Guernsey County Economic Development Strategic Plan

Prepared for:
Cambridge-Guernsey County CIC

Prepared by:
Voinovich School of Leadership and Public Service at Ohio University

Staff Research Team:

Marty Hohenberger, Director of the Center for Economic Development and Community Resilience

Clara Bone, Senior Project Manager

Elham Erfanian, Ph.D., Research Professor

Student Research Team:

Bozeman Koonce, Graduate Research Assistant

Spencer Johnson, Graduate Research Assistant

Ryan Humeniuk, Undergraduate Voinovich Scholar

Chloe Christen, Undergraduate Voinovich Scholar

Derek Reissig, Undergraduate Voinovich Scholar

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Executive Summary

The Guernsey County Economic Development Strategic Plan aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the current demographic and economic conditions of the county as well as provide a comparison to other counties, the state, and the nation when applicable.

In particular, the data shows that the county has an aging housing stock albeit comparable to the housing stock age of the state as a whole. Lower median house values and rental rates could indicate on one hand the affordability to live in Guernsey County over other areas in the state, while on the other hand the potential gaps in quality or types of housing needed.

The data also showed that while Guernsey County's population has declined slightly over the past few years, it has remained relatively stable (around 38,000) since the 1970s. However, the age distribution of the county shows a true concern: the median age and percentage of population over the age of 55 is higher than would be expected at the state level. This indicates that there is a need for Guernsey County to attract and retain younger, working age individuals.

The plan uses this data along with community input to identify key areas of focus for the county. The Cambridge-Guernsey County CIC used this information to form task forces to work on two key priority area: Housing and Youth Retention and Attraction.

Housing

The housing priority will encourage new and affordable housing through infrastructure planning, landowner engagement, developer outreach, and resident education. These strategies aim to prepare shovel-ready sites, attract investment, and promote homeownership and rental readiness. A public dashboard will promote transparency of the success of this task.

Youth Retention and Attraction

The youth retention and attraction priority will address "brain drain" by creating pathways for young people, including college graduates, veterans, direct-to-employment individuals, and entrepreneurs, to live and work in Guernsey County. Initiatives include marketing local opportunities, identifying and connecting individuals with internship programs, and exploring incentive structures for young professionals.

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1. Introduction

The Guernsey County Economic Development Strategic Plan serves as a roadmap for advancing the county's long-term economic vitality and community resilience. Developed through a partnership between the Cambridge-Guernsey County Community Improvement Corporation (CIC) and the Voinovich School of Leadership and Public Service at Ohio University, this plan provides a data-driven and community-informed framework for decision-making. The plan draws on extensive analysis of demographic and economic trends, regional comparisons, and stakeholder input gathered through workshops, surveys, and public meetings.

The purpose of this strategic plan is to identify and prioritize actionable strategies that will strengthen Guernsey County's economy, support workforce development, and enhance overall quality of life. In doing so, the plan reflects the voices of residents, business leaders, educators, and public officials who contributed insights into the county's strengths, challenges, and opportunities. The result is a forward-looking document designed to align resources, partnerships, and policies around a shared vision for sustainable growth and community prosperity.

2. Existing Conditions & Community Trends

The first task associated with this work involved a demographic and economic scan in order to compile a foundation of solid information on key economic and demographic descriptors (e.g., unemployment rates, income, labor markets, etc.) of Guernsey County and the surrounding areas.

This section provides the existing population and household trends and characteristics of Guernsey County and Ohio, including age, educational attainment, school enrollment, and household incomes.

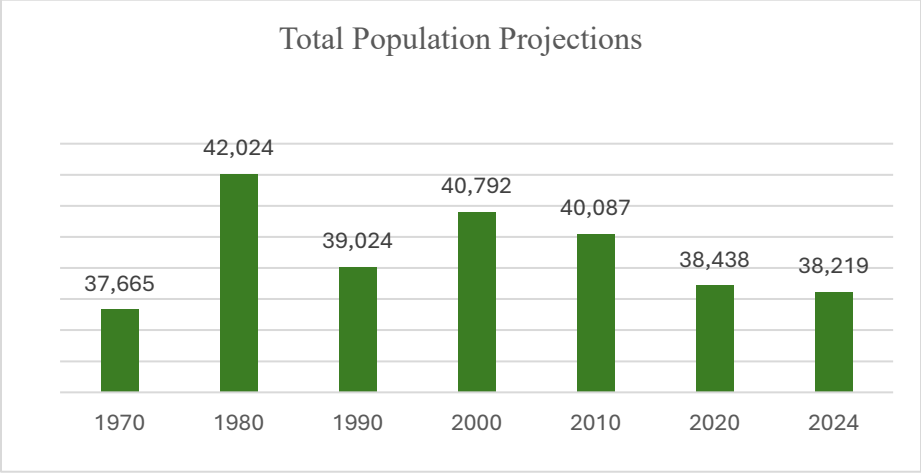
2.1 Population Growth Trends[1]

Guernsey County's population has shown a slight decrease, according to the US Census Bureau's Vintage Population Estimates. As of July 1st, 2024, Guernsey County's population was 38,219. This estimate has lowered since the 2020 census estimate of 38,438, resulting in a net loss of 219 residents (0.6%) over the last four years.

The county has experienced a slight year-to-year decline since 2020; however, the population has remained relatively stable, holding around a population of 38,000 for the last two decades.

As shown in Figure 1, Guernsey County's Census "components of change" show that the county's recent decline is primarily the result of natural decrease (more deaths than births) and domestic out-migration, partially offset by modest international in-migration. These dynamics are consistent with population patterns across many rural Ohio counties. This would explain the consistent decrease in population from 2000 to 2024.

Figure 1: Guernsey County Population Trends, 1970-2024



1. Data from U.S. Census Bureau, 1970–2020 Decennial Census; and U.S. Census Bureau, Vintage 2024 County Population Estimates (released May 2025)

2.2 Age Distribution[2]

As shown in Table 1, Guernsey County has experienced a continued rise in its elderly population from 2018 to 2023. In 2023, approximately 34.5% of the population in Guernsey County was at least 55 years old, compared to 31.3% in Ohio. The median age in Guernsey County increased from 42.5 in 2018 to 42.7 in 2023, while the median age in Ohio increased from 39.5 to 39.9 during this period. Additionally, Guernsey County has experienced a significant decrease in the population aged 45-54, declining approximately 14.3% from 2018 to 2023. The total working-age population (ages 15-64) in Guernsey County decreased from 24,783 in 2018 to 22,745 in 2023, a decline of approximately 8.2%. These shifts indicate that Guernsey County's age structure is increasingly skewed toward older residents, with a shrinking base of younger and working-age individuals compared to statewide averages.

Table 1: Age Distribution: Guernsey County and Ohio, 2018 and 2023

	2018		2023		Percent
Age Range	**Number**	**Percent**	**Number**	**Percent**	**Change**
Guernsey County					
Under 15	7,165	18.2	6,905	18.0	-3.6
15-24	4,721	12.0	4,439	11.6	-6.0
25-34	4,507	11.5	4,829	12.6	7.1
35-44	4,352	11.1	4,227	11.0	-2.9
45-54	5,421	13.8	4,645	12.1	-14.3
55-64	5,782	14.7	5,605	14.6	-3.1
65 and over	7,326	18.7	7,633	19.9	4.2
Total Population	**39,274**		**38,283**		**-2.5**
Median Age	**42.5**		**42.7**		**0.2**
Ohio					
Under 15	2,136,494	18.3	2,145,931	18.2	-0.1
15-24	1,525,913	13.1	1,510,771	12.8	-0.3
25-34	1,533,104	13.1	1,550,140	13.2	0.1
35-44	1,396,763	11.9	1,459,379	12.4	0.5
45-54	1,488,201	12.7	1,429,147	12.1	-0.6
55-64	1,612,804	13.8	1,581,635	13.4	-0.4
65 and over	1,996,163	17.1	2,103,043	17.9	0.8
Total Population	**11,689,442**		**11,780,046**		**0.8**
Median Age	**39.5**		**39.9**		**1.0**

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, Demographic and Housing Estimates, 2018-2022; Guernsey County, OH - Profile data - Census Reporter; Neilsberg Research. Guernsey County, OH population by age.

[2] Data from Guernsey County, OH - Profile data - Census Reporter; Neilsberg Research. *Guernsey County, OH population by age*.

2.3 Educational Attainment[3]

Table 2 shows the estimations of the educational attainment of residents at three levels. In 2023, roughly 33.0% of the population of Guernsey County reported having some amount of college education, compared to roughly 36.6% in Ohio. This shows that Guernsey County trails in the statewide averages. Additionally, 15.5% of Guernsey County's population did not have a high school diploma, while only 17.7% of the population in Ohio did not have a high school diploma. From 2018 to 2023, the proportion of the population that reported having some college education increased from roughly 32.1% to 33.0%. The proportion that did not have a high school diploma increased from 14.1% to 15.5%. This proportion is higher than the state number change (from 9.3% to 17.7%).

Table 2: Educational Attainment: Guernsey County and Ohio, 2018 and 2023

	2018		2023		Percent
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Change
Guernsey County					
Some high school or less	3,865	14.1	4,235	15.5	9.9
High school diploma	12,071	44.1	11,555	42.2	-4.3
Some college, no degree	5,026	18.4	5,327	19.4	5.4
Associate's degree	2,549	9.3	2,448	8.9	-4.3
Bachelor's degree	2,407	8.8	2,373	8.7	-1.1
Graduate or professional degree	1,470	5.4	1,470	5.4	0.0
Population 25 years and over	**27,388**		**27,408**		**0.07**
Ohio					
Some high school or less	746,400	9.3	1,310,995	17.7	-11.8
High school diploma	2,625,971	32.7	1,616,966	21.8	-2.4
Some college, no degree	1,638,319	20.4	658,910	8.9	-6.4
Associate's degree	690,735	8.6	571,298	7.7	2.3
Bachelor's degree	1,431,014	17.8	2,654,140	35.8	9.0
Graduate or professional degree	894,596	11.1	592,185	8.0	13.5
Population 25 years and over	**8,027,035**		**7,404,494**		**-7.8**

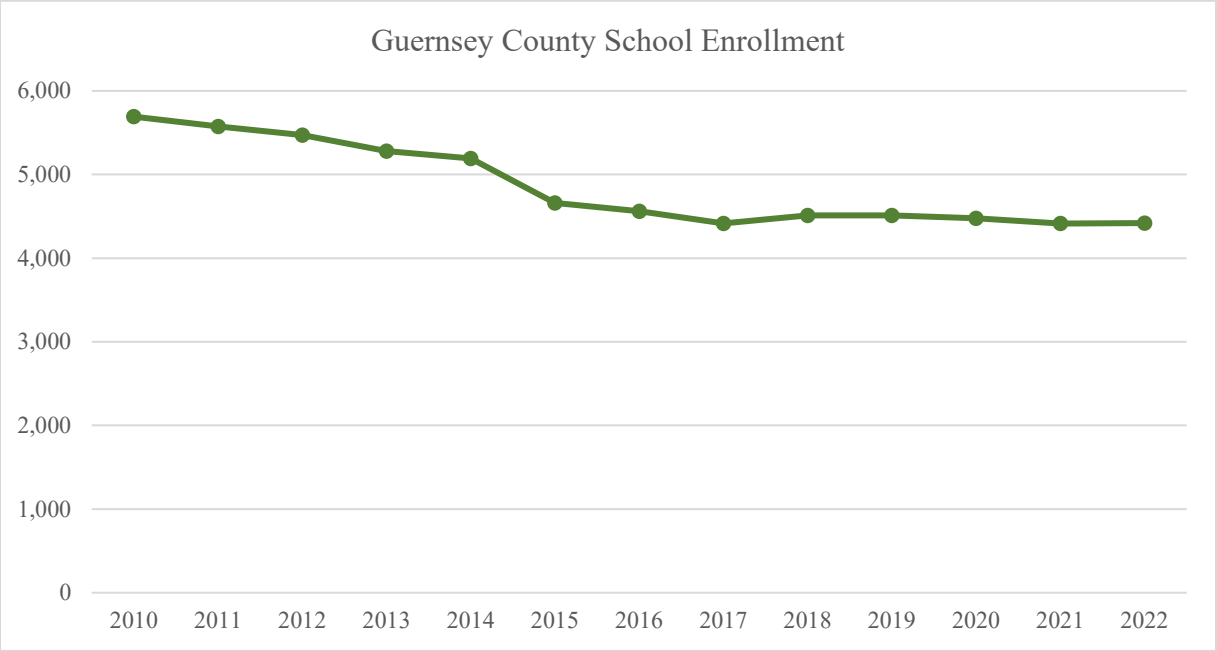
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, Educational Attainment, 2018-2023; U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year Estimates for 2019–2023

[3] U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year Estimates for 2019–2023

2.4 School Enrollment Trends[4]

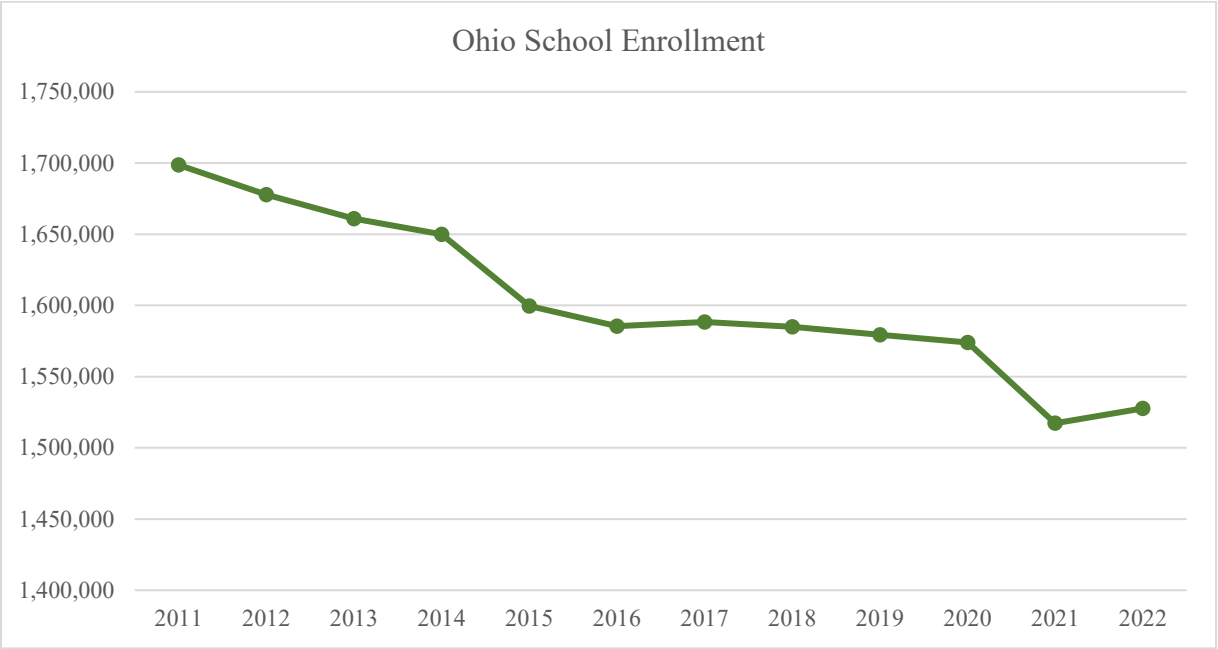
Figure 2 visualizes the number of students enrolled in Guernsey County's school districts from 2010 to 2022. With a decline between 2010 and 2015 from 5,692 to 4,659, for years after 2015, the enrollment has been relatively stable around 4,500 students, an overall loss of roughly 22%. To show how this compares to the overall state, Figure 3 shows the total enrollment of all schools in Ohio. The enrollment for the state also peaked in 2010 with a total enrollment of 1,715,302 students. This declined to 1,527,706 in 2022, over an 11% decrease. Therefore, while the state's school enrollment has decreased over the last decade, Guernsey County's schools have been experiencing a relatively higher decline.

