

# **Guernsey County Comprehensive Strategic Plan**

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# **Guernsey County Comprehensive Strategic Plan**

## ***Introduction***

This Comprehensive Strategic Plan was created for the purpose of providing a framework for the development and conservation of Guernsey County resources over a broad spectrum of ongoing issues. The plan addressed challenges in thirteen (13) different areas chaired by local community leaders. It is revised every two years to reflect past progress and emerging needs. This iteration, though will focus on economic development. Working with The Montrose Group through a grant from OMEGA, the prevailing philosophy was that the pressing need to create new employment through planning for site and infrastructure development was the most important county challenge. The plan should be viewed as a policy guide as to future decisions regarding initiatives in economic development over the next two (2) years.

It is extremely important to maintain a clear distinction between the Comprehensive Strategic Plan itself and potential implementing measures. This Plan should not be construed as an attempt to create a regulatory document. Implementing measures include such regulatory controls as zoning and subdivision codes, public land acquisition, taxation policies and public improvements, which are just some of the methods or tools to implement land use policies. These measures are specific actions and are the work of public policy and decision makers. The Comprehensive Strategic Plan simply establishes a guide for future decisions regarding land use within the community.

As described, the term “community” applies to all land within Guernsey County and encompasses the city, villages, and townships within. The scope of the plan also recognizes the influence of external social and economic growth patterns emanating from surrounding counties and communities.

A primary consideration in the preparation of the Comprehensive Strategic Plan should be its usefulness. The Guernsey County Plan is a statement of beliefs and expectations intended for coordination purposes with other jurisdictions and in making specific decisions about present and future land use. As stated earlier, the Comprehensive Strategic Plan is to provide a guide for the utilization of the land resources of Guernsey County. To accomplish this, consideration must be given to all types and categories of land use. There are many other aspects of our society that interrelate with land use activities, and all must be considered concurrently in developing a comprehensive land use plan. However, decisions on how to manage these other concerns should be consistent with, and based upon, land use considerations. This has been the approach used in developing the Comprehensive Strategic Plan. The Plan recognizes the land use impact of existing conditions and anticipates the possible impact of future changes.

It is not the intention to ignore issues addressed by committees in previous plan revisions. Rather, it intends to focus efforts on the single objective of developing the county’s economy, which will encourage concurrent planning in other county organizational functions.

Existing economic, physical and social conditions, as well as projections of the most desirable future conditions, must be used to establish balanced policy and land use allocation in the future. The balancing process should result in a plan that provides the greatest long-term benefit to the greatest number of present and future citizens of Guernsey County. A transition will be to the long-term benefit of both the individual and the public.

### *Plan Development Precepts*

1. The Plan is forward looking: two- to five-year time frame.
2. The Plan was developed through a process of extensive community involvement.
3. The Plan encouraged widespread community support.
4. The Plan is based upon, and adequately reflects, community values, beliefs, and expectations.
5. The Plan should be used to guide community decisions.
6. The Plan is designed to be a living community document that is amended from time to time reflecting community changes.
7. All meetings of every committee were open to anyone who wished to attend.
8. All media outlets in Guernsey County were kept informed of most meeting times and places.
9. Every reasonable effort was made to listen to and consider issues or concerns raised by those who are not active in the planning process.
10. The Steering Committee developed rules of procedure to facilitate the orderly development of the Plan.

### *Vision*

Guernsey County will be comprised of vibrant communities, valuable natural and cultural resources, and a well-maintained land use pattern that will:

- Be an appealing place to live, work, and visit.
- Create and maintain an environment that acknowledges and respects age and cultural diversities.
- Enhance and maintain farms and forests as working resources.
- Preserve and enhance open spaces, natural areas, streams, creeks, rivers, and cultural resources.
- Foster, encourage, and oversee structured growth within identifiable areas of infrastructure; i.e., industrial parks for future economic development, farm land, housing sub-divisions, recreational parks and facilities.
- Offer a wide range of economic opportunities, together with a viable travel and tourism industry, a healthy environment and effective public services for all citizens.

### *Mission Statement*

Guernsey County will use a citizen-based approach and educational process to develop a thorough Comprehensive Strategic Plan. By encouraging the involvement of community leaders, the plan would reflect a broad cross-section of ideas and values. The desired outcome is to have a planning document that reflects the consensus of all participants for future land use and increased economic development potential.

**Guernsey County**  
**Comprehensive Strategic Plan**  
***Economic Development Action Steps***

Guernsey County will be successful in attracting new businesses and jobs as well as helping existing businesses expand if it focuses its efforts on industry sectors where there is potential for growth based on past and future industry trends. Due to its location, Guernsey County sees an outflow of workers daily into surrounding counties providing an opportunity to focus attraction efforts on those industry sectors and keep those workers closer to home. Guernsey County is part of the Ohio Mid-Eastern Governments Association (OMEGA) region that is home to economic and infrastructure assets and challenges alike. Major interstate corridors such as I-70 and I-77 and major pipeline transportation infrastructure makes Guernsey County a prime location for manufacturing, distribution and logistics, and energy opportunities and is poised for growth in these industry sectors. Guernsey County should position itself to compete, grow, and attract targeted capital investment and jobs based on its assets. To achieve success, Guernsey County should focus on the following eight action plan steps:

