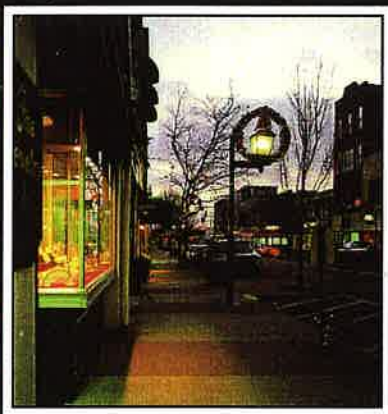
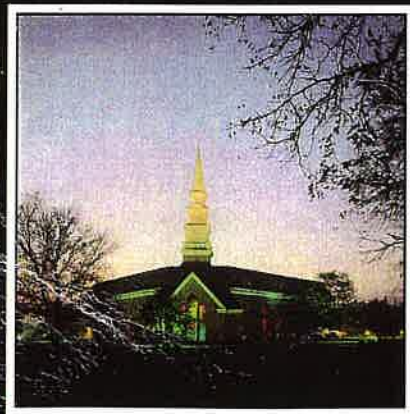


KNOX COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

FOCUS 2100 ADVANCED...

MARCH
1998



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THE PREPARATION OF THIS PLAN WAS MADE POSSIBLE BY FINANCIAL SUPPORT FROM:

KNOX COUNTY AND ITS MUNICIPALITIES AND TOWNSHIPS
KNOX COMMUNITY HOSPITAL
MOUNT VERNON NAZARENE COLLEGE
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MOUNT VERNON COMMUNITY TRUST

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POGGEMEYER DESIGN GROUP, INC.

MARCH, 1998

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1 Introduction	1
Purpose of the Knox County Comprehensive Plan	1
Roots of this Comprehensive Plan	2
1974 Comprehensive Plan	2
Focus 2100	2
Other Local Planning	3
The Planning Process	3
What Have We Gained Now That This Plan is Finished?	4
Chapter 2 Challenges	7
Chapter 3 Community Setting	9
Historic Roots of Knox County	9
Knox County Communities and Background	9
Mount Vernon	10
Centerburg	11
Danville	11
Fredericktown	11
Gambier	11
Gann (Brinkhaven)	11
Martinsburg	12
Utica	12
Natural Environment	12
General Topography	12
Surface Water	12
The Kokosing River	16
Flood Plains	17
Lakes	17
Subsurface Water	17
Natural Gas	17
Wetlands	20
Geology	20
Soil Conditions	20
Population Characteristics	22
Population Change	22
Municipal and Township Population Change	23
Age and Gender	24
Economic Characteristics	24
Major Local Private Sector Employers	26
Industrial Employment	26
Tourism	27
Income	27
Housing Characteristics	29
Recent Housing Construction	29
Age of Homes	31
Agricultural Characteristics	31

Family Farming	32
Cultural Characteristics	33
Cultural Facilities	33
Cultural Events and Organizations	35
Existing Land Use	36
Quality of Life Indicators	36
The Per Capita Tax Rate	36
Families with Incomes below the Poverty Level	38
Female-Headed Households With Incomes Below the Poverty Level	38
High School Dropouts	38
Higher Education	38
Outdoor Recreation Space	38
Community Facilities	39
Existing Publicly-Operated Community Water Systems	39
City of Mount Vernon	39
Village of Fredericktown	42
Village of Gambier	42
Village of Centerburg	42
Village of Danville	42
Clinton Township Regional Water and Sewer District	42
Knox County	43
Del-Co Water Company	43
Existing Publicly-Operated Wastewater Systems	43
Anti-degradation	43
City of Mount Vernon	44
Village of Fredericktown	44
Village of Gambier	45
Village of Centerburg	45
Village of Danville	45
Clinton Township Regional Water and Sewer District	45
Knox County	46
Summary of Wastewater Capacity Summary	46
Parks and Recreation	46
Kokosing Gap Trail	49
Transportation Characteristics	51
Previous Planning Efforts	51
Interstate Linkages	53
Ohio Department of Transportation Traffic Counts	53
Traffic Accidents in Knox County	56
Knox County Vehicle Registration	56
Significant Areas of Traffic Generation in Knox County	57
Coshocton Road	57
Hardcourt Road	57
Industrial Area South of Mount Vernon	58
Apple Valley	58
Downtown Mount Vernon	58
Brick Streets	59
Railroads	59
Transit Facilities	59
Airports	59