Figure 2: Guernsey County School Enrollment, 2010-2022



[4] Figures 2 and 3 were developed using data from the Ohio Department of Education. Figure 2 includes the following Guernsey County schools: Guernsey Local and Caldwell Exempted Village.

Figure 3: Ohio School Enrollment, 2010-2022[5]



2.5 Household Income Distribution

Table 3 describes the number and annual income distributions of households in Guernsey County and Ohio for the years of 2018 and 2022. By the Census Bureau definition, household income is the sum of annual earnings for all residents of a household, related or unrelated to the homeowner, who are at least 15 years old. In 2022, Guernsey County lagged behind Ohio with a median household income of $53,901compared to $65,720 for Ohio. The largest percent of both Guernsey County and Ohio households fell into the $50,000 to $74,999 income range. Furthermore, 21.1% of Guernsey County's households earned less than $25,000 in 2022, compared to 17.8% for Ohio. Guernsey County's median income grew by roughly 22.5% from 2018 to 2022, a relatively quicker growth than Ohio's 17.1%. The number of households in Guernsey County also increased by 4% during this timeframe.

[5] Figure 3 includes all of the school districts in Ohio.

Table 3: Household Income Distribution: Guernsey County and Ohio, 2018 and 2022

	2018		2022		Percent
Household Income	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Change
Guernsey County					
Less than $10,000	1,449	9	1,051	6.5	-27.5
$10,000 to $14,999	1,079	6.7	711	4.4	-34.1
$15,000 to $24,999	1,980	12.3	1,649	10.2	-16.7
$25,000 to $34,999	1,883	11.7	1,778	11	-5.6
$35,000 to $49,999	2,592	16.1	2,376	14.7	-8.3
$50,000 to $74,999	3,171	19.7	3,120	19.3	-1.6
$75,000 to $99,999	1,819	11.3	2,215	13.7	21.7
$100,000 to $149,999	1,529	9.5	2,101	13	37.4
$150,000 to $199,999	290	1.8	647	4	123.1
$200,000 or more	290	1.8	501	3.1	72.9
Total Households	**16,098**		**16,165**		**0.4**
Median income	$ 43,975		$ 53,901		22.5
Mean income	$ 56,201		$ 69,452		23.5
	2018		2022		Percent
Household Income	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Change
Ohio					
Less than $10,000	327,981	7	287,814	5.9	-12.2
$10,000 to $14,999	220,216	4.7	214,641	4.4	-2.5
$15,000 to $24,999	459,174	9.8	365,865	7.5	-20.3
$25,000 to $34,999	459,174	9.8	400,013	8.2	-12.9
$35,000 to $49,999	632,535	13.5	585,385	12	-7.5
$50,000 to $74,999	857,437	18.3	868,321	17.8	1.3
$75,000 to $99,999	604,423	12.9	643,923	13.2	6.5
$100,000 to $149,999	660,648	14.1	780,513	16	18.1
$150,000 to $199,999	238,958	5.1	360,987	7.4	51.1
$200,000 or more	224,901	4.8	375,622	7.7	67.0
Total Households	**4,685,447**		**4,878,206**		**4.1**
Median income	$ 56,111		$ 65,720		17.1
Mean income	$ 76,151		$ 90,109		18.3

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, Income in the Past 12 Months, 2018-2022

2.6 Year Housing Structure Built

Table 4 shows the distribution of when housing structures were built in Guernsey County and Ohio. It shows that 32.4% of housing was built from 1960 to 1989 in Guernsey County, as compared to 35% in Ohio. Likewise, 28.7% of housing was built in 1990 or later in Guernsey County, as compared to 26.3% in Ohio. Finally, it shows that 39% of housing was built in 1959 or earlier in Guernsey County, compared to 38.7% in Ohio. This shows that the age of housing in Guernsey County is currently comparable to the age of housing in Ohio. However, it is important to note that since 2010 the percentage of new housing has begun to outpace that of Guernsey County.

Table 4: Year Structure Built: Guernsey County and Ohio, 2022

	Guernsey County		Ohio	
YEAR BUILT	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Built 1939 or earlier	4,593	24.1	101,5843	19.3
Built 1940 to 1949	854	4.5	303,916	5.8
Built 1950 to 1959	1,982	10.4	713,002	13.6
Built 1960 to 1969	1,709	9	619,978	11.8
Built 1970 to 1979	3,081	16.2	740,710	14.1
Built 1980 to 1989	1,378	7.2	478,029	9.1
Built 1990 to 1999	2,260	11.9	607,740	11.6
Built 2000 to 2009	2,229	11.7	497,945	9.5
Built 2010 to 2019	965	5.1	256,572	4.9
Built 2020 or later	0	0	17,474	0.3
Total Housing Units	**19,051**		**5,251,209**	

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, Selected Household Characteristics, 2022

2.7 Housing Property Values

Below, Table 5 displays the current property value distribution of housing structures in Guernsey County and Ohio. This data shows that the property values in Guernsey County are much lower than those of the surrounding area. The median value in Guernsey County is $145,600, which is $37,500 lower than the rest of Ohio (183,300). This is further supported by the fact that 30.9% of Guernsey County's housing units are valued at less than $100,000, while only 20.5% of Ohio's are worth less than $100,000.

Table 5: Property Values: Guernsey County and Ohio, 2022

	Guernsey County		Ohio	
VALUE	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Less than $50,000	1,044	8.9	220,094	6.9
$50,000 to $99,999	2,588	22	434,131	13.6
$100,000 to $149,999	2,391	20.4	557,150	17.4
$150,000 to $199,999	1,860	15.8	551,028	17.2
$200,000 to $299,999	2,320	19.8	710,845	22.2
$300,000 to $499,999	1,149	9.8	529,369	16.5
$500,000 to $999,999	350	3	170,394	5.3
$1,00,000 or more	35	0.3	27,303	0.9
Median (dollars)	**$ 145,800**		**$ 183,300**	

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, Selected Household Characteristics, 2022

2.8 Rent Distribution

Table 6 presents the rent payment distribution of Guernsey County and Ohio in 2022. The highest rent range that Guernsey County has is $2,500 to $2,999 which only accounts for 0.2% of the units. This shows that Guernsey County lacks higher end rental units. Collectively, Tables 4 and 6 show that rent paying units make up approximately 20% of Guernsey County's housing units, which is lower than the rest of Ohio at 28.6%. As such, there could be opportunities for new rental units to be developed in the area.

Table 6: Units Paying Rent: Guernsey County and Ohio, 2022

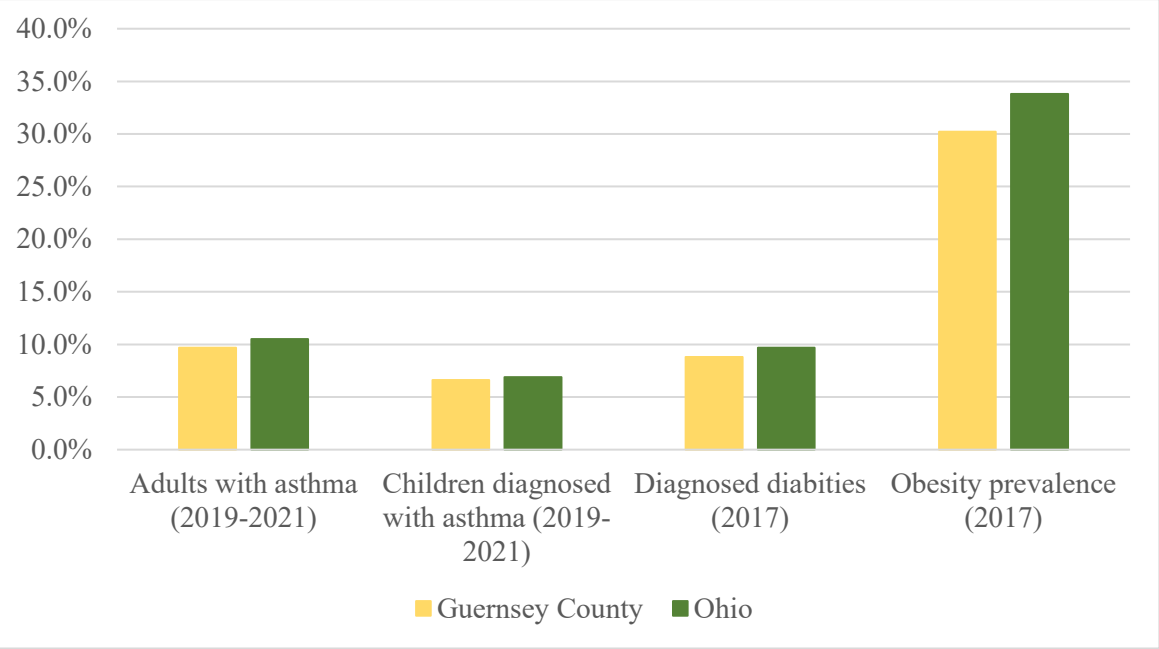
	Guernsey County		Ohio	
GROSS RENT	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Less than $500	555	14.4	147,267	9.8
$500 to $999	2,471	64.1	697,755	46.4
$1,000 to $1,499	724	18.8	475,215	31.6
$1,500 to $1,999	16	0.4	127,860	8.5
$2,000 to $2,499	85	2.2	33,211	2.2
$2,500 to $2,999	6	0.2	10,238	0.7
$3,000 or more	0	0	13,228	0.9
Total Units	**3,857**		**1,504,774**	
Median (dollars)	**$801**		**$945**	
No rent paid	**571**		**84,320**	

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, Selected Household Characteristics, 2022

2.9 Health Outcomes[6]

Figure 4 depicts the percentages of asthma diagnosed in children and adults, diagnosed diabetes, and obesity prevalence in Guernsey County and Ohio in 2019-2021 and 2017. A lower percentage of asthma was recorded in persons of Guernsey County, with 9.7% of adults and 6.6% of children diagnosed as compared to the 10.5% of adults and 6.9% of children in all of Ohio in 2019-2021. Both Guernsey County's population's proportion of diagnosed diabetes of 8.8% and obesity prevalence of 30.2% were lower than Ohio averages. Diagnosed diabetes was recorded as roughly 0.9% lower than the state's percentage, and the obesity prevalence was 2.6% lower than the state's percentage.

Figure 4: Asthma, Diabetes, and Obesity Percentages: Guernsey County and Ohio



[6] Figure 4 was created using data from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, 2019-2021 and 2017. Figure 5 was developed with data from National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Division for Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention, 2018-2020. Table 7 was created using the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute, County Health Rankings.

Figure 5 presents heart disease and stroke hospitalization rates from 2018-2020 and death rates from 2018-2020 in Guernsey County and Ohio. Per 1,000 persons, about 63.3 were hospitalized for heart disease and almost 12.2 were hospitalized for stroke in Guernsey County, showing that the county's hospitalization rate in hearth disease was higher than those recorded in Ohio (50.8). Death rates for heart disease in Guernsey County was higher than those in the state, with about 25 more heart disease patients per 100,000. Death rates for stroke in Guernsey County was lower than those in the state, with about and 5 more stroke patients per 100,000 surviving hospitalizations.

Figure 5: Heart Disease and Stroke Hospitalization and Death Rates: Guernsey County and Ohio

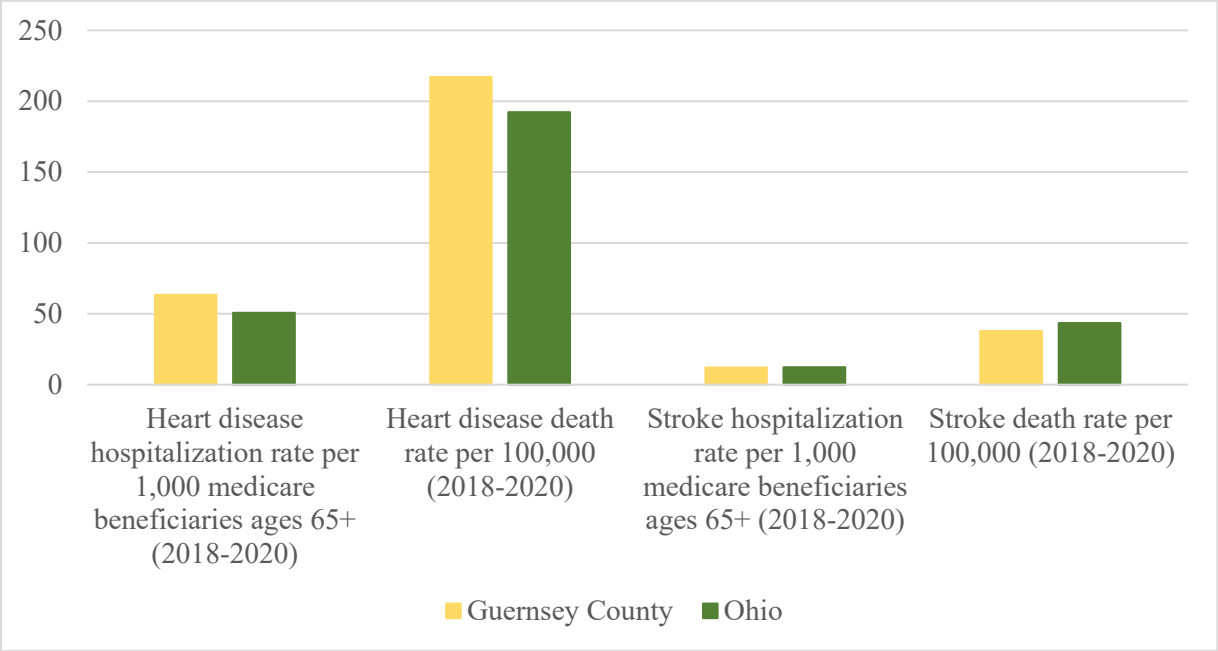


Table 7 compares the results of certain measures used to rank health statistics for the United States, Ohio, and Guernsey County. The table lists the rankings of health outcomes, health behaviors, clinical care, and physical environments. Most notably, Guernsey County trails behind national and state ratios comparing the population to clinical care providers available. Additionally, Guernsey County residents lack access to exercise opportunities.