1. Identify available, developable industrial sites in Guernsey County that have access to public infrastructure to properly serve sites and attract industrial development opportunities in key industry sectors that include pipeline transportation, plastics and rubber product manufacturing, chemical manufacturing, heavy and civil engineering construction, and high-tech oriented research or manufacturing.
2. Identify and work with developers to construct new speculative industrial space to capture business attraction opportunities in key industry sectors.
3. Implement a Guernsey County “*Industrial Site Development Marketing and Outreach Strategy*” around leading industry sectors.
4. Guernsey County should work together with local communities and organizations to support small business and downtown development opportunities that create vibrant neighborhoods and business districts.
5. Identify available land and incentives programs for new residential housing unit construction as a part of Guernsey County’s talent attraction strategy.
6. Guernsey County should continue to work with its partners to facilitate and advance strategies that retain and attract the next generation of talent to fill the workforce pipeline and support existing business hiring needs and demonstrate an availability of workforce for business attraction industries.
7. Guernsey County should establish and coordinate a C-level executive round table initiative that brings together local business leaders to benchmark and share ideas.
8. Local officials should continue efforts to nurture businesses located within the County to assure full support for current operations or potential expansion plans.

## **Action Plan Step #1**

*Identify available, developable industrial sites in Guernsey County that have access to public infrastructure to properly serve sites and attract industrial development opportunities in key industry sectors that include pipeline transportation, plastics and rubber product manufacturing, chemical manufacturing, heavy and civil engineering construction, and high-tech oriented research or manufacturing.*

The Cambridge-Guernsey County Community Improvement Corporation (CIC) should identify new properties within Guernsey County that are well-situated to grow existing companies and attract new industrial businesses to Guernsey County. The CIC should determine the public and private infrastructure needs of each site and develop a funding model to pursue to secure dollars necessary to make each site development-ready. The CIC should contract with a civil engineering firm to assist it in determining the infrastructure needs for each site. Guernsey County, like the rest of the U.S. Appalachian region, struggles to find flat land ready for development, and the County offers unique opportunities for industrial development just like other rural communities, but with the complexity of hilly topography. The CIC should work with county representatives, such as the Engineer and Sanitation Engineer, as well as an outside civil engineering firm to determine the location of existing public infrastructure and locations where public infrastructure investments necessary to open development opportunities for these communities. The CIC, Guernsey County Port Authority, and Community Industrial Association (CIA) should develop a funding model to pursue and secure public infrastructure dollars, in partnership with county and local community representatives.

*Guernsey County should:*

- Work with local government, real estate brokerage and property owners to identify four potential sites for large scale industrial, energy, and logistics developments;
- Gain ownership or control of the site(s) through the CIC, CIA, or supportive industrial developer;
- Support the re-zoning of the site(s) if needed to permit industrial, energy, and logistics sector developments;
- Advocate for state and federal government site development funding from JobsOhio's Ohio Site Inventory Program; Ohio Rural Industrial Park Loan Program; local and state ARPA funding; and the U.S. Economic Development Administration Public Works Program;
- Support the use of a 100%, 15-year property tax abatement through either the Ohio Enterprise Zone or Community Reinvestment Area Programs at the site(s), including negotiations for a school district compensation agreement;
- Support the formation of a Joint Economic Development District (JEDD) at the site(s) if necessary;
- Support the development of local public infrastructure financing through and potentially tax increment financing if a Community Reinvestment Area tax abatement is used; and

- Utilize the identified sites as a key component to a business attraction campaign.

*To develop industrial properties in Guernsey County, the CIC should:*

- Prepare an industrial site inventory survey and identify top sites for industrial development; and
- Secure control over several of these potential industrial sites through the CIC or a friendly private developer and secure the land use entitlements, public infrastructure funding and services, tax incentives and compensation agreements with local governments and school districts.

*The CIC needs to conduct an industrial site inventory program to identify potential sites for development.*

The topography of Guernsey County makes industrial site development a challenge. The first step to bolster the creation of high wage jobs and capital development in Guernsey County is to identify potential sites that with proper investment could be made jobs ready. This survey will involve conversations with local government officials, commercial real estate brokers, local school officials and private property owners. An engineering consulting firm should be engaged to review potential sites to outline the infrastructure needs and costs for these sites. A report should be created that outlines the sites primed for potential industrial development in Guernsey County.

*Secure industrial site control and gain land use entitlements, infrastructure finance and tax incentives.*

Following the creation of the Guernsey County site development survey, the CIC should pursue securing site control of one to two of these sites. With Guernsey County's location at the intersection of I-70 and I-77, new industrial sites will be a key element of a compelling business attraction effort. Industrial and logistics operations must have a site prepared for development through a multi-step process involving several levels of local government that designates permitted land use, develops required infrastructure, provides for needed tax incentives to attract end users and provides for tax revenues for local governments and schools impacted by the development.