Knox County Airport	59
Regional Development	60
Chapter 4 Development Trends	61
Trends in Rural Growth	61
State Rural Growth Trends	61
Regional Growth Trends	62
Recent Knox County Growth	63
Projected Knox County Growth	64
Projected Age Groups	65
Life Expectancy	66
Household Trends	66
General Housing Market Trends	67
General Trends in Housing Construction	68
Employment Trends	69
Heritage Tourism	70
Trends in Family Farming and Agriculture	70
Chapter 5 Emerging Community Planning Attitudes	71
Sustainable Development	72
New Urbanism or Traditional Town Planning	72
Updated Development Standards	73
Conservation Design	74
Farmland Preservation	75
Other Ohio Farmland Protection Efforts	78
Greenways and Park Linkages	79
Chapter 6 Core Planning Issues	81
Organizational Issues	81
Land Use Issues	81
General Land Use Issues	81
Environmental Issues	82
Rural Development Issues	82
Land Use Regulation	83
Commercial Development	83
Industrial Development	83
Transportation Issues	83
Quality of Life Issues	84
Chapter 7 Vision and Goals	87
General Goals	88
Land Use Goals	89
Transportation Goals	89
Quality of Life Goals	89
Chapter 8 Policies and Initiatives	81
Appendix	119

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This Plan represents a new vision for the Knox County of tomorrow. It is the product of the best efforts of more than 100 people who served on task forces and donated their time and expertise at many meetings over a 12-month period. The many people who participated in this Plan and gave freely of their time, did so out of concern for the future. They participated in a planning process with the belief that the development of a logical and well thought-out community plan will shape the future in meaningful ways. The development of this Plan was also grounded in the belief that often there is one chance to make wise community development decisions. There is also a belief that Knox County may be at a decisive point in its history, with critical decisions on the horizon. Consequently, the goals defined in this Plan are set high, reflecting the positive attitudes of Knox County residents, and recommended actions go beyond more common remedial solutions and weak initiatives.

No one who participated in the development of this Plan believes that all initiatives and recommendations contained herein will move forward unaffected by emerging trends or unforeseen circumstances. However, as the future unfolds, it is expected that this Plan will represent a fundamental statement of community vision and will be updated regularly. The significance of this vision is reflected in the considerable effort placed on public participation and consensus building throughout the planning process.



PURPOSES OF THE KNOX COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Four fundamental purposes underlying the need to prepare a comprehensive plan for Knox County were identified early in the planning process. These four purposes were:

- **To Develop a Plan That Will Help Direct Future Development and Redevelopment in a Way That Will Enhance the Physical, Social, and Economic Environment of Knox County.** Knox County is determined to make choices and decisions that will direct development and redevelopment in a way that will enhance the physical, social, and economic environment, rather than detract from it. Communities are in a constant state of change. Either they move forward with positive community-building choices, or they fall behind those communities who recognize the importance and excitement of self-determination. The direction of this change will be the product of choices made by residents and local leaders. These choices will include active choices to take some type of action or passive choices that may involve choosing not to act on problems or opportunities.
- **To Serve as the Beginning of an Ongoing Planning Process That Defines a Long-term Community Vision.** Ongoing planning efforts should also maintain the perspective of building a community with a long-term vision. The completion of this Plan is not expected to be the conclusion of planning efforts. Rather, it is recognized that community planning is a process that

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1

- **To View the Completion of this Comprehensive Plan as the Beginning of Dedicated Implementation Efforts.** This Plan represents an effort to build a consensus among community leaders so that proactive initiatives can move forward with broad support. A lack of commitment to ongoing community planning often results in planning documents that are not meaningful. Most commonly, this happens in a community that lacks a sense of self-determination and embraces a perspective of being dependent upon outside forces. Knox County is not such a community; and this Plan is viewed as a means to an end, not an end in itself.
- **To Define Both County-wide and Local Planning Perspectives.** The preparation of this Plan is grounded in the belief that there are two relevant planning perspectives. First, there is the perspective that certain development issues are legitimately County-wide and require a response from the County level. Second, other issues are almost entirely local with little County-wide significance. Concerns such as major roadway corridors, aquifer protection areas, and connections between park facilities are County-wide matters that involve multiple local governments. Issues such as local road improvements and delivery of local services are largely local matters with little County-wide impact. This plan strives to distinguish between these two perspectives and is focused primarily toward addressing County-level matters and issues.

ROOTS OF THIS COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Community planning is actually a process. Ideally, it is an ongoing process kept current with continual effort. In Knox County, several planning efforts have preceded this comprehensive plan. Some of these plans are transportation-specific and are described later. Two other prior planning efforts are County-wide and comprehensive and include the 1974 Knox County Comprehensive Plan and Focus 2100. These are described below:

1974 Comprehensive Plan

In 1974, a comprehensive plan was prepared for Knox County. That planning document, like many produced during this time, was funded with a federal grant and contained a substantial amount of information on the physical, social, and economic characteristics of Knox County. Unlike many plans produced during that time however, the population projections developed proved to be reasonably accurate. Additionally, as will be noted elsewhere in this Plan, some development concepts expressed nearly 25 years ago are still quite relevant today. These concepts will surface in several areas throughout this Plan.

Focus 2100

More recently, in January 1996, the Knox County/Mount Vernon Chamber of Commerce sponsored a bold initiative called Focus 2100. The connection between Focus 2100 and the development of this Plan is so significant that it was decided that the title of this Plan should express the advancement of the Focus 2100 process.