Table 7: Health Rankings with Measures and Results: United States, Ohio, and Guernsey County

Measure	Description	Guernsey County	Ohio	United States	Years of Data Used
HEALTH OUTCOMES					
Premature Death	Years of potential life lost before age 75 per 100,000 population	10,200	8,700	7,300	2018-2020
Poor or fair health	% of adults reporting fair or poor health	18%	15%	12%	2020
Poor physical health days	Average # of physically unhealthy days reported in past 30 days	3.7	3.2	3	2020
Poor mental health days	Average # of mentally unhealthy days reported in past 30 days	5.4	5	4.4	2020
Low birthweight	% of live births with low birthweight (< 2500 grams)	8%	9%	8%	2020

Measure	Description	Guernsey County	Ohio	United States	Years of Data Used
HEALTH BEHAVIORS					
Adult Smoking	% of adults who are current smokers	28%	20%	16%	2020
Adult obesity	% of adults that report a BMI ≥ 30	38%	36%	32%	2020
Food environment index	Index of actors that contribute to a healthy food environment, (0-10)	6.3	6.8	7	2019 and 2020
Physical inactivity	% of adults aged 20 and over reporting no leisure-time physical activity	30%	24%	22%	2020
Access to exercise opportunities	% of population with adequate access to locations for physical activity	48%	84%	84%	2022 and 2020
Excessive drinking	% of adults reporting binge or heavy drinking	20%	19%	19%	2020
Alcohol-impaired driving deaths	% of driving deaths with alcohol involvement	35%	33%	27%	2016-2020
Sexually transmitted infections	# of newly diagnosed chlamydia cases per 100,000 population	339.5	509.2	481.3	2020
Teen births	# of births per 1,000 female population ages 15-19	30	21	19	2014-2020

Measure	Description	Guernsey County	Ohio	United States	Years of Data Used
CLINICAL CARE					
Uninsured	% of population under age 65 without health insurance	10%	8%	10%	2020
Primary care physicians	Ratio of population to primary care physicians	2,770:1	1,290:1	1,310:1	2020
Dentists	Ratio of population to dentists	1,910:1	1,550:1	1,380:1	2021
Mental health providers	Ratio of population to mental health providers	420:01:00	330:01:00	340:01:00	2022
Preventable hospital stays	# of hospital stays for ambulatory-care sensitive conditions per 1,000 Medicare enrollees	3,354	3,278	2,809	2020
Mammography screening	% of female Medicare enrollees ages 67-69 that receive mammography screening	36%	40%	37%	2020

Measure	Description	Guernsey County	Ohio	United States	Years of Data Used
PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT					
Air pollution - particulate matter	Average daily density of fine particulate matter in micrograms per cubic meter (PM2.5)	8.6	8.9	7.4	2019
Drinking water violations	Indicator of the presence of health related drinking water violations. Yes - indicates the presence of a violation, No - indicates no violation.	No			2021
Severe housing problems	% of households with overcrowding, high housing costs, or lack of kitchen or plumbing facilities	14%	13%	17%	2015-2019
Driving alone to work	% of workforce that drives alone to work	86%	80%	73%	2017-2021
Long commute - driving alone	Among workers who commute in their car alone, % commuting > 30 minutes	24%	31%	37%	2017-2022

3. Economic Scan and Workforce Inventory

This section provides a report of the current and historic industry and occupational employment trends for Guernsey County and Ohio, as well as an analysis of regional employed resident commuter behavior.

3.1 Employment by Industry[7]

Table 8 breaks down industry-specific employment data for Guernsey County and Ohio in 2016 and 2023. In 2023, the Manufacturing, Health Care and Social Assistance, and Retail Trade are Guernsey County's most significant employers with 46.5% of the county's working population. Health Care and Social Assistance, Manufacturing, and Retail Trade are also the most significant employers for Ohio with 42.9% of the employment.

Guernsey County had ten industries with employment growth from 2016 to 2023, compared to nine with employment decline, and one with no change. Of the growth industries, six had a growth rate of over 25%, including 141.2% growth in Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting. On the other hand, this industry decreased in Ohio overall by 1.2%. Additionally, five of Guernsey County's industries experienced employment declines of at least 25%, including a loss of 46.1% in Real Estate and Rental and Leasing. However, this industry had no significant change in Ohio overall.

Table 8: Employment by Industry: Guernsey County and Ohio, 2016 and 2023

Guernsey County	2016		2023		2016-2023
Industry	Estimate	Percent	Estimate	Percent	Percent Change
Accommodation and Food Services	408	3.7	549	4.7	34.6
Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services	307	2.8	429	3.7	39.7
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	131	1.2	316	2.7	141.2
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	93	0.8	200	1.7	115.1
Construction	805	7.3	785	6.7	-2.5
Educational Services	687	6.3	851	7.3	23.9
Finance and Insurance	337	3.1	218	1.9	-35.3
Health Care and Social Assistance	1,981	18.0	1,999	17.0	1.0
Information	171	1.6	97	0.8	-43.3
Management of Companies and Enterprises	0	0	0	0	0
Manufacturing	2,197	20.0	2,104	17.9	-4.2
Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction	419	3.8	583	5.0	39.1
Other Services (except Public Administration)	553	5.0	308	2.6	-44.3
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	311	2.8	255	2.2	-18.0
Public Administration	620	5.6	578	4.9	-6.8

[7] Table 8 was developed using data from the U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, Industry by Sex for the Full-Time, Year-Round Civilian Employed Population 16 Years and Over, 2016 and 2023

Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	102	0.9	55	0.5	-46.1
Retail Trade	985	9.0	1,360	11.6	38.1
Transportation and Warehousing	397	3.6	637	5.4	60.5
Utilities	150	1.4	185	1.6	23.3
Wholesale Trade	323	2.9	223	1.9	-31.0
Civilian employed population 16 years and over	**10,977**		**11,732**		**6.9**

Ohio	2016		2023		2016-2023
Industry	Estimate	Percent	Estimate	Percent	Percent Change
Accommodation and Food Services	150,510	4.0	148,984	3.7	-1.0
Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services	126,851	3.4	135,569	3.4	6.9
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	29,340	0.8	28,996	0.7	-1.2
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	38,669	1.0	40,440	1.0	4.6
Construction	195,320	5.2	252,860	6.3	29.5
Educational Services	278,400	7.5	318,892	7.9	14.5
Finance and Insurance	227,865	6.1	256,504	6.4	12.6
Health Care and Social Assistance	570,195	15.3	622,225	15.5	9.1
Information	67,720	1.8	59,536	1.5	-12.1
Management of Companies and Enterprises	5,285	0.1	6,711	0.2	27.0
Manufacturing	721,225	19.4	723,261	18.0	0.3
Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction	13,317	0.4	10,119	0.3	-24.0
Other Services (except Public Administration)	138,770	3.7	143,989	3.6	3.8
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	228,417	6.1	279,178	6.9	22.2
Public Administration	181,823	4.9	197,955	4.9	8.9
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	57,880	1.6	57,903	1.4	0
Retail Trade	362,608	9.7	379,899	9.4	4.8
Transportation and Warehousing	165,284	4.4	207,691	5.2	25.7
Utilities	39,760	1.1	42,765	1.1	7.6
Wholesale Trade	124,725	3.3	110,179	2.7	-11.7
Civilian employed population 16 years and over	**3,723,964**		**4,023,656**		**8.0**

3.2 Labor Force Overview[8]

Figure 6 reports data for labor force eligibility and employment in Guernsey County from 2013 to 2023. In 2013, the county's labor force included 18,533 individuals, of whom around 16,930 were employed and 1,603 were unemployed. This corresponds to an 8.6% unemployment rate for the year. Figure 7 shows how the Guernsey County unemployment rate compares with Ohio's rate from 2013 to 2023. During this period, Guernsey County's unemployment rates were higher than or relatively equal to Ohio's rates. Figure 8 shows the participation rate of Guernsey

[8] Figures 6-9 were developed by authors from the U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, Selected Economic Characteristics, 2013-2022

County and Ohio. In this graph, the county is shown to have increased from a participation rate of 46.9% in 2013 to a rate of 56.2% in 2023. For context, this still places Guernsey County over 7% below Ohio's participation rate in 2023. To further explore why Guernsey County's rate was significantly lower, Figure 9 separates the county's participation rate by gender. Women consistently have a lower rate than men, with there being nearly an 10% difference between the genders in 2023. This is consistent with the typical trend with males having a higher labor force participation rate than females. Together these figures show that there is higher unemployment in Guernsey County, there is also low participation in Guernsey County's labor force. This could indicate a need to focus on increasing participation particularly of females in Guernsey County.

