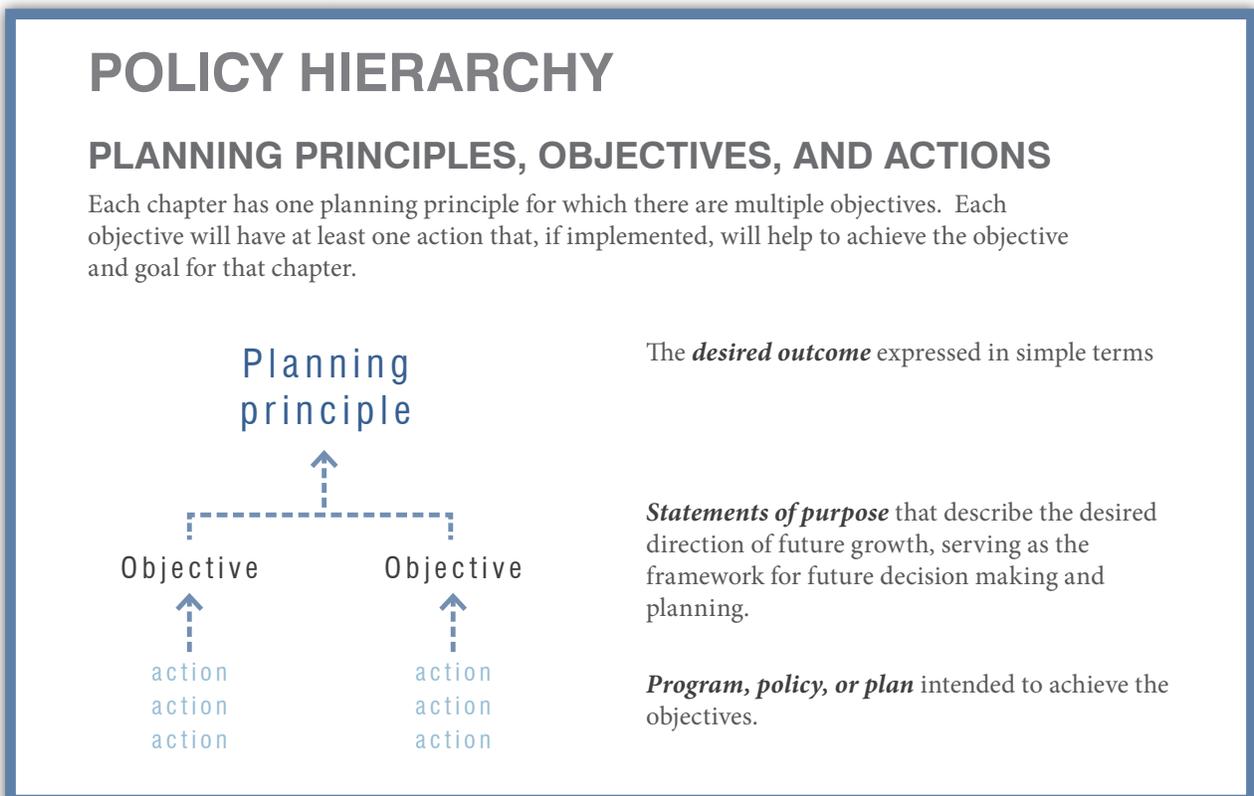
CHAPTER 7

Includes the four Priority Development Areas identified through the public involvement process that should be considered priorities for future development or redevelopment.

CHAPTER 8

Outlines the implementation strategy to aid in the fulfillment of the Comprehensive Plan’s recommendations. This chapter provides guidance on how the Plan should be used and when it should be updated and amended. This chapter also summarizes and prioritizes the recommendations made for each Plan component.

Figure 1.2 - Policy Hierarchy



1.3

planning process

The Comprehensive Plan Update process spanned approximately twelve months and included both technical research and public involvement, resulting in an intuitive, informed, and progressive document.

By employing an innovative planning process, Wooster sought to develop a truly comprehensive plan that would fully integrate land use, transportation, parks and open spaces, economic development, utilities, and other public services planning.

The planning process (Figure 1.3 and 1.4), consisting of seven general steps, was developed at the beginning of the project. Given the breadth and complexity of the Plan, this process helped guide project activities, many of which were carried out concurrently in order to maintain the overall project schedule. The following is a brief summary of each step in the planning process.

Project Launch

During this initial step in the planning process, the scope of services was defined for the Planning Team, while members of the Comprehensive Plan Task Force were identified and invited to participate.

Technical / Existing Conditions Analysis

Throughout the Fall and Winter of 2013, the Planning Team collected and analyzed data about all aspects of the City. This information provided an understanding of the current conditions in the Wooster area and informed the recommendations in the Plan.

Community Engagement

Concurrently with the existing conditions assessment, public input was sought using a combination of Steering Committee meetings, public meetings, surveys, and online engagement to gain insight into the concerns and needs of Wooster residents. This helped to form the development of recommendations in the Plan.

Identify Plan Principles and Objectives

The overarching principles and objectives for the Plan were formulated by the Steering Committee, based on the public input received early in the process. The principles and objectives communicate the goals the City hopes to accomplish through the creation and implementation of the Plan.

Develop Plan Components

This step in the planning process involved developing recommendations for each component of the Plan, including proposed land uses, upgrades to the transportation network, expansion of the pedestrian and

bicycle network, park and public space enhancements, development area plans, and utility improvements.

Draft Plan Review and Feedback

Perhaps the most integral part of the planning process, this step followed an iterative process allowing the Steering Committee and the general public an opportunity to review and provide feedback on the draft version of the Plan.

Final Plan and Adoption

Once the plan components were completed, compilation of the Comprehensive Plan document began. The final Plan is a concise, understandable, and easily implemented document.

The final step in the comprehensive planning process included review and approval of the Plan by the Planning and Zoning Commission and City Council. The Planning and Zoning Commission officially approved the Plan on October 22, 2014.

Figure 1.3 - Comprehensive Planning Process



Figure 1.4 Planning Process Timeline