*Real estate site development process:*

The properties in question must be appropriate for the types of industries Guernsey County wants to attract, whether in a township or municipal boundary. In many regions, specific industrial and logistics business development districts are set up with specific zoning standards to attract industrial and logistics developments. Zoning applications must be developed following the creation of engineering and consulting reports that outline the transportation and infrastructure investments need to permit the site to operate. Pre-zoning briefings with local governments officials outline the scale and scope of the project as well as the transportation and infrastructure needed and the "Return on Investment" estimates for the local community. Approval will be sought with the local zoning and planning commission before a city council or township trustee board votes to approve of the zoning change. If the site is in a township adjacent to a municipal corporation, the property will likely benefit from the formation of a Joint Economic Development District (JEDD) similar in nature to existing JEDD's that may be in place in Guernsey County. This allows for the provision of infrastructure to be brought to the properties, including sewer and water and roadwork. To tap into these services, the property must apply to be included in the JEDD area. There is an

income tax levied on employees who work in the JEDD which can be as high as 2.5% in Ohio. The JEDD is governed by a Board of Directors that approves the inclusion petition. Before the JEDD Board will approve the petition to be in the JEDD, the township trustees and village or city council must approve the request to be included in the JEDD and proper zoning needs to be in place. Ordinances and agreements will need to be negotiated that provide funding for site infrastructure and set income tax revenue splits and service arrangements between the local governments.

The site will also need to have a substantial tax abatement to attract industrial and logistics projects as these primarily compete on a multi-state basis. In Ohio, a Community Reinvestment Area (CRA) is a mechanism in place to offer tax abatement to attract projects. Being in this area allows for the taxes on real property to be abated. Tangible personal property is not taxed in Ohio, and in a township, the County Commissioners and in a city, the City Council and Mayor/Manager have the authority to approve a CRA agreement. CRA's do not abate the taxes on the buildings; thus, the property tax value gain can be captured to use for Tax Increment Financing (TIF). Part of gaining a tax abatement is negotiating a compensation agreement with local governments—primarily local school districts. In Ohio, there must be revenue sharing with the school district in order to achieve 100%, 15-year abatement and several local models exist where the developer provides revenue sharing through a TIF district on the land that redirects the increased taxes on land to the school district with the CRA only abating taxes on the buildings.

Ohio also allows Port Authorities to own property and lease it to private entities. The largest benefit for a private entity to use a port authority is for the exemption of sales tax on construction materials. Local port authorities do these transactions frequently and has an agreement with the county or city to provide port authority financing in the county will be required. This is another funding opportunity for local governments, but also provides a substantial reduction in sales tax tied to a project's construction materials.

Preparing these rural sites for development with land use entitlements, economic development incentives, and infrastructure will give Guernsey County a substantial advantage to prepare these sites for economic investment. The CIC should consider pursuing programs to assist with site acquisition and infrastructure development using financing and incentives programs at the state and federal levels to attract new investment opportunities.

1. *JobsOhio Revitalization Program* - The JobsOhio Revitalization Program Loan and Grant Fund is designed to support the acceleration of redeveloping sites in Ohio. Primary focus for the program is placed on projects where the cost of the redevelopment and remediation is more than the value of the land a site cannot be competitively developed in the current marketplace. Priority will be placed on projects that support near term job creation opportunities for Ohioans, and for revitalization projects typically that retain and/or create at least 20 jobs at a wage rate commensurate with the local market with job creation and retention projects within JobsOhio targeted industry sectors, Those making additional capital investment beyond remediation and redevelopment and/or projects with wages higher than the average local wage rate. Eligible applicants include businesses, non-profits, or local governments where the entity committing the jobs has signed an agreement such as a letter of intent, option, lease or holds title for the project site and has a specific business plan, financing plan and schedule for redevelopment and job creation to occur. Eligible sites include an abandoned or under-utilized contiguous property where redevelopment for the immediate and primary purpose of job creation and retention are challenged by significant redevelopment constraints. Eligible costs include: demolition; environmental remediation; building renovation; asbestos and lead paint abatement;

removal and disposal of universal and construction waste; site preparation; infrastructure; and environmental testing and lab fees; and remediation projects. For environmental remediation loans and grants, a “No Further Action” letter issued by an Ohio Certified Professional is typically required for projects where long-term engineering controls are necessary on the site. In certain circumstances, JobsOhio may require a “Covenant Not to Sue” from the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency, depending on the project and site characteristics.

2. *U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) Economic Adjustment Assistance (EAA) Program* - The U.S. Economic Development Administration EAA Program makes \$500 million in grants available to local communities. Of the \$500 million, EDA has dedicated \$200 million of the EAA Program funding to directly support coal communities. The EAA Program is EDA’s most flexible program, and grants made under this program help communities plan, build, innovate, and build workforce through the various construction and non-construction programs designed to meet local needs. Up to \$10 million in a maximum award is available through the EDA EAA Program and eligible applicants include 501(c)(3) non-profits, county governments, and city or township governments, among others. There are various eligible activities that EAA funds can be used for in helping distressed communities revitalize, expand, and upgrade physical infrastructure to enable communities to attract new industry; encourage business expansion; diversify local economies; and generate or retain long-term, private sector jobs and investment through the acquisition or development of land and infrastructure improvements. Key public infrastructure includes a host of activities from fiber and broadband infrastructure to water/sewer improvements, industrial parks, business incubator facilities, skill-training facilities; and brownfield redevelopment.
3. *U.D. EDA Assistance to Coal Communities (ACC)* - EDA’s ACC initiative awards funds on a competitive basis to assist communities impacted by the declining use of coal through activities and programs that support economic diversification, job creation, capital investment workforce development, and re-employment opportunities. Up to \$3 million in an award is available to eligible applicants which include city or township governments, special district governments, 501(c)(3) non-profits, and other non-profits not having a 501(c)(3) status.