Figure 6: Guernsey County Labor Force and Employment, 2013-2023

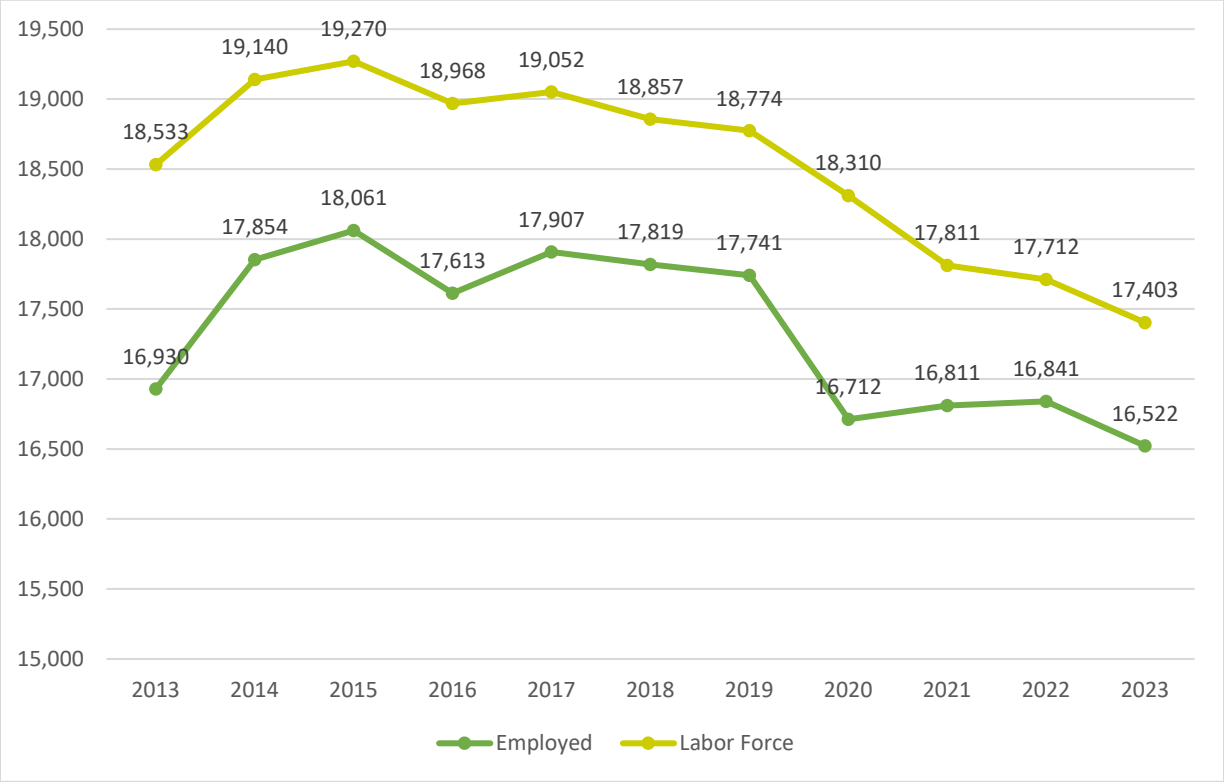


Figure 7: Unemployment Rate: Guernsey County and Ohio, 2013-2023

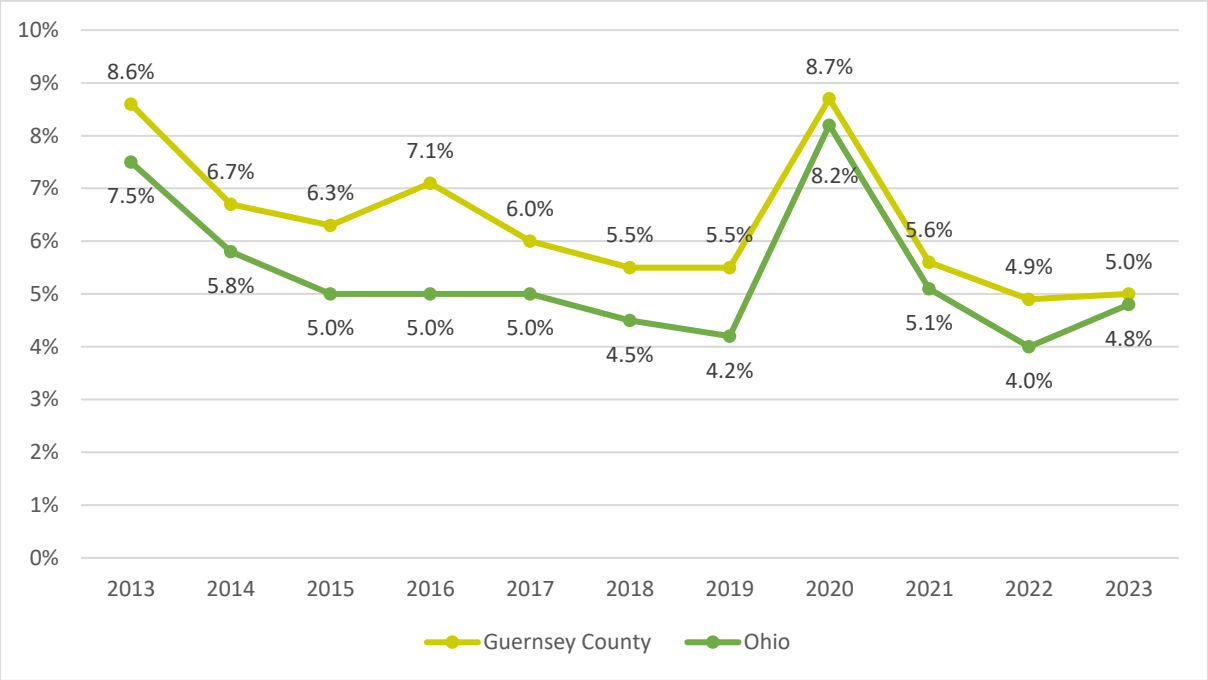


Figure 8: Participation Rate: Guernsey County and Ohio, 2013-2023

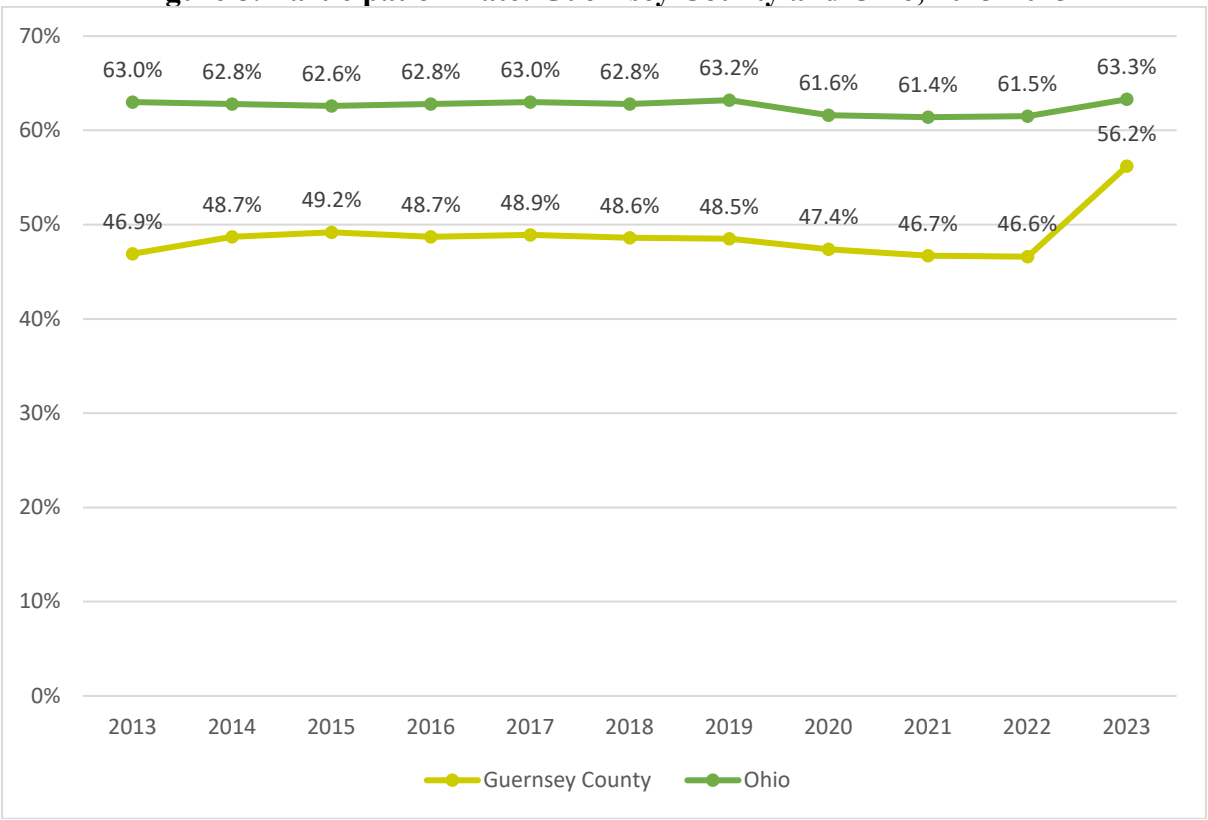
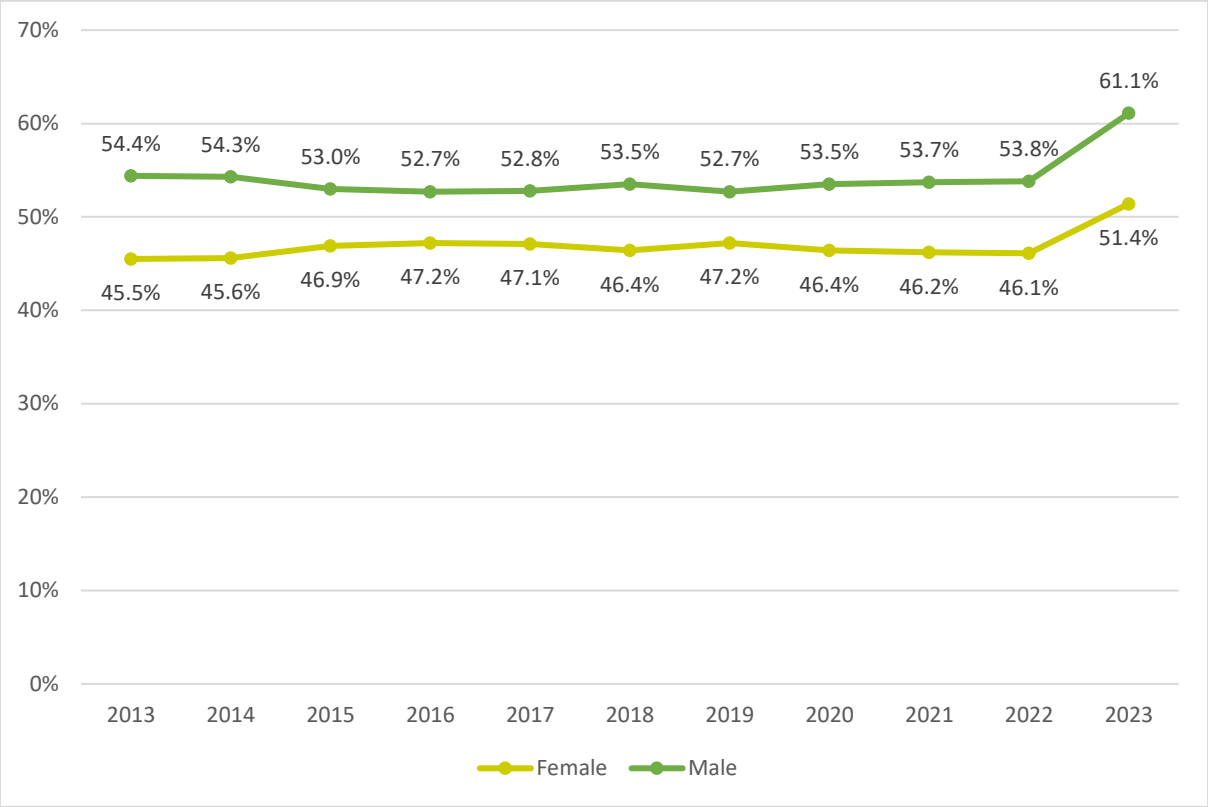


Figure 9: Guernsey County Participation Rate by Gender, 2013-2023



3.3 Employed Resident Commute Shed[9]

Figures 10 and 11 show the distribution of the Guernsey County workforce. Figure 10 shows the commute shed, or where Guernsey County residents are employed. 73% of employed Guernsey County residents remain in the county for work. The remaining 27% of employed Guernsey County residents work outside of Guernsey County. In total, 4,295 Guernsey County residents commute to another county for employment. On the other hand, Figure 11 shows the labor shed, or in which county people who work in Guernsey County reside. Approximately 72% of the individuals employed in Guernsey County also reside in Guernsey County. The remaining 28% of individuals working in Guernsey County reside in a different County. In total, Guernsey County attracts 4,732 from other counties to work in Guernsey County. This results in a net difference of 437 more individuals coming to the county for work than leaving Guernsey County for work.

[9] Figures 10 and 11 were developed utilizing U.S. Census Bureau Commuting Flows, 2016-2020.

Figure 10: Commute shed in 2016-2020

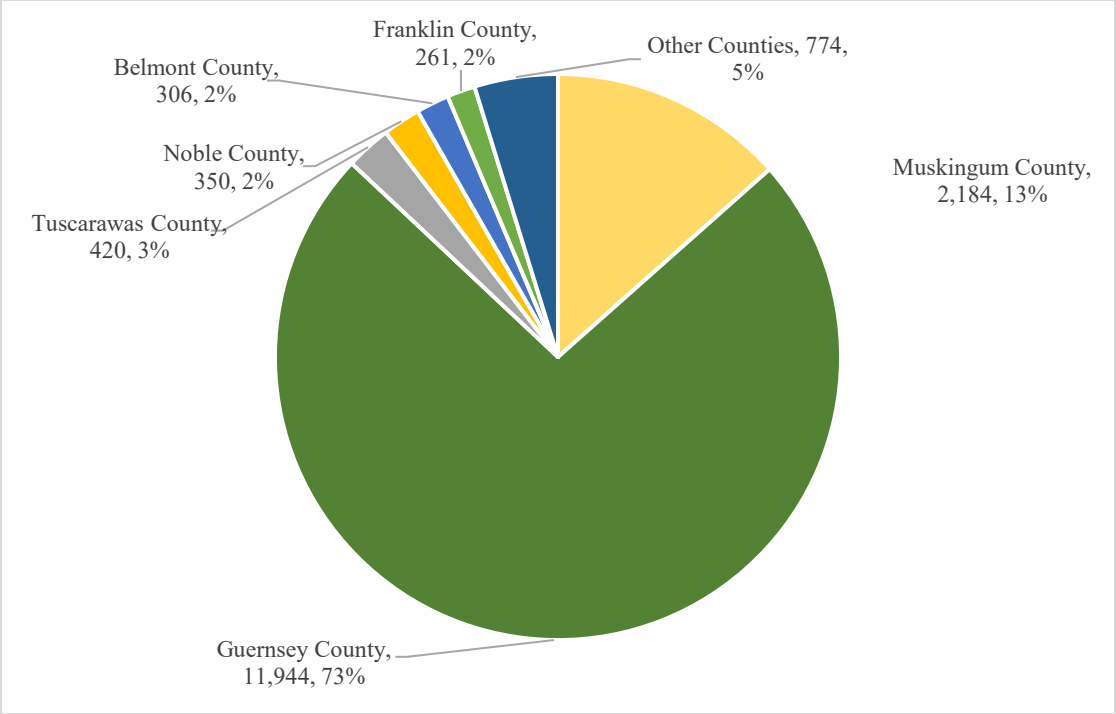
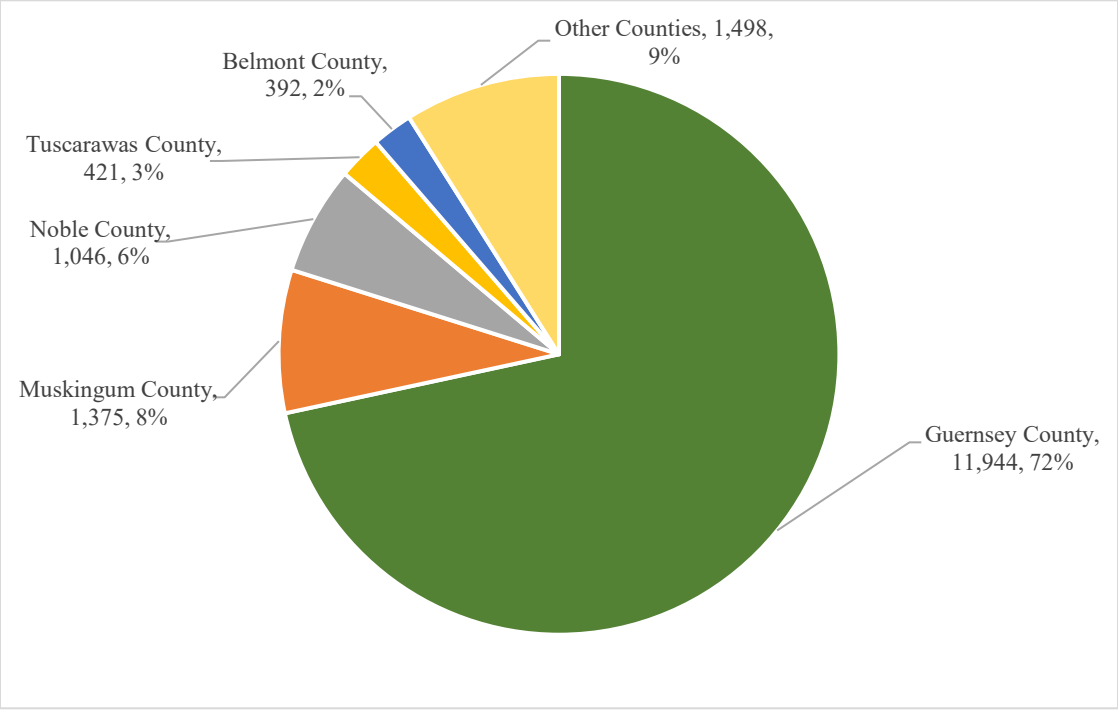


Figure 11: Labor shed in 2016-2020



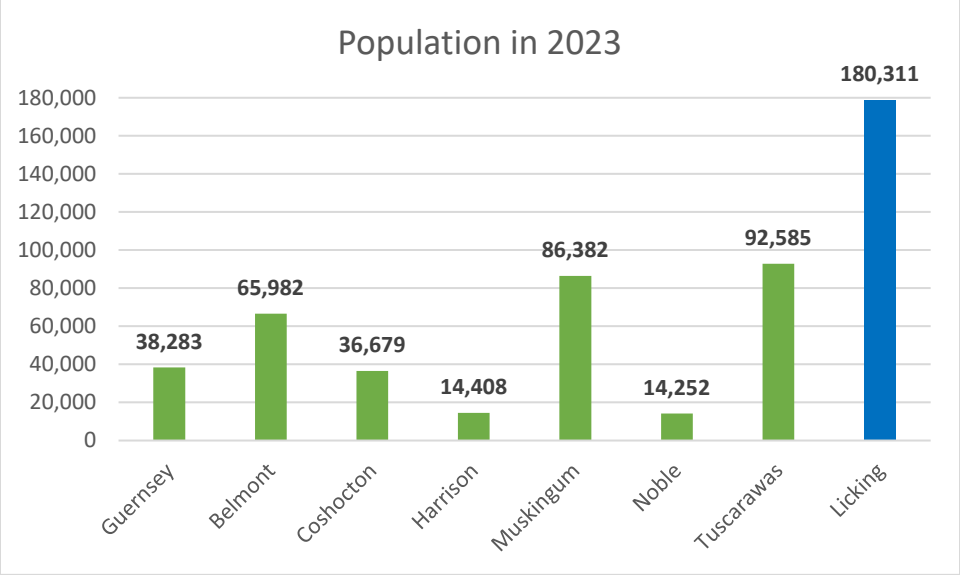
4. Community Comparison

The following graphs compare Guernsey County to its surrounding counties as well as to Licking County. The "7-County Region" on these figures in yellow, represents the region-wide rates adjusted for population for the region of Guernsey County and its 6 surrounding counties, Belmont, Coshocton, Harrison, Muskingum, Noble, and Tuscarawas, all indicated in green.

4.1 Population[10]

Figure 12 shows the population of the selected counties in 2022. In the 7-county region, Noble County had the lowest population at 14,252 followed by Harrison County at 14,408. Additionally, Belmont, Muskingum, and Tuscarawas Counties all had much higher population counts than Guernsey County. However, Coshocton County was relatively close to population size at 36,679 residents to Guernsey County's 38,283 residents. On the other hand, Licking County is much larger than any county in the 7-county region with 180,311 residents.

Figure 12

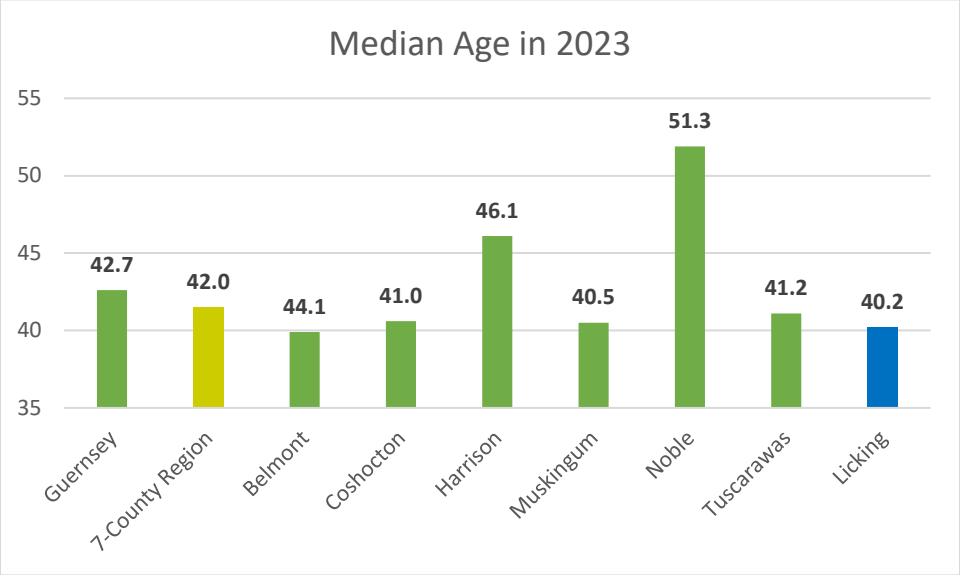


[10] Figure 12 Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, Demographic and Housing Estimates, 5-year estimates, **2023**

4.2 Median Age[11]

Figure 13 shows the median age of the selected counties. In 2023, the median in Guernsey County was 42.7, which is higher than the median age for the 7-county region at 42.0. Specifically, Guernsey County had a higher median age than three of the six surrounding counties: Coshocton, Muskingum, and Tuscarawas. Although Harrison and Noble County both have a much higher median age, the relatively low population sizes of these two counties meant that they had a smaller impact on the region's median age. Furthermore, Licking County does have a lower median age than Guernsey County.