Focus 2100 was a one-day conference open to all residents of Knox County. It was designed to create an environment where open and creative group discussion could lead toward the development of shared visions for the future of Knox County. More than 100 people attended this conference. The conference results form a significant basis for this Plan.

Participants in Focus 2100 selected one of six groups and engaged in the identification of community strengths and areas of concern. At the group-level, goals were developed, ranked, and then reported to

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1

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all participants, who then voted on the top three community goals for Knox County. The six groups included:

- Land Use and Environment
- Transportation
- Economics (Industrial)
- Economics (Service)
- Culture and Society (Institutions)
- Culture and Society (Attractions)

At the conclusion of the conference, the top three identified community goals were:

- To develop a County-wide land use mission statement and plan to protect/preserve our rural and community character - to be updated every five years.
- To improve Knox County education to emphasize functional literacy, thinking skills, job entrance skills, and lifelong learning.
- To enhance, encourage, and promote economic development and quality of life. Transportation goals included commissioning an in-depth traffic flow study of Knox County roadways, winning County-wide and regional support for short and long-term plans for improvements that will provide efficient and effective traffic flow with connections to I-71 and I-70 and reduce travel time while traffic volumes increase.

Other Local Planning

Besides prior County-wide planning efforts, the recent completion of an area planning study for College, Harrison and Monroe Townships, Kenyon College, and the Village of Gambier is important. This planning effort was completed in 1996 and is integrated into this Plan.

It should also be noted that during the preparation of this Plan, representatives from Hilliar Township and the Village of Centerburg initiated a local planning project focused toward this area of Knox County. Local planning such as this was encouraged by the leadership involved with the development of this Plan and coordinating efforts took place.

THE PLANNING PROCESS

Building on the efforts of Focus 2100, the approach used to produce this Plan sought to maintain a high level of community participation throughout the planning process. It was an early and common view that the successful implementation of this Plan would depend largely on public acceptance and consensus built throughout the planning process. Consequently, the development of this Plan involved cultivating close working relationships with three appointed task forces organized around the subjects of land use,

The approach developed to produce this plan sought to maintain a high level of community participation throughout the planning process.

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1

transportation/utilities, and quality of life. These task forces first met independently to gather relevant information, then met jointly to collaborate on the development of a draft plan. Once the draft plan was completed, more than 300 complete copies were distributed to municipal, county and townships officials, and other community leaders throughout Knox County. A summary of the draft plan was also printed in the Mount Vernon News on February 4, 1998. More than twenty-five pages of comments were received from many individuals between January 15, 1998 and February 16, 1998. Throughout the process, an overall steering committee (which included representatives from each task force) monitored overall progress of the plan development.

WHAT HAVE WE GAINED NOW THAT THIS PLAN IS FINISHED?

One of the most difficult, but important questions to be asked following the completion of a major planning project is, what have we gained now that we are finished? Although this might be a difficult question, it deserves a simple and direct response. Reflecting on individual community planning sessions and the year-long process that led to the development of this Plan, the question can be answered in the following way:

- There is **a much better understanding of community growth pressures**. Current levels of growth and development have been documented. Growth projections from public and private sources have been obtained and discussed.
- There is **a consensus between City and County leaders that local planning needs to be reorganized and reinvented**. This step is necessary to ensure that innovative and creative local planning becomes an ongoing component of local government activity. It is also necessary in terms of assuring that key initiatives found in this Plan move forward.
- Focus 2100 and the development of this Plan have helped establish **an enriched atmosphere for community dialog on County-wide development issues**. This type of coordinated and collective County-wide focus had not previously existed.
- There is **greater community awareness of areas of groundwater resources in Knox County** and the need to be more sensitive to areas identified as having significant groundwater pollution potential.
- A major issue facing a growing Knox County is planning for new roads to redirect traffic flow. This Plan defines **proposed improvements (at a conceptual level) that are generally accepted as presenting minimal negative impacts while providing substantial improvement to area traffic flow**.
- Farmland and rural character preservation are an especially important land use issue in Knox County. Specifically, participants in this planning process have consistently voiced a strong desire to preserve the rural character of the County in the face of increasing growth pressure. This plan sets forth **initiatives to address this important local issue. Collectively, these initiatives have been called Knox Rural Design Initiatives (KRDI) and are described in Chapter 8**.
- Although Knox County's rural character provides considerable open space, **the comparative lack of outdoor recreation acreage was identified during the planning process. Now, specific goals and initiatives have been established to address this situation**.

- Because of the recent designation of the Kokosing River as a State Scenic River and because of this planning effort, greater attention has been directed toward the Kokosing and Mohican River Corridors. **Reinforcing a concept expressed in the 1974 Comprehensive Plan, both the Kokosing and Mohican River Corridors have emerged as major elements of a future open space system for Knox County.**

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1