Currently, the D.O. Hall Business Center holds the County’s primary potential for industrial growth. Development efforts have provided for upgraded access and improved infrastructure. Now efforts must focus on improvement of available sites within the 100 remaining vacant acres of the park to provide shovel-ready sites for immediate occupancy. While these efforts are extremely important, it must be recognized that the vacant parcels within the park are relatively small. The largest would comprise approximately fifteen (15) acres. Actions are ongoing to mitigate site detriments such as terrain or mine issues. Still, the average request for site acquisition exceeds 70 acres.

With the Community Industrial Association (CIA), Community Improvement Corporation (CIC), and Port Authority leading economic development efforts, the County must now begin to focus on acquisition of additional lands for the construction of one or more new industrial parks for availability when D.O. Hall vacant properties are exhausted. It is recognized that there are many attractive industrial and/or commercial properties in the county under private ownership which must receive consideration. Public/private partnerships should be encouraged to derive maximum potential for occupancy of these



sites. This will require joint funding efforts for infrastructure and pricing that would be business-friendly. Meantime, efforts must continue to focus on acquisition of properties which allow county officials to exercise control of development of these new parks and to negotiate pricing so as to provide a “win-win” situation for the County and the prospective industry enhancing our main goal—job creation.

A long-range vision provides for the creation of a business as park as part of a regional effort. Research on the venture was initiated in 2008 and has now been enhanced with a partnership with former Zane State College President, Dr. Paul Brown. The 2,200-acre AEP reclaimed mine site represents the potential for a high-tech regional research/manufacturing business park. While the initial efforts to provide necessary funding have been unsuccessful, it continues to be a significant objective in the creation of a truly economic transformational mega business park which was dubbed the “MAGNAM” Project. A Board of Directors has been created, marketing have been developed and partnerships are being sought. It is imperative that every possible funding source is researched and plans continue to be developed that will bring infrastructure to the site. An even larger challenge will be securing funding for land purchase and provision of road and rail access, along with water, sewer, and utilities. This is truly an economy-changing initiative that is well worth the considerable effort it will take to accomplish the goal. It would be a crucial component of the creation of a high-tech corridor along I-70 through Guernsey County and south along I-77.

**Action Plan Step #2**

*Identify and work with developers to construct new, speculative industrial space to capture business attraction opportunities in key industry sectors using state and local financing and incentives programs.*

Companies looking to relocate or expand operations typically have aggressive timelines to locate and bring new operations online. Existing and flexible speculative industrial space has moved from a desire to a requirement for communities looking to compete for private sector economic development opportunities. As the demand for existing, quality industrial space remains robust, the CIC should work with private developers to secure land and construct flexible speculative industrial facilities. Speculative space development has been a proven and successful strategy in urban and rural markets alike, generating interest in communities as well as prospective clients. Given Guernsey County’s location at the I-70 and I-77 crossroads, the attractiveness of Guernsey County speculative industrial facilities will be strong and economic development investment opportunities robust.

The CIC should consider the construction of speculative industrial space and pursue using financing and incentives programs at the state and local levels to attract new investment opportunities.

1. *Ohio Rural Industrial Park Loan (RIPL) Program* - In July 2021, the Ohio RIPL Program realized renewed funding support to the tune of \$30 million over the next two state fiscal years to support speculative industrial building projects in Ohio’s rural communities. The RIPL Program promotes economic development by providing low-interest direct loans to assist eligible applicants in financing the development and improvement of industrial parks and related off-site public infrastructure improvements.

2. *JobsOhio Ohio Site Inventory Program (OSIP)* - In 2019, JobsOhio announced its Sites 2.0 Program, the OSIP, which provides up to \$50 million annually for five years to fund construction-ready sites for companies to attract or expand in Ohio. The program is focused on providing funding for sites with lagging infrastructure or economic blight with the goal of filling gaps in Ohio's real estate inventory, mitigating developer risk, and accelerating the process of bringing in-demand projects and sites online.
3. *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.
4. *Ohio Enterprise Zone (EZ) Program* - 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. Retail projects are not eligible for tax exemption under the EZ Program unless they are located in an impacted city. Residential projects are also not eligible for a tax exemption under the EZ Program.
5. *Tax Increment Financing (TIF) District* - 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. Public infrastructure improvement includes, but is not limited to, public roads and highways; water and sewer lines; the continued maintenance of those public roads and highways and water and sewer lines; environmental remediation; land acquisition, including acquisition in aid of industry, commerce, distribution, or research; demolition, including demolition on private property when determined to be necessary for economic development purposes; storm water and flood remediation projects, including such projects on private property when determined to be necessary for public health, safety, and welfare; the provision of gas, electric, and communications service facilities, including the provision of gas or electric service facilities owned by non-governmental entities when such improvements are determined to be necessary for economic development purposes; and the enhancement of public waterways through improvements that allow for greater public access.