Figure 13



4.3 Educational Attainment[12]

Figure 14 shows the percentage of the population age 25 or older who had at least graduated from high school (or equivalent) in 2023. In Guernsey County, 85.7% were high school graduates which is lower than the 7-county region at 89.4. In particular, Guernsey County had a lower percentage of high school graduates than four out of the six surrounding counties: Belmont, Harrison, Muskingum, and Tuscarawas. Furthermore, Licking County had a higher percentage of high school graduates, at 93.1%, than any of the counties in the 7-county region.

Figure 14

[11] Figure 13 Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, Demographic and Housing Estimates, 5-year estimates, **2023**

[12] Figures 14 and 15 Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, Educational Attainment, 5-year estimates, **2023**

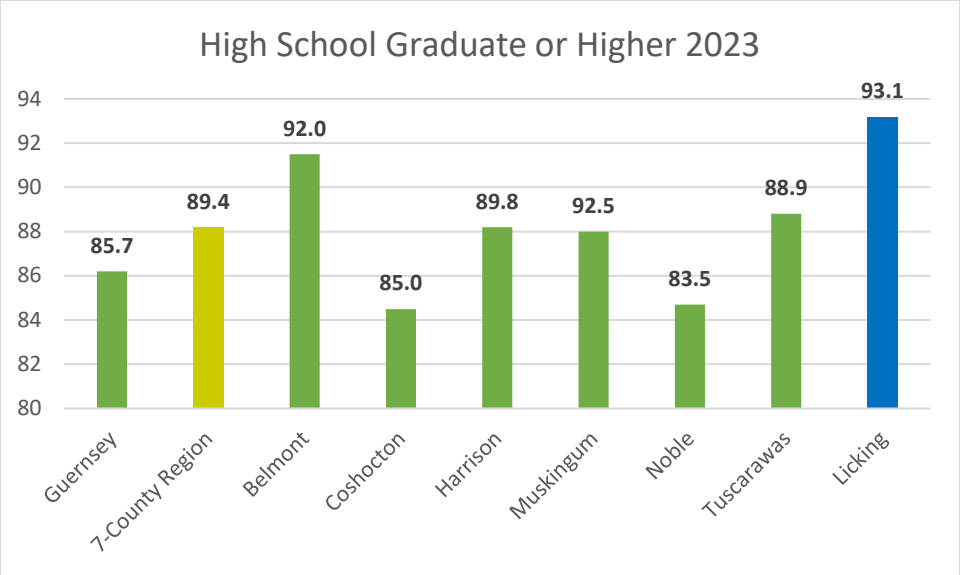
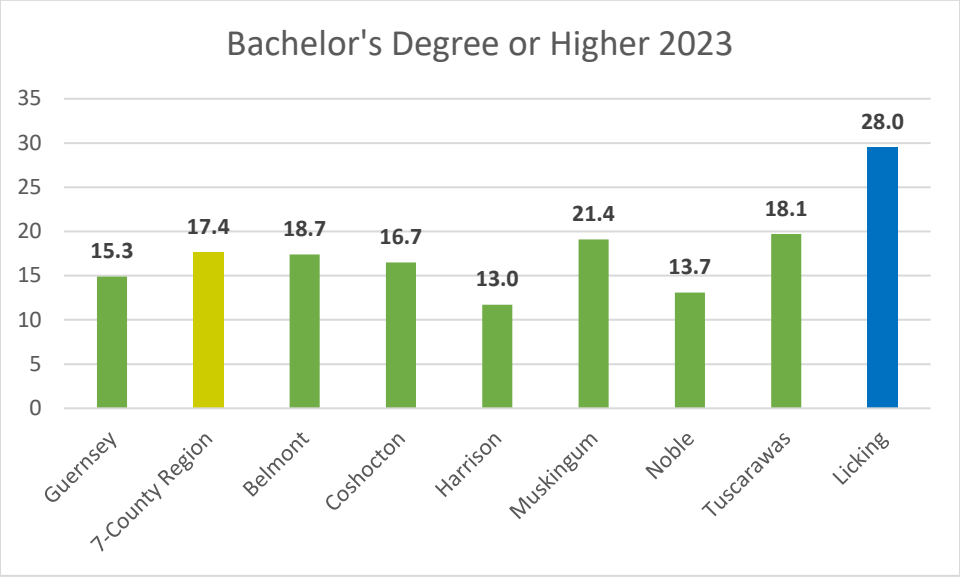


Figure 15 shows the percentage of the population age 25 or older who have a bachelor's degree or higher in 2023. In Guernsey County, 15.3% had a bachelor's degree or higher which is lower than the 7-county region at 17.4%. Furthermore, Guernsey County had a lower percentage than four out of the six surrounding counties: Belmont, Coshocton, Muskingum, and Tuscarawas. Likewise, Licking County had a higher percentage of bachelor's degrees or higher at 28.0% which is about 10% more than the highest counties in the 7-county region.

Figure 15



4.4 School Enrollment[13]

Figure 16 shows the annual change in school enrollment from 2010 for Guernsey County, the 7-county region, and Licking County. This graph shows the swings in enrollment from year to year. In the 7-county region, it shows that there has been school enrollment loss each year except for in 2013. In Guernsey County, it shows that there have been years where enrollment increased from the previous year (2015, 2017, 2019), but it also shows years where enrollment fell much more than compared to the region. For Licking County, it shows that they too have had lower enrollment from 2014 to 2021. However, the percentage change was usually less than in the 7-county region.

Figure 16

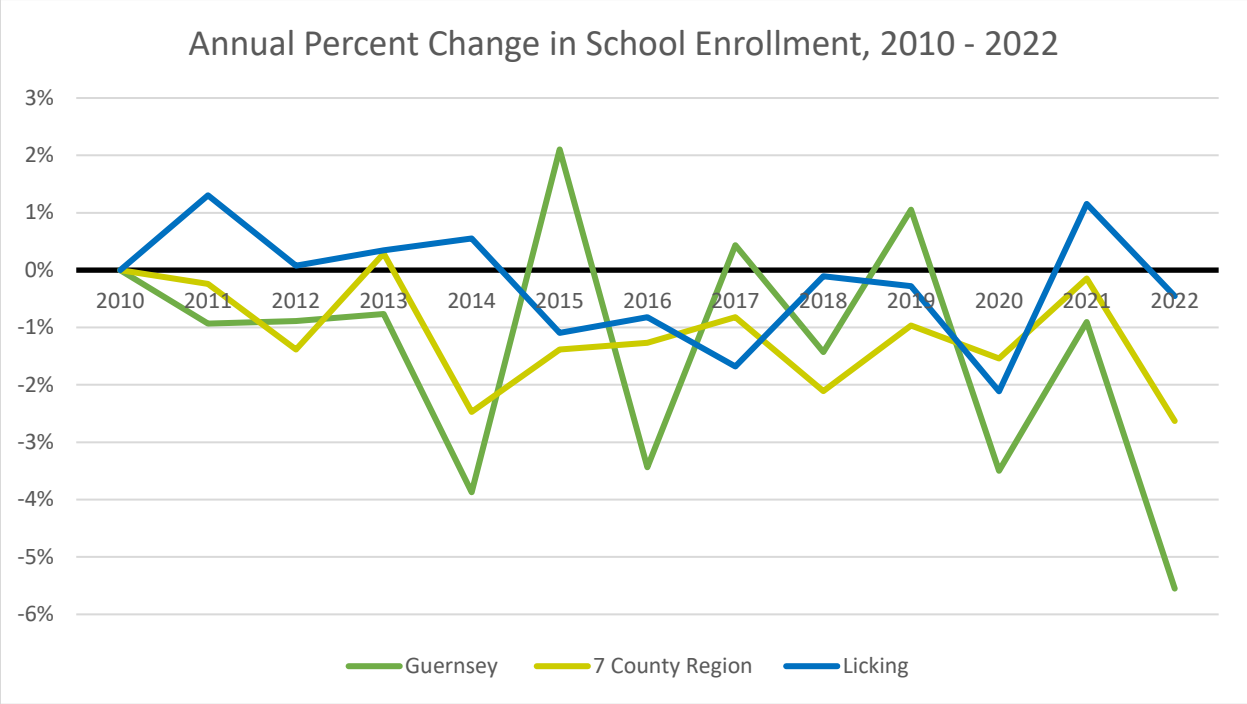
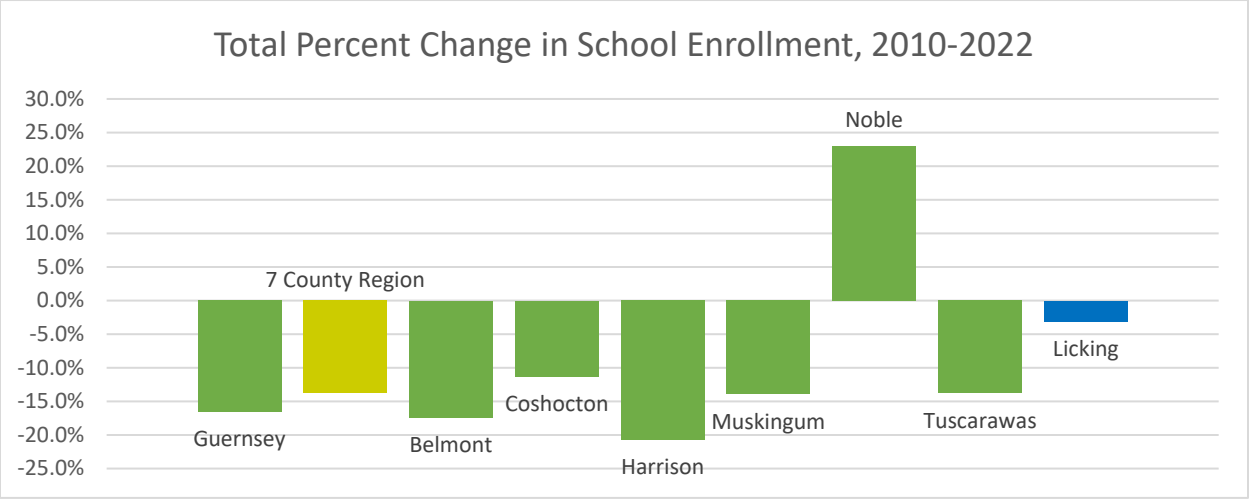


Figure 17 shows the total change in school enrollment from 2010-2023. This graph shows that Noble County is the only county in the group being looked at that had higher school enrollment in 2022 than in 2010. In Guernsey County, school enrollment decreased approximately 16.5% from 2010 to 2022. In the 7-county region, school enrollment decreased approximately 13.8%. While Licking County also experienced school enrollment decreasing, it only decreased by approximately 3.1%.

[13] Figures 16 and 17 Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, School Enrollment, 5-year estimates, 2022

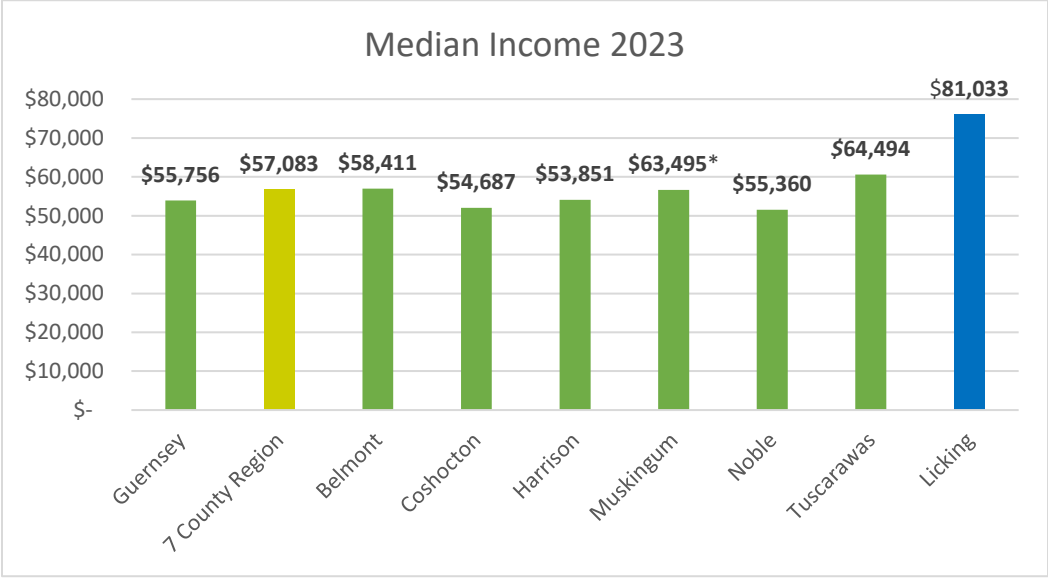
Figure 17



4.5 Median Income[14]

Figure 18 shows the median income for households in 2023. In the 7-county region, the median income was $57,083. The median income for Guernsey County was slightly lower at almost $55,756. The region's median income was relatively similar, fluctuating from $54,687 in Coshocton County to $64,494 in Tuscarawas County. However, the median income for households was much higher in Licking County at almost $81,033.

Figure 18

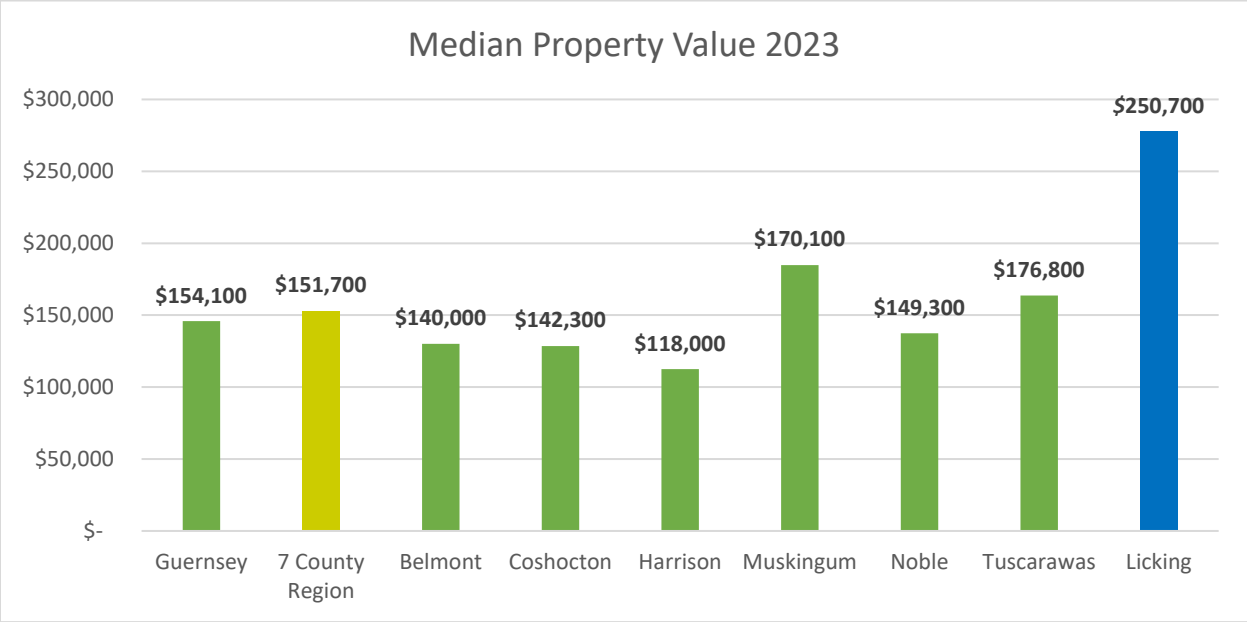


[14] Figure 18 Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, Income in the Past 12 Months, 5-year estimates, **2023**

4.6 Housing Property Values[15]

Figure 19 shows the median property value for houses in 2023. The median property value in Guernsey County was $154,100 which is similar to the 7-county region median property value at $151,700. The median property value in Guernsey County was higher than in four of the six surrounding counties: Belmont, Coshocton, Harrison, and Noble Counties. Furthermore, property values in Guernsey County as well as the 7-county region were significantly lower than the median property values in Licking County at $250,700. This indicates that the lower cost of living and owning a home in the 7-county region may be a draw to people who may work in Licking County or would like to relocate to the area. However, Guernsey County may need to address other concerns with the housing stock and amenities in order to stand out among similar priced housing in the other counties in the area.

Figure 19

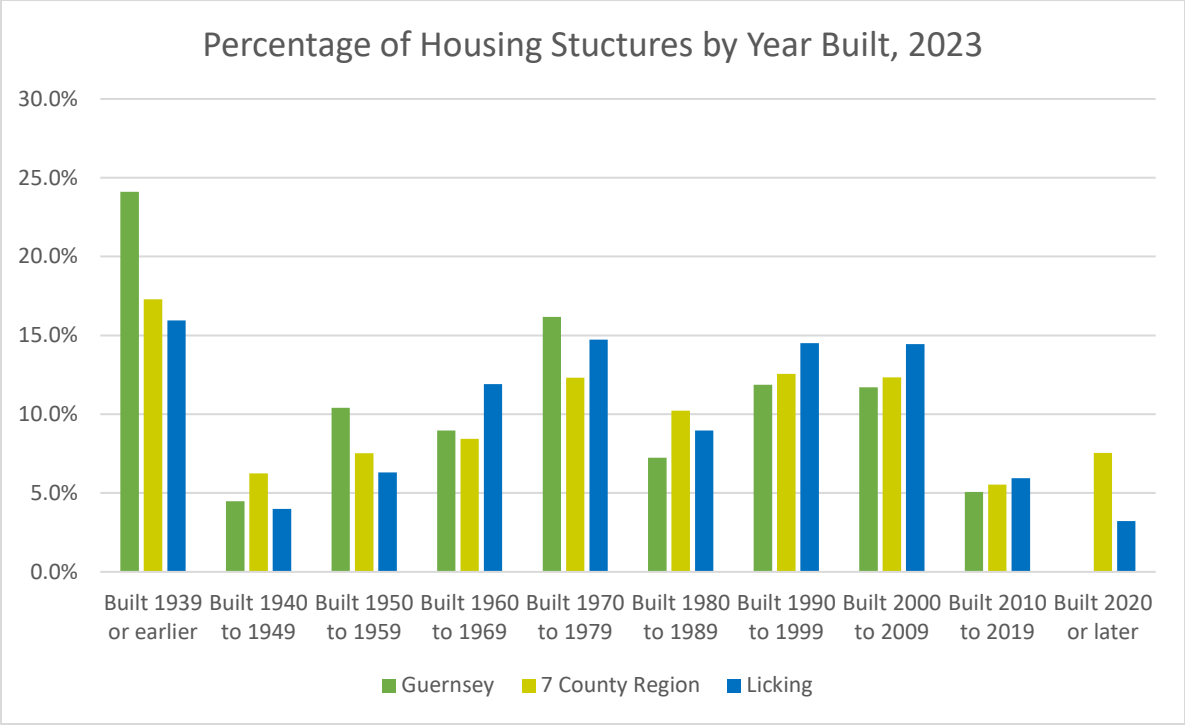


4.7 Year Housing Structures Built[16]

Figure 20 shows the percentage of the housing stock by year built as of 2022. In comparison to the 7-county region and to Licking County, Guernsey County has a higher percentage of housing built in 1939 or earlier, at almost 1 in 4 homes. Likewise, the graph shows that Guernsey County has less housing built since 1980 than in the 7-county region or in Licking County. Specifically, the census recorded no new housing built in Guernsey County in 2020, 2021, or 2022.

[15] Figure 19 Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, Selected Household Characteristics, **2023**
[16] Figure 20 Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, Selected Household Characteristics, **2023**

Figure 20



4.8 Labor Force[17]

Figure 21 shows the unemployment rate in 2023. Guernsey County had an unemployment rate of 5.0, which was slightly higher than the 7-county region at 4.8. Furthermore, Guernsey County's unemployment rate was lower than three of the six surrounding counties: Belmont, Coshocton, and Tuscarawas. Additionally, two other surrounding counties, Harrison and Muskingum, had similar unemployment rates at 4.5 and 4.6, respectively. However, the unemployment rate in Licking County and Noble County was much lower at only 3.2 and 2.9 respectively in 2023.

Figure 22 shows the labor force participation rate in 2023. Guernsey County had a labor force participation rate of 56.2 which was similar to the 7-county region's rate of 56.5. Noble County had an extremely lower rate at 38.3. On the other hand, Licking County had a higher rate at 63.3. It is important to consider the labor force participation rate and employment rate together. For example, Guernsey and Muskingum Counties have similar unemployment rates of 5.0 and *4.6*. However, labor force participation is higher in Muskingum at 59.6. This indicates that there is a greater share of individuals in Guernsey County not seeking employment, thus lowering the official unemployment rate. Similarly, even though the unemployment rate in Noble County is technically lower than in Guernsey County, the much lower labor force participation indicates that there are actually a larger percentage of individuals not working in Noble County, whether

[17] Figures 21-23 Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, Selected Economic Characteristics, 5-year estimates, 2022

that be due to leaving the workforce because of disabilities, taking over childcare responsibilities, or any other factor that has influenced individuals not to seek employment.

Figure 23 shows the labor force participation broken down by gender. For every county, except Noble County, there is a higher percentage of labor force participation for males than females. The rates in Guernsey County are approximately the same as to the 7-county region. Likewise the difference between male and female participation, approximately 10%, is the same in the region and in Licking County. This indicates that Guernsey County in on par with female participation. However, Guernsey County could raise participation overall to be more in line with Licking County and State averages. Furthermore, there is still opportunities for all counties with a difference in gendered labor force participation to target and raise participation for the gender with lower participation by addressing the issues that keep them from participating.

Figure 21

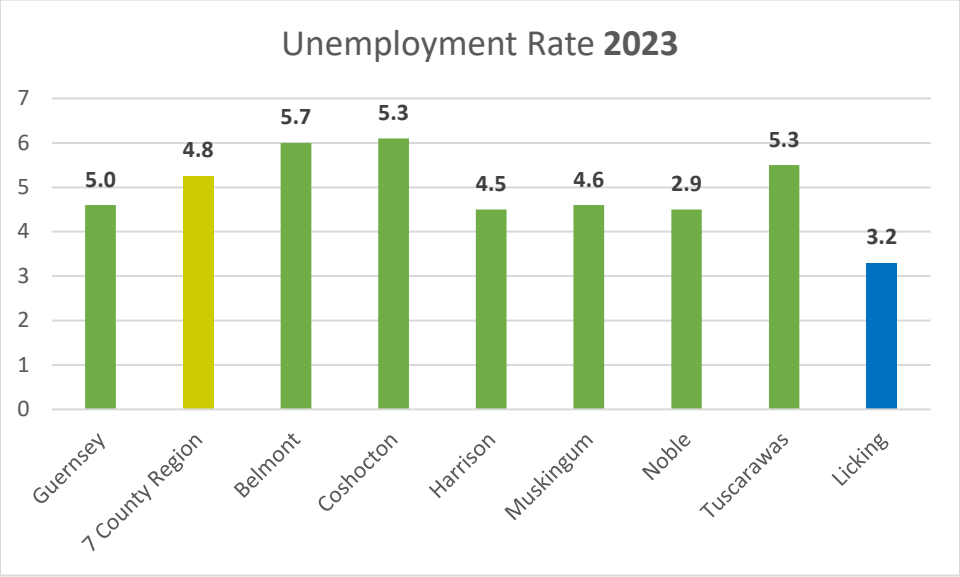


Figure 22

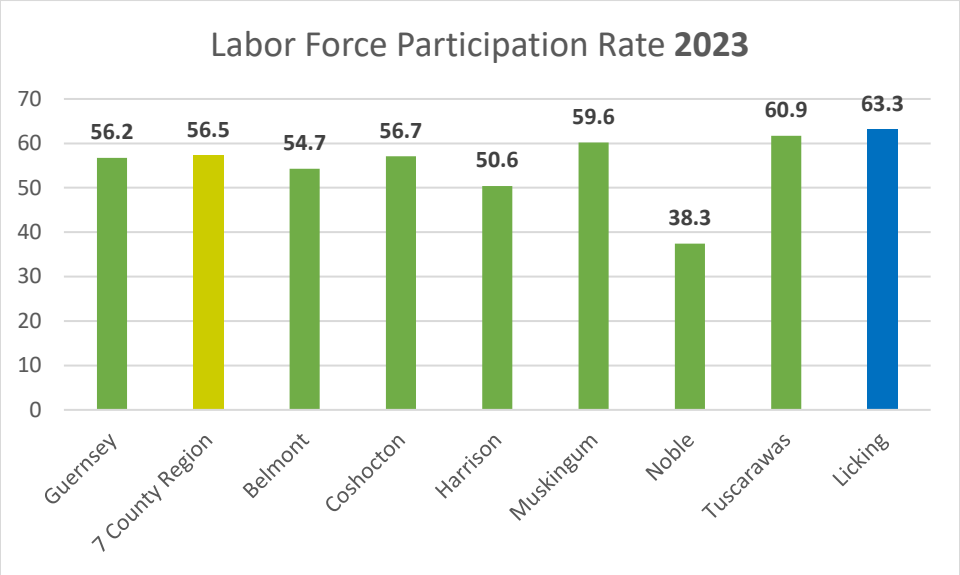
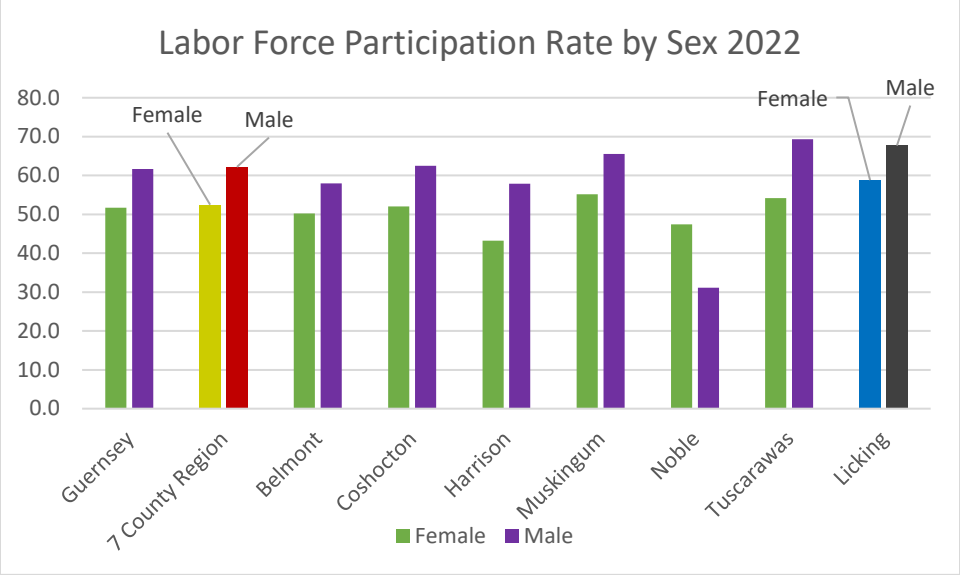


Figure 23



5. Community Engagement

5.1 SWOT Analysis

On May 1, 2024 the research team met with selected stakeholders in Guernsey County to conduct a SWOT analysis. Stakeholders were identified by the chair and vice chair for the Guernsey County Planning Commission: Bill Arnett, Economic Development Director, Cambridge-Guernsey County CIC, and Nick Cunnigham, City Engineer, City of Cambridge. Strengths are positive attributes of Guernsey County that are influenced by internal factors, would be easier for the local community or government to influence, and separate Guernsey County from other counties in the area. For example, access to the county by two interstates, tourism features such as The Wilds, Salt Fork, and Deerassic, and growing downtowns in Cambridge and Byesville in Guernsey County are strengths of the community. Weaknesses on the other hand, are negative attributes for Guernsey County where internal (County-level or lower) programs or policies could be implemented to address the issues. For example, Guernsey County's lack of off hour childcare, lack of entertainment/amenities in the county, and/or housing could be addressed through creation of programs to meet these needs or improve the attraction of businesses and developers at the County level. Opportunities represent external factors that bring a positive impact to Guernsey County. While opportunities are considered out of the control of the county itself, the county can capitalize on the benefits by supporting programming and policy that puts Guernsey County in the position to best take advantage of the opportunity. For example, major investments are being made in Ohio such as the Intel development in Licking County, or the ongoing investments in the oil/gas industry which represent opportunities for workforce and attraction of residents. However, to receive any benefit from these investments in the region, Guernsey County must be ready to support the workforce in areas such as housing, broadband, and amenities. On the other hand, threats represent external factors that have a negative impact on Guernsey County but are outside the ability of any one such county to solve. For example, the impact of the ongoing opioid epidemic and the effects of inflation are outside of Guernsey County's ability to solve. However, it is important for Guernsey County to be aware of threats and be able to mitigate the impacts whenever possible.

Additionally, this SWOT analysis was presented at a public meeting, where the broader community was able to give input on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats for Guernsey County. Table 9 shows the combined SWOT analysis. Note that the "❖" indicates that the point was added to the list at the public meeting.