**Action Plan Step #3**

*Implement a Guernsey County Industrial Site Development Marketing and Outreach Strategy around leading industry sectors, including support for mining activities, pipeline transportation, plastics and rubber product manufacturing, chemical manufacturing, and heavy and civil engineering construction.*

Business attraction campaigns promote a community through marketing to companies likely to have an interest or link to the region. An industrial site development marketing and outreach plan defines key characteristics and assets of the sites and communities to be marketed, identifies prospect companies, and connects with these prospective companies through a variety of mediums. Using the industry sector strengths within Guernsey County in which it has a competitive advantage will be a key component to the implementation of an effective business attraction strategy. Local companies are also a source for prospective development as they provide introductions to key supplies and others with an interest to be more closely connected with their

business. The Guernsey County economic development team should develop this campaign with a sound understanding of countywide assets to demonstrate how sites match the demands of future manufacturers, distributors, and industrial tenants.

Four key best practices that will help Guernsey County reach its target audience include:

1. Build out of essential content of sites to include overall lot sizes, key property features such as availability of public and private infrastructure, the location of the property and its proximity to major transportation assets such as highways and intermodal facilities and development of current and potential configurations of the property so a prospect can see themselves at the site.
2. Incorporate photography, video content, and location maps of the sites that highlight the location and property configuration, identify the sites in relation to nearby transportation assets like highways, airports, and rail yards, residential neighborhoods where potential employees could live, and local amenities such as downtown business districts to demonstrate a sense of place.
3. Develop an outreach campaign to expand the reach of marketing efforts beyond the targeted industry sector companies to audiences that include brokers, site selectors, and industrial developers.
4. Utilize local, regional, and state partnerships to market properties using the collateral materials created, including OhioSE and JobsOhio.

*The Guernsey County economic development team should build out the essential content of sites, so prospects clearly identify county assets.*

Before any effective business attraction campaign can begin, the CIC needs to develop marketing materials that can be used in multiple formats to advertise available sites. These materials should incorporate key aspects of the properties the CIC wants to clearly convey to the targeted audience to present the argument for the competitive nature of the Guernsey County sites. Property cards, images, and video content should be developed and used across social media platforms, direct mail campaigns, and on the site and building databases of OhioSE and JobsOhio. Public agencies and other owners of industrial real estate that rely solely on the internet to market properties and drive interest into a community must realize that the dynamics and platforms for marketing online have changed. The Guernsey County team should consider identifying specific platforms to utilize and focus on a rhythm of outreach to prospects through those mediums. This can include social media platforms such as LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram and Facebook, as well as extensive use of email marketing campaigns and search engine optimization. Additionally, the Guernsey County team should consider a rhythm of outreach using more traditional means such as email, letter writing and postcards to real estate brokers, companies and site selection consultants.

Additionally, the CIC should give careful consideration to how data can be used to both measure the performance of the business attraction strategy and market to the community in a way that assists businesses in making site location decisions. The International Economic Development Council (IEDC) states that data can be a powerful differentiator in economic development. Keeping in mind that data drives a majority of site selection decisions, the Guernsey County team should leverage data access, messaging and partnerships to present the key assets of the community and give target audiences the information necessary to make confident location decisions. The more available, robust, and up-to-date the data, the more likely it is for communities to see a better evaluation and higher probability for business expansions and relocations.

Three key areas to build out Guernsey County messaging are in your webpages and webpages of partner organizations like OhioSE and JobsOhio; social media; and online searches or “search engine optimization.” Establishing and employing good search engine online optimization techniques can provide visibility for the Guernsey County sites as well as claim the best possible real estate on a search engine results page. Visual content leads to more engagement, and more engagement means more leads. Combining this concept with the brand consistency mentioned above will begin to develop traction and awareness among your targeted audience.

**Old ED Marketing Tactics**

**New Ed Marketing Tactics**

<i>Direct Mail</i>	→ → →	<i>E-mail</i>
<i>Seminars</i>	→ → →	<i>Webinars</i>
<i>Trade Shows</i>	→ → →	<i>Virtual Tours</i>
<i>Print Ads</i>	→ → →	<i>Display and Banner Ads</i>
<i>In-Person Networking Events</i>	→ → →	<i>Social Networking</i>
<i>Business Response Cards</i>	→ → →	<i>Landing Pages</i>
<i>TV Commercials</i>	→ → →	<i>YouTube Videos</i>
<i>Radio Ads</i>	→ → →	<i>Podcasts</i>
<i>Collateral</i>	→ → →	<i>Dynamic Content</i>

*Develop an outreach campaign to expand the reach of marketing efforts beyond existing audiences.*

Following a traditional sales funnel model, the goal of the CIC Business Attraction and Marketing Strategy should be the ability to attract the attention of targeted “prospects,” develop interest in Guernsey County sites, engage the “prospect” in discovering how their project aligns with the County’s assets and opportunities, and securing commitments for capital investment.

**Action Plan Step #4**

*Guernsey County should work together with local communities and organizations to support small business and downtown development opportunities that create vibrant neighborhoods and business districts.*

A city’s downtown area has an important and unique role in economic and community development. A downtown, or central business district, is a concentrated, walkable area where commercial, cultural and civic activities are located. Downtowns create a critical mass of activity and commerce for residents and visitors. Successful downtown business centers are often home to a concentration of talent, culture, arts, historic preservation, and innovation. Downtown and Main Street businesses tend to support each other and reinvest back into the local community and ultimately becoming a place where people want to live, visit, and invest. While many of Ohio’s rural communities have experienced contracting population and new small business establishments, with proper support and financial incentives in place, downtowns can be successful and can become engines for growth.

Guernsey County should focus on initiatives that strengthen its downtowns and leverage state and local programs to bring investments to fruition. The establishment of the Port Authority Revolving Loan Program was targeted at facilitating small business start-ups or expansions. Widespread dissemination of the availability of this program should be expanded.

Coordination with the City, Village, local realtors, and private land owners must be continually emphasized to assist in maintenance of a database identifying available properties and buildings and their pertinent information. Such an inventory helps county officials respond effectively to companies interested in locating within their county and serves businesses of a variety of sizes and functions.

The County should work with business owners and operators and community groups to formulate redevelopment plans for existing commercial areas. Although redevelopment of existing commercial areas (both within municipalities and in the unincorporated county) will occur via the private sector, the County may find that it can attract more serious attention to these sites if it can present potential developers with a well-thought-out scenario for its development. When a community has a redevelopment plan for an area, a potential developer may be more interested for two reasons:

1. The developer's initial, and potentially cursory, assumptions regarding the area's potential may be challenged by the analysis provided in the redevelopment plan; and
2. The developer will have a more clear understanding of the site's potential and the type of redevelopment most likely to gain the local government's (and citizens') approval.

Such a redevelopment plan should include an analysis of the area's assets and liabilities, its short- and long-term market opportunities, an identification of potential land uses and land use mixes, and a concept site design indicating how the area can be redeveloped successfully. Redevelopment plans should be developed with ample opportunity for public involvement, and should be shared with both citizens and potential developers at every opportunity.

Facilitate a secondary center of economic activity near the Village of Old Washington. The Village has existing but limited infrastructure, and does afford additional opportunities for economic development. Economic activity in this location can vary widely, but it may be appropriate to focus on activities that will benefit from their proximity to the smaller population center or niche strategies that can draw on a wide trade area.

**Action Plan Step #5**      *Identify available land and incentive programs for new residential housing unit construction as a part of Guernsey County's talent attraction strategy.*

Building on the workforce and talent pipeline educational and training strategies, the CIC should be a partner in addressing the housing shortage in Guernsey County by identifying the potential sites that are well-positioned for residential housing projects. The CIC should not only investigate larger tracts of land, but also work with communities like the City of Cambridge to identify downtown mixed-use projects that could include a residential component. Mixed-use development opportunities require appropriate zoning, incentives such as tax abatement, and more parking to accommodate downtown mixed-use projects.

Guernsey County has a housing shortage that ranges from workforce and affordable housing to mid-level housing stock, and this housing shortage is having a direct negative impact on retaining and attracting talent to the county. Compared to metropolitan and urban settings, housing development in rural areas is often viewed as risky investments by developers. Market rate housing is a major component to driving talent attraction, and the CIC should facilitate mechanisms that promote housing development with regional developers to explore opportunities to construct market rate housing developments in Guernsey County to support workforce development efforts.

A diverse selection of housing stock should be achieved in order to meet the needs of local residents while also providing options for new residents looking to relocate to Guernsey County. This diverse housing stock should include a mix of single-family homes, town homes, and apartments, and be situated in neighborhoods and vibrant downtown settings to maximize interest from a broad cross section of prospective buyers. The “work from home” (WFH) revolution that Covid-19 has accelerated could be a boon for rural communities that excel at offering a vibrant quality of life and affordable housing options. Nowadays, top talent sees the workplace as an extension of their lifestyle; if their core values are not reflected in those of the company, it is unlikely that employee will thrive in that atmosphere. In the race for talent, an inclusive community and workplace culture can really draw people in, make them stay, and create opportunity to draw new residents and talent in.

In order to provide more housing and a variety of housing options in Guernsey County to attract and retain talent, the CIC should consider leveraging the following programs to incentivize residential investment projects:

1. *Downtown Redevelopment District (DRD)* - Ohio’s DRD Program provides a tax exemption of new real estate property taxes to be redirected to the development of historic properties and historic districts. The DRD allows for seventy percent (70%) of new property taxes in a ten (10) continuous acre area over a ten (10) to thirty (30) year period to be redirected to infrastructure development, rehabilitation of historic and non-historic properties in the DRD, and funding of not-for-profit economic development organizations. This tool could help fund public infrastructure improvements and building rehabilitation, serving as an incentive for private developers to invest in downtown revitalizations.
2. *Transformational Mixed-Use Development (TMUD) Program* - In early 2021, the Ohio Legislature passed Senate Bill 39 creating the TMUD Program. The TMUD Program allows for a non-refundable credit of ten percent (10%) of the development costs or ten percent (10%) of an insurance company’s capital contribution and permits unclaimed credit amounts to be carried forward for up to five years. A non-refundable tax credit, compared to a refundable tax credit, can only be exercised by an organization that pays taxes to the State of Ohio. The bill allows insurance companies to apply directly for the credit or to purchase the right to claim the credit from a property owner. TMUD creates an important tool for entities like the CIC and its development partners to access capital to make transformational development projects a reality. Guernsey County communities qualify for the rural portion of the program that provides a TMUD tax credit for projects not within a major city (100,000 or more in population) that have at least one new or previously vacant building that is two or more stories in height; or is at least 75,000 sq. ft. Senate Bill 39 sets aside a cap of up to \$100 million per fiscal year, with no more than \$40 million going to a single project and divides the overall \$100 million between large city and small city projects--\$80 million for large cities, and \$20 million for small cities. TMUD awards are highly competitive, as there are limited dollars, and they must seek approval from the Ohio Development Services Agency and the Ohio Tax Credit Authority.
3. *JobsOhio Vibrant Communities Program* - In the fall of 2020, JobsOhio announced a new Vibrant Communities Program to allow for up to \$2,000,000 in grants to transformational projects within a distressed community. Projects within the City of Cambridge are eligible for the program, and could include mixed-use projects and those projects with the highest prospect for job creation. The first round of the program has been completed and the second round of funding recently opened for applications.