Table 9: SWOT Analysis

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
● Location (70/77 Interchange) ○ Easy to access ■ Ridge Tool NA Distribution Center ■ Out of county employees ○ Connecting students with employers through their high school ● Tourism ○ State Park: Salt Fork ○ Lake (Seneca) ○ The Wilds ○ Deerassic ● Added two childcare facilities ● Infrastructure ○ Power plant ○ Gas ○ Broadband (better than Appalachian region) ● Colgate Palmolive and other employers ● Appalachian work ethic and loyalty ● Entrepreneurs ● Growing downtown – Cambridge Main Street and Byesville ● Collaborative relationship with elected/public officials ● Industrial sites → Affordability ● Mental health → Strengthened in recent years ● Safety → Attractive for returning residents to grow family ❖ Culture ❖ Quality of life ❖ Education	● Industrial sites → availability ● Schools ○ Students already leaving county in HS for educational opportunities (e.g. Zanesville) ● Off hour childcare ● Entertainment/amenities for discretionary income ● Space and money for investment in entrepreneurs ● Public engagement/lack of knowledge ○ "Don't know what they don't know" ○ Need communication out to public ● Housing (recent completed study) ● Healthcare → standards for pay tied to Medicaid/Medicare and slow to change (10+ years, give or take) ● Resources for fire, police, EMT, etc. ○ Less people going into field ○ Low wages for fire/EMT ○ Muskingum has top pay for police ○ Law enforcement perceptions ● Potential workforce does better using gov't assistance programs that they would lose if employed ● Policy doesn't reflect new generation's mindset ● Transportation ○ Public ○ Long waits/not available when needed ● Workforce – lack of qualified applicants ● Lack of commercial space ❖ Blighted downtowns/empty buildings ❖ Broadband (as compared to USA) ❖ Townships lack water infrastructure ❖ Lack of funding benefactors

	❖ Banks do not invest in their communities anymore/leaders are located outside the county ❖ Youth engagement/lack of input from next generation or opportunities for them to participate ❖ Lack of zoning ❖ Mitigation needed for wetlands and mine lands before they are developable
OPPORTUNITIES	**THREATS**

● Oil/gas/energy
  ○ Multiple upstream companies + investment by companies → philanthropic as well
● Land development, plentiful but needs investment and mine remediation, recognize where there might be opportunities otherwise overlooked
● Tourism
  → Market/communication, build on existing strengths, business development to support it, complemental activities/business to bring people in
● Agriculture
● Wine trails to the Wilds, "wild about wine" – Muskingum, Coshocton and Guernsey
● Redevelopment of airport? (would have to pay back loans)
● Old Washington events and festivals
 	
❖ Invest in natural resources
❖ Service industries such as remote support or call centers
❖ Port Authority
  ○ Small business loans
❖ Remote work
❖ Artificial intelligence
❖ Great Guernsey Trail
  ○ Businesses adapt/diversify to meet needs of users
	● Corporate policies – labor force issues
	● Declining population
	● Lower standard of living/lower socioeconomics
	● Intel → draw workers away
	● Rural areas lack broadband in rest of county
	● Drugs/chemical dependency
	  ○ Foster care/kids lack stability that leads to lower graduation rates
	● Effect on economy if major employer is lost
	● Inflation
	  ○ Costs for improvement
	  ○ Housing interest
	  ○ Cost of construction
	
	❖ Market doesn't support new businesses or restaurants opening
	❖ Artificial intelligence
	❖ 70/77 interchange increases drug users in area
	❖ Voucher school system taking funding from the public rural schools

5.2 Priorities Identification

After discussions with the Planning Commission Chair and Vice Chair, and the stakeholder group, four categories of priorities were identified and the public added specific priorities for each. These categories are workforce, industrial development, business development, and housing. Figure 24 shows a mapped-out version of each category to the relative strength of the priority as indicated by the voting process outlined below.

On August 20, 2024, a public meeting was held to discuss the development of this strategic plan and gain input from the broader community. Approximately, 28 individuals from the community attended the meeting. At the meeting, background on economic and demographic data was given and the community gave suggestions for additional data to include around commuting and other comparisons to the region. Afterwards, the public gave feedback on the SWOT analysis as indicated above. After this, the public was asked to identify priorities for this plan. After this discussion concluded, each person in attendance was given three green dots with which they were able to "vote" or indicate which three listed priorities were the most important to focus on at the current time. Table 10 shows the breakdown of this voting at the public meeting.

The top five priorities identified fall across three of the four categories. In particular, infrastructure for housing and new and affordable middle-income housing was identified as the top two priorities overall. This is followed by industrial development retention and expansion efforts, workforce related youth retention, and mentoring and internships targeted at students. The full breakdown is shown in figure 25.

In addition to the public meeting, the identified stakeholders were also asked to add their input to the priority identification process. These stakeholders consisted of representatives who attended the CIC and Port Authority meetings, the Young Professionals of Guernsey County, and the Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors. Table 11 shows the updated voting counts.

With this new data included, the top five priorities are slightly different. However, they still fall across three of the four categories. In particular, new and affordable housing was by and large chosen as the top priority with 31 votes. In comparison, the second priority, retention and expansion efforts, received just 14 votes. With this data, housing infrastructure fell from the number one priority to third in the ranking. Youth retention remained the fourth priority. Finally, while the fifth priority remains within the workforce category, it shifted to help with childcare. Figure 26 shows this full breakdown.

Figure 24: Treemap of Priority Strength within each Category

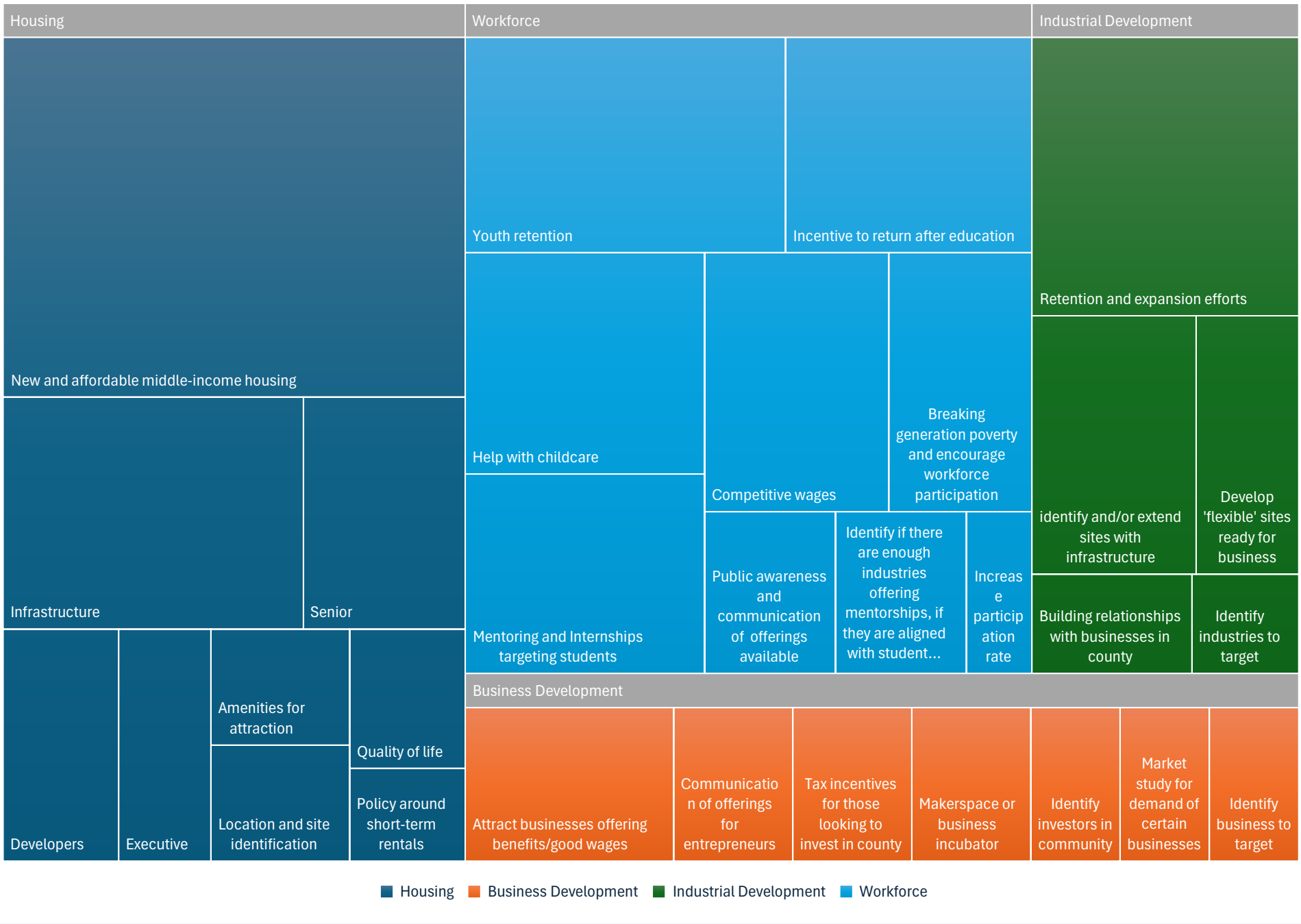


Table 10: Public Meeting Priority Voting

Workforce	
Priority	**Votes**
Mentoring and Internships targeting students	6
Public awareness and communication of offerings available	1
Incentive to return after education	1
Youth retention	6
Increase participation rate	0
Competitive wages	1
Help with childcare	3
Identify if there are enough industries offering mentorships, if they are aligned with student interests	1
Breaking generation poverty and encourage workforce participation	0
Industrial Development	
Priority	**Votes**
Retention and expansion efforts	7
Building relationships with businesses in county	1
identify and/or extend sites with infrastructure	0
Develop 'flexible' sites ready for business	0
Identify industries to target	0
Business Development	
Priority	**Votes**
Communication of offerings for entrepreneurs	2
Identify investors in community	0
Tax incentives for those looking to invest in county	1
Makerspace or business incubator	1
Attract businesses offering benefits/good wages	0
Market study for demand of certain businesses	1
Identify business to target	2
Housing	
Priority	**Votes**
New and affordable middle-income housing	7
Executive	2
Senior	4
Amenities for attraction	0
Infrastructure	10
Location and site identification	1
Developers	2
Incentives	0
Quality of life	1
Policy around short-term rentals	2

Figure 25: Priority Ranking by Community Meeting Votes

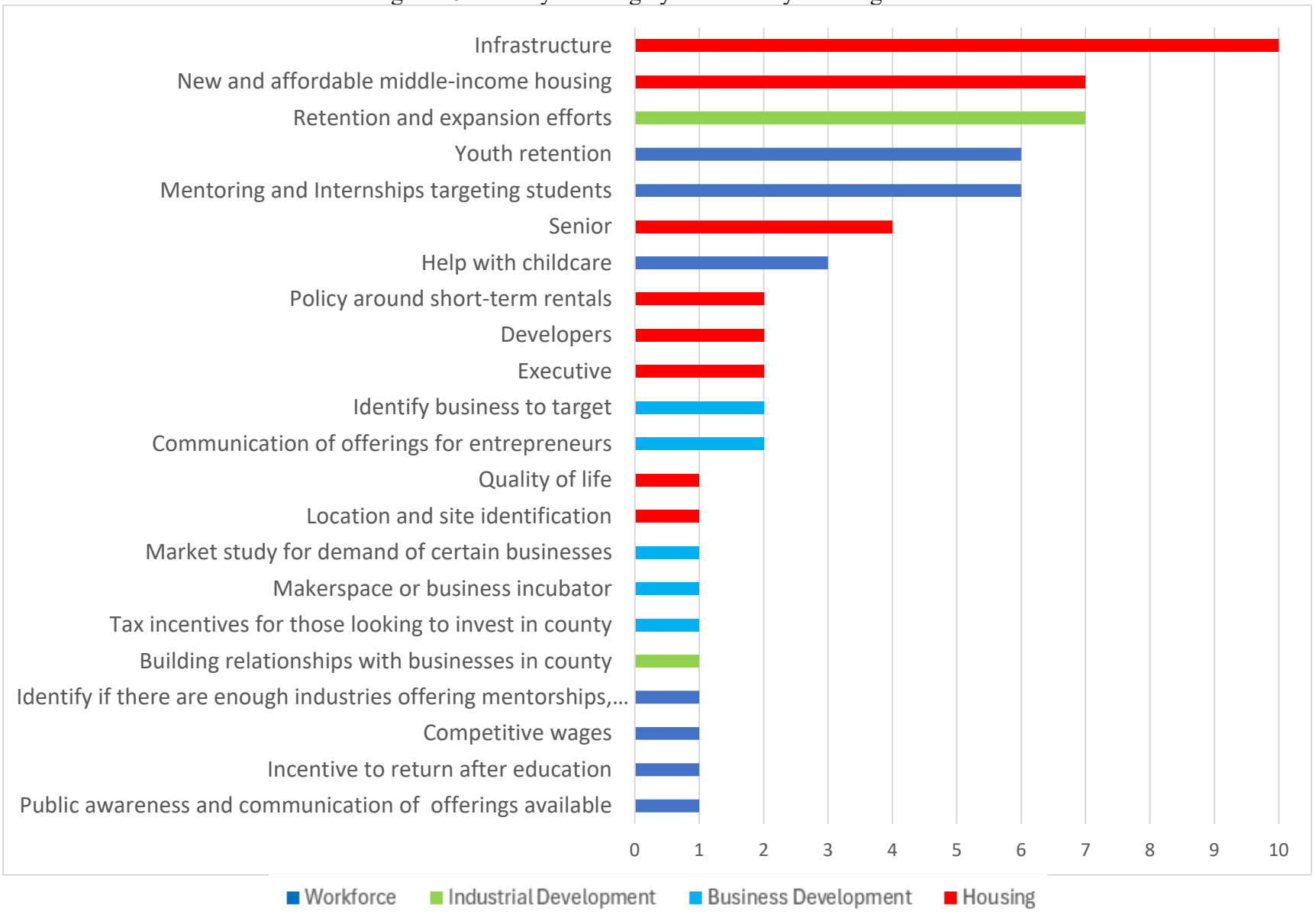


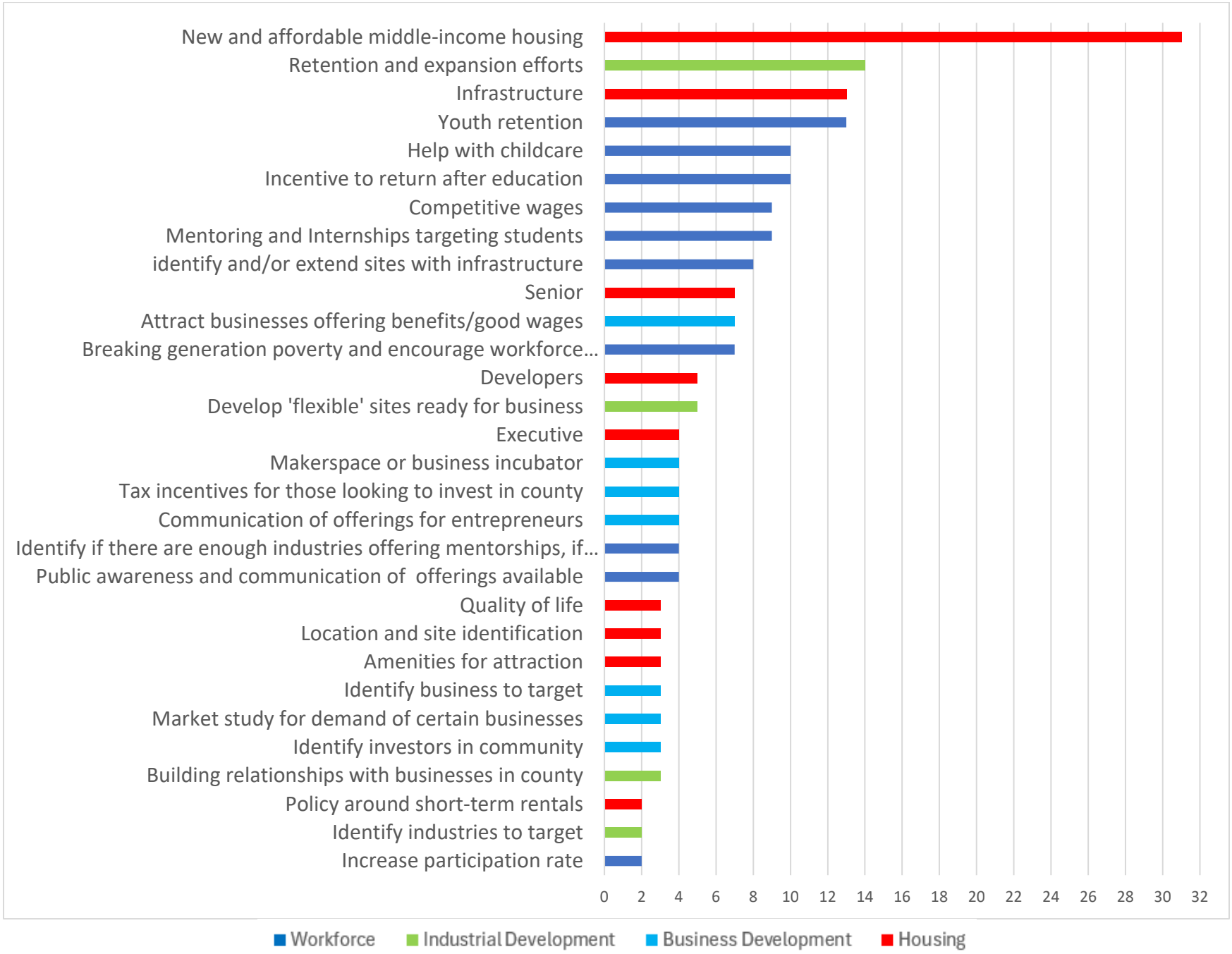
Table 11: All Meetings Priority Voting

Workforce	Public	CIC/Port	Young Professionals	Chamber	Total
Priority			**Votes**		
Mentoring and Internships targeting students	6	2		1	**9**
Public awareness and communication of offerings available	1	1	2		**4**
Incentive to return after education	1	2	3	4	**10**
Youth retention	6	5	1	1	**13**
Increase participation rate	0	2			**2**
Competitive wages	1	4	1	3	**9**
Help with childcare	3	3	2	2	**10**
Identify if there are enough industries offering mentorships, if they are aligned with student interests	1	3			**4**
Breaking generation poverty and encourage workforce participation	0	3	1	3	**7**
Industrial Development	**Public**	**CIC/Port**	**Young Professionals**	**Chamber**	**Total**
Priority			**Votes**		
Retention and expansion efforts	7	5	1	1	**14**
Building relationships with businesses in county	1	1	1		**3**
identify and/or extend sites with infrastructure	0	7		1	**8**
Develop 'flexible' sites ready for business	0	3	1	1	**5**
Identify industries to target	0	1	1		**2**

Business Development	Public	CIC/Port	Young Professionals	Chamber	Total
Priority			**Votes**		
Communication of offerings for entrepreneurs	2	2			**4**
Identify investors in community	0	2	1		**3**
Tax incentives for those looking to invest in county	1	2		1	**4**
Makerspace or business incubator	1	3			**4**
Attract businesses offering benefits/good wages	0	2	1	4	**7**
Market study for demand of certain businesses	1	1	1		**3**
Identify business to target	2	1			**3**

Housing	Public	CIC/Port	Young Professionals	Chamber	Total
Priority			**Votes**		
New and affordable middle-income housing	7	12	7	5	**31**
Executive	2	1		1	**4**
Senior	4	2		1	**7**
Amenities for attraction	0	1		2	**3**
Infrastructure	10	2		1	**13**
Location and site identification	1	1		1	**3**
Developers	2	3			**5**
Incentives	0				**0**
Quality of life	1	1		1	**3**
Policy around short-term rentals	2				**2**

Figure 26: Priority Ranking by All Meetings Votes



6. Priorities

After discussing these results with the CIC leadership, it was determined that the top two priorities that should be focused on were “Housing” and “Youth Retention and Attraction”. The housing priority focuses on four key aspects: infrastructure, engaging landowners, marketing, and education. The Youth Retention and Attraction priority was identified as a critical need for the workforce in the county. This priority identifies four key groups of individuals and strategies to attract and retain them: the college educated, veterans, direct-to-employment individuals, and entrepreneurs. It is important for the county to narrow its focus to these two key priorities that fall within the mission of the CIC. By targeting only two areas, it will help keep the county on task and prevent resources from being spread too thinly. As this plan should be a living document, annual updates on the progress of each priority should be completed. This will also give the CIC and task forces the opportunity to review their current position to determine if new strategies should be added to existing priorities or if it is time to add another priority identified in the preceding section.

6.1 Housing

GOAL:

Encourage development of new housing and better prepare residents for homeownership.

Description & Rationale:

A 2024 Housing Needs Assessment, conducted on behalf of the Cambridge-Guernsey Community Improvement Corporation and Guernsey County Community Development Corporation, showed a need for owner occupied and rental housing. Additionally, information provided by Ohio University’s Voinovich School for Leadership and Public Service showed only about 35% of the county’s housing stock was constructed since 1980 with nearly none constructed after 2020. The lack of available housing options limits the county’s ability to attract new residents. Beyond development of additional housing structures, input from stakeholders and task force members indicate a need to educate those seeking to purchase a home and those entering the rental market to the requirements and acceptable standards for each.

Strategy 1: Infrastructure Documentation & Incentives

Use existing infrastructure information to identify parcels ready for housing development.

Action Steps & Timeline:

- Compare infrastructure maps with vacant land
    - Create map showing vacant land with infrastructure by Q1 2026.
        - Timeline: Q1 2026
        - Owners: Nick Cunnigham
- Educate relevant stakeholders about incentives available for housing development
    - Compile housing incentives document for review by stakeholders by Q4 2025.
        - Timeline: Q4 2025
        - Owners: Bill Arnett – Bricker Graydon (under engagement with Port Authority)

Strategy 2: Engage Landowners

Based on the completion of Strategy #1, contact landowners to discuss willingness to sell properties for housing development.

Action Steps & Timeline:

- Conduct landowner meeting(s) in Q1 2026 to determine landowners' willingness to sell.
    - Hold **two formats**: (a) a county-wide luncheon for big-picture framing, and (b) small-group "parcel clinics" where team sits with owners and walk through maps, comps, and tax scenarios.
    - Bring a professional team, (realtor, attorney, CPA) that can provide any additional info/answer questions.
        - Timeline: Q1 2026
        - Owner: Bill Arnett, attendees to include landowners, representatives from townships, villages, city, and planning commission.

Strategy 3: Market Opportunities for Landowners & Developers

Based on the completion of Strategy #2, provide updated Housing Study and Housing Incentives document to interested landowners and developers.

Action Steps & Timeline:

- Distribute resource materials to landowners and developers who are interested in Q2 2026.
        - Timeline: Q2 2026
        - Owners: Task Force Members
- Distribute resource materials to bankers, home builders and allied industries in Q2 2026.
        - Timeline: Q2 2026
        - Owners: Task Force Members

- Promote availability of new housing resource materials via news releases, online (website), and social media in Q2 2026.
    - Timeline: Q2 2026
    - Owners: Task Force Members and other partner organizations
- Conduct Developer Day Q3 2026
    - Invite interested developers to ride around and see shovel-ready lots (or those pending) and meet with key city and county officials; further presentations on incentives as needed.
        - Timeline: Q3 2026
        - Owners: Task Force Members and other partner organizations

Strategy 4: Education for Potential Buyers and Renters

Make available first-time homebuyer and "Rent Smart" programs for residents.

Action Steps & Timeline:

- Identify lenders who are willing to participate in the first-time homebuyer programs
    - Timeline: Q1 2026.
    - Owners: Task Force Members
- Promote availability first-time homebuyer program via bankers, realtors and other allied industries; plus, online and social media in Q1 2026.
    - Timeline: Q1 2026
    - Owners: Task Force Members
- Conduct first-time homebuyer program in Q2 2026.
    - Timeline: Q2 2026
    - Owners: Task Force Members and Participating Lenders
- Evaluate first-time homebuyer program in Q2 2026 and determine need/desire for additional programs.
    - Timeline: Q2 2026
    - Owners: Task Force Members and Participating Lenders
- Confirm availability for "Rent Smart" Program via OSU-Extension in Q1 2026.
    - Timeline: Q1 2026
    - Owners: Bill Arnett
- Promote availability of "Rent Smart" Program to Cambridge Housing and Guernsey County Landlords Association in Q1 2026.
    - Timeline: Q1 2026
    - Owners: Bill Arnett and Nick Cunningham
- Promote availability of "Rent Smart" Program to the general public via online and social media.
    - Owners: Task Force Members
- Conduct "Rent Smart" Program in Q2 2026.
    - Timeline: Q2 2026
    - Owners: OSU-Extension and Task Force Members

- Evaluate “Rent Smart” Program in Q2 2026 and determine the need/desire for additional programs.
    - Timeline: Q2 2026
    - Owners: OSU-Extension and Task Force Members

How Success Will Be Measured

Consider a public scoreboard updated every six months:

- Parcels moved to “shovel-ready”
- Units permitted/completed (owner-occupied vs. rental)
- Landowners engaged & developers in the pipeline
- Program graduates who close on a home or secure a quality lease

A transparent dashboard sustains political and community buy-in and shows early wins.

6.2 Youth Retention and Attraction

GOAL:

Retain and attract young people to the community.

Description & Rationale:

Research shows Guernsey County, and more broadly, Appalachia Ohio is suffering from “brain drain.” Some of the region’s best and brightest leave the region for education, enlistment or employment opportunities, and a significant percentage do not return. An OSU student conducted a survey of young adults from Ohio’s 32 Appalachian counties as part of a master’s thesis.[18] Of the 383 students, between the ages of 18 – 25, 32.2% migrated outside of Appalachia Ohio and did not return. Further, of the young people who migrated outside of Appalachia Ohio, 71.5% had obtained a degree of higher education versus the regional average of 12.6%. The Youth Retention and Attraction task force created strategies based on four categories of young people often described by educators as students graduate from high school: those who seek further education, enlist in the military, go directly into employment, or start businesses as entrepreneurs.

[18] Allman, M. B. (2025). *“Emerging Adulthood in Appalachian Ohio: The Rural Brain Drain Dilemma.”* [Master's thesis, Ohio State University]. OhioLINK Electronic Theses and Dissertations Center. http://rave.ohiolink.edu/etdc/view?acc_num=osu1752181652687847

Strategy 1: Retain and attract college educated individuals: "achievers."

Encourage college-educated individuals to live and work in Guernsey County by marketing professional opportunities, building partnerships with higher education institutions, and promoting a modern image of the county as an affordable, connected, and opportunity-rich place to build a career and raise a family.

Action Steps & Timeline:

- Complete market research to understand the needs of the community for college educated people.
    - Contact professional associations, i.e., attorneys, accountants to determine need in Guernsey County.
        - Timeline: Q1 2026
        - Owner: Task Force Members
- Contract with DiSalvo Development Partners for additional research related to Location Quotients and business/employee needs.
        - Timeline: Q1 2026
        - Owner: CIC
- Create pamphlets and online marketing messages that can be distributed to colleges/universities around the state and/or country.
        - Timeline: Q2 2026
        - Owner: CIC
- Follow up with the colleges/universities during career days; start with nearby residential campuses, Muskingum and Marietta.
    - Identify volunteer and/or internship opportunities with area non-profits and provide to nearby colleges/universities to help forge connections between students and community.
        - Timeline: Q1 2026
        - Owner: Task Force members
- Reach students from colleges/universities that are not in our "backyard" partnering with local companies who have established internship programs or who routinely visit campuses for recruitment.
        - Timeline: Q1 2026
        - Owner: CIC & Chamber of Commerce
- Change the perception of Guernsey County
    - Complete video (broken into segments) that can be used to market to internal and external audiences.
        - Timeline: Q1 2026
        - Owners: Chamber of Commerce & CIC
- Identify local "champions"/influencers who can capture and promote our area on social media in an organic manner.
        - Timeline: Q1 2026
        - Owners: Task Force members
- Determine the structure for an incentive to encourage attraction of young talent.

        - Timeline: Q4 2025
        - Owners: Task Force Members
- Complete fundraising for the incentive launch.
        - Timeline: Q1 2026
        - Owner: CIC

Strategy 2: Retain and attract military veterans "enlisted or seekers."

Position Guernsey County as a veteran-friendly community by promoting employment opportunities, emphasizing the county's natural amenities and affordability, and partnering with state and local organizations to attract transitioning service members.

Action Steps & Timeline:

- Market the opportunities (jobs) we have in the area for veterans.
    - Determine potential marketing avenues to reach active-duty military members.
        - Timeline: Q1 2026
        - Owners: Task Force Members
- Market what the area has that is appealing to veterans.
    - Hunting/fishing
    - Outdoor space
    - Affordability
    - Easy access to large metros
        - Timeline: Q2 2026
        - Owners: CIC
- Work with the state (JobsOhio) to determine if we can team with them to promote Guernsey county at military bases across the country.
        - Timeline: Q1 2026
        - Owners: CIC
- Work with Guernsey County Veterans Services and local law enforcement to establish other action steps to recruit veterans.
        - Timeline: Q1 2026
        - Owners: Task Force Members, potentially County Commissioners
- Determine the structure for an incentive program to encourage attraction of veterans.
    - Complete fundraising for the incentive to launch.
        - Timeline: Q1 2026
        - Owners: CIC

Strategy 3: Retain and attract direct-to employment individuals

Strengthen local workforce pipelines by connecting students with employers early, expanding exposure to trades and technical careers, and promoting Guernsey County's employment opportunities as viable and rewarding career paths immediately after high school.

Action Steps & Timeline:

- Market the opportunities (jobs) we have in the area for this targeted audience.
- Change the perception of Guernsey County.
- Discuss employment opportunities with students early and often
    - Build on the success of annual Manufacturing Tours and offer tours for younger students.
        - Timeline Q2 2026
        - Owners: Task Force Members / ECO / School Districts
- Consider conducting an employment night modeled after Washington County's Family Career Fest to engage students and their parents and explore options for partnering with the current Guernsey County College and Career Fair.
    - Community representatives will attend the Guernsey County College and Career Fair in Q4 2025 and talk to organizers about partnering or expanding.
    - Community representatives will attend Washington County event in Q4 2025 and meet with organizers to better understand the event's impact.
        - Timeline: Q4 2025
        - Owners: Task Force Members

Strategy 4: Retain and attract entrepreneurs

Foster a supportive ecosystem for entrepreneurs and small business owners through research, training, mentorship, and investment networks that encourage innovation and local business creation.

Action Steps & Timeline:

- Complete market research to determine what is needed in the community.
    - Contract with DiSalvo Development Partners for additional research related to Location Quotients and business/employee needs.
        - Timeline: Q1 2026
        - Owner: CIC
- Promote business incubators and small business counseling
    - Coordinate training and support entrepreneurs via the Midtown Market and CBI.
    - Promote SBDC as a resource for entrepreneurs.
        - Timeline: Q1 2026
        - Owners: Task Force Members
- Create local Shark Tub event based on ECO Shark Tub previously organized by Tusc EDC.

    - Contact Tusc EDC to better understand the process for holding the event and challenges that lead to its cancellation.
        - Timeline: Q4 2025
        - Owner: CIC
- Explore options for creating a local "Angel Investor" group to support startups and early-stage businesses.
    - Contact regional resources to determine existence of other Appalachian-based Angel Investor Groups
        - Timeline: Q4 2025
        - Owner: CIC
    - Research tax and other advantages for investors in Guernsey County (Opportunity Zones).
        - Timeline: Q4 2025
        - Owner: Task Force Members
- Update CIC website and promote its use as a resource for entrepreneurs.
        - Timeline: Q4 2025
        - Owner: Task Force Members

How Success Will Be Measured

The following will be tracked and made available to promote transparency:

- Number of new or returning young residents attracted through education, employment, or incentive programs.
- Participation rates in local internship, mentorship, or apprenticeship programs.
- Employer and educational institution partnerships established to support youth employment and retention.
- Number of veterans connected to local employment or housing opportunities.
- Attendance and outcomes from events such as career fairs or entrepreneurship programs (e.g., Shark Tub).
- Growth in small business startups and participation in entrepreneurship training and counseling programs.
- Social media engagement and outreach metrics tied to marketing campaigns.