4. *Ohio Housing Finance Agency Grants for Grads Program* - The OHFA's Grants for Grads Program provides a discounted mortgage interest rate to recent graduates as an additional incentive to support recent Ohio graduates with home ownership. Grants for Grads includes 2.5 percent or 5 percent down payment assistance, which is forgiven after five years as long as the graduate remains in the State of Ohio. If a graduate sells or moves out of Ohio within five years, the graduate must repay some or all of the assistance provided.
5. *Guernsey County Community Reinvestment Areas (CRA) for Residential Property Tax Abatement* - Modeled after successful downtown redevelopment strategies in other cities like Columbus, Guernsey County should work with the City of Cambridge and other communities to expand and adopt a downtown residential property tax abatement through a CRA Program. A 100%, 15-year full property tax abatement should be adopted for market rate student housing, targeting units with an above-average rental rate. Programs like the residential CRA offer economic development incentives on high-quality housing to serve as an attraction of talent that is needed in Guernsey County.

**Action Plan Step #6**

*The CIC should continue its work with educational and industry partners to facilitate and deploy a strategy to promote and integrate workforce programs that retain and attract the next generation of talent to fill the workforce pipeline and support existing business hiring needs and demonstrate an availability of workforce for business attraction target industries.*

Attracting talent and creating a pipeline of future workers is critical to meeting the employment needs of existing and future Guernsey County businesses. Working together with K-12 and higher education partners, the Guernsey County team should continue its support and engagement in workforce pipeline initiatives such as the Manufacturing Council and "Train-Work-Stay" approach of area school Career Navigators. This coordination between employers and educational leaders in Guernsey County to encourage workforce talent pipeline strategies that retain and prepare students for occupations with the highest potential growth opportunity will be critical to the retention and growth of existing companies and the attraction of new companies to Guernsey County.

Recent U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) survey data show one out of four businesses located outside metropolitan areas struggle to find qualified workers, compared with just one in six businesses in metro areas that cite the same problem. According to participants, job applicants in their regions often lack necessary skills in basic math, hands-on trades, information technology, and manufacturing; however, participants also noted a shortage of higher-skilled workers with bachelor's degrees and beyond.

As an influx of technologies continues to disrupt the business environment, occupations will be changing just as workforce demographics shift. Jobs like data scientist and cloud architect which did not exist 10 years ago are now in high demand. For businesses to be able to succeed, a diverse workforce with the skills and mindsets born out of access to next generation skills and STEM education will be an important component to attracting businesses, growing high wage jobs, attracting talent, and building a local community's tax base.

*Continue Building Career Engagement Opportunities for Guernsey County Students.*

Building a pipeline of future talent goes beyond offering creative curriculum. Providing engagement opportunities with local businesses immerses students into a workplace setting and creates real-world experiences of working in different professions. The CIC should elevate its support of existing workforce and talent pipeline efforts by facilitating engagement opportunities such as:

- Teacher Manufacturing Boot Camps - A CEU-eligible program that introduces local teachers to manufacturing career pathways available within area businesses and the career opportunities that exist for local students. Teachers spend time on the production floor, complete various occupational tasks, learn about local company operations, products and services, vocational and soft skills needed by local employers and current and future jobs opportunities.
- Workforce Signing Days - Similar to college athletics signing days, local schools and area companies showcase high school seniors who sign “Letters of Intent” for job offers and entrance into apprenticeship programs, committing to joining the local workforce after graduation.
- Student Manufacturing Bus Tours - High school students tour local businesses to showcase companies, products, necessary skill sets, and job opportunities.
- Business Leader Engagement in the Classroom - Bringing business representatives into the classroom on a monthly basis to teach real world applications of school curriculum through a series of lessons, reinforced by hands-on activities.
- Engagement of “Young Leaders of Guernsey County” graduates in various career engagement initiatives, serving as a connector to future talent and mentors for young students.

*Create Resident Recruitment Effort to Build Local Workforce.*

Guernsey County sees thousands of talented residents leave the community every day for work. Developing a boomerang-like approach that attracts residents back into the local workforce is an approach the CIC should explore together with workforce partners and local employers. Partnering with K-12 and higher educational institutions to target local job openings to graduating seniors should also be considered as a way to retain talent in the Guernsey County workforce. Crafting a marketing outreach campaign for local job opportunities in partnership with local employers will elevate the messaging to job seekers in the region. There are several ways to deploy a campaign like this. Developing a “live here, work here” brand to building awareness of local job opportunities and promoting working for local employers will help create interest in these positions within the local community.

Together with local employers, the CIC should create compelling content to advertise job openings and the benefits of working for local businesses. Focus on creating great content to target to your local resident audience. There is no magic formula to successful content marketing, and the key is to create engaging, informative, and actionable content. Business profiles that celebrate company achievements, showcase products and services manufactured, and provide employee testimonials on the benefits of working at the company are ways to create interest from local job seekers and encourage them to learn more about local opportunities. Develop personalized



content marketing to tailor the job opportunity messaging to the right audience. Job openings for machinists should be marketed in and around companies outside of Guernsey County that employ high concentrations of machinists, while automotive supplier positions should be marketed around other like businesses in the region, and so on. Direct messaging to a specific audience will make the call to action to learn more about local employment opportunities more relevant.

*Engage with Guernsey County Young Professionals to Build Community Engagement and Development.*

As communities look to advance community development initiatives, engaging young professionals should be a foundational component to those community development directives. There is a growing rise in the importance and value for young professionals to be involved in creating a vision for the future of their community and for young professionals to take an active role in making that vision a reality.

**Action Plan Step #7**

*The CIC should establish and coordinate a C-level executive roundtable initiative that brings together local business leaders to benchmark and share ideas.*

An effective leader understands that building a network is important, but maintaining and nurturing that professional network is also important. Business leaders in C-suite positions typically have built strong networks within industry sectors and local communities throughout their career. A well-developed professional network is filled with individuals who are highly skilled in diverse areas of expertise and can be called on to lend perspective and share experiences that helps leaders maneuver through various complexities. Through the “listening” phase of the Economic Development Strategic Plan process, it became evident from local business leaders there is a lack of communication between companies and a recognition that building stronger relationships meaningful interactions together is important for the overall business climate. The CIC team can play an integral role in establishing and facilitating these interactions which ultimately creates a healthier business community that is apt to foster innovation and creative investment opportunities in the community, as well as advocate for new business attraction opportunities within Guernsey County.

The Edward Lowe Foundation has developed a unique CEO roundtable methodology, PeerSpectives, that is designed specifically for leaders of second-stage growth companies. The Edward Lowe Foundation defines a second-stage growth company as one that has moved beyond the start-up phase but has not yet reached full maturity. Typical C-level roundtable formats are structured to ensure there is balanced representation from the local business community. Conversations are usually structured, and an emphasis is placed on sharing experiences rather than offering advice. The Foundation’s approach to PeerSpectives varies in that it provides a confidential environment for discussing sensitive business and even personal issues with colleagues. Participants have reported they have gained new ideas on everything from marketing strategy and financial issues to dealing with difficult personnel problems. PeerSpectives roundtables were originally designed for CEO’s, presidents and owners of second-stage companies. Over the years, the Foundation found the system works for any professional in a position of leadership and who possesses final decision-making authority, such as leaders of non-profit organizations, department heads of municipalities, and business owners of first-stage companies. In short, it benefits any leader who encounters decisions they have never faced before.

The Edward Lowe Foundation's PeerSpectives Program is a proven format being utilized by communities and organizations across 18 states, Canada, and throughout the United States by the National Association of Women Business Owners. Comprehensive executive leadership development and networking programs such as Aileron Professional Management, located in Tipp City, Ohio, provide robust C-suite services that range from professional development and leadership development based on the Edward Lowe Foundation's "economic gardening" philosophy of growing a company by primarily focusing *on* the business, not in it.

The Greater Akron Chamber in Akron, Ohio, is a more simplistic approach to the C-level executive roundtable structure. The Greater Akron Chamber also uses the PeerSpectives protocol and make all the difference for business leaders. The Chamber's focus is hosting regular roundtables where executive attendance improves leadership skills, sharpens decision-making abilities, and builds lasting relationships with peers. Roundtables include 8-12 participants from non-competing industries and provide a confidential environment to share challenges and learn from the experience of others.

The need for a forum where existing business owners and C-suite executives can meet and discuss industry trends, operational approaches, and building lasting relationships in te community is evident, and the benefits to the business community that evolve out of these roundtable relationship-building forums should not be ignored.

**Action Plan Step #8**

*Local officials should continue efforts to nurture businesses located within the county to assure full support for current operations or potential expansion plans.*

The County must guard against a focus on attraction of new industry at the expense of attention to existing companies. We should work to ensure that factors that can be controlled locally such as the provision of adequate infrastructure to serve industrial needs receive consistent priority. The County must remain sensitive to industrial requirements through frequent visits or ready accessibility. Companies must be kept abreast of new opportunities which arise periodically such as foreign trade junkets or seminars, energy-saving subsidies, or new government incentives. The goal should be to help local industry thrive and expand.

Other areas of the State may hold the edge in the focus of industrial site selectors due to the amenities indigenous to their locale such as population, markets, development land, infrastructure, or incentives. To compete, Guernsey County economic development officials must concentrate on efficient and business-friendly processes for securing and working with clients. Assistance to new or expanding industry must be forthright, personal, knowledgeable, and readily available. Access to State and local available incentives or funding sources must be secured for requesting entities and must be provided expeditiously and with minimal burden to the company. The Port Authority's Rural Business Enterprise Revolving Loan Program has been, and continues to be, a viable source of funding. Focused primarily on small business start-up or expansion, the fund can supplement conventional funding to jump-start emerging organizations. It is imperative that economic development officials fully utilize every form of assistance available to companies of all sizes.