Land Use & Development

Vibrant, walkable, mixed-use districts are increasingly popular. How can local governments foster developments that are both fiscally and environmentally sustainable?

The Issues

From the central city of Dayton to the most agricultural townships, the Miami Valley has the full spectrum of community sizes and types. Our Region’s community diversity includes older, first ring suburbs, edge suburbs that continue to annex and grow, historic county seats, rural villages, and townships and unincorporated hamlets. These communities are of different ages, sizes, and exhibit different development patterns. Such diversity makes the Miami Valley a place where seemingly every resident can find a place where they’d like to live, and every business can find a suitable place to locate.

As unique as all our communities are, they all face some of the same region-scale challenges. One such challenge is population. Some communities continue to see population growth, but the region as a
whole has had a barely-perceptible 0.03 percent growth since 1980. Our Region’s median age is also getting older. Between the 2000 and 2010 Census, the median age in each county rose, and in three of the five counties (Darke, Miami, and Preble) the 2010 median age was above 40, which is higher than the national median age. Broader, national trends also affect development planning in the Miami Valley. Communities face the challenge of meeting greater demand for mixed-use, walkable designs for both commercial and residential land uses. Climate change is also becoming a part of the practice of land use planning, as conversations are beginning about how intact ecosystems can help communities mitigate and adapt to climate change.

Planning future land use and development patterns in an era of steady, aging population, climate and weather extremes, and shifting economics is an important and difficult task for local governments. Fortunately, there are tools Miami Valley communities may use to inform the critical decisions to be made about how, and where, individual communities intend to develop in the future. Compiled by the Miami Valley Regional Planning Commission, the Planning Tools page provides planning officials with guides, resource links, and best practices for development of many different types of local plans.

What Communities can do

It may seem a daunting task, but updating community plans, codes, and zoning is a highly effective way to guide development in a manner that reflects community priorities. Some communities have not updated their plans in a long time, and, as studies have documented, while zoning codes can be used to support sustainability goals, older codes tend to incorporate fewer sustainability principles.

The resource lists below present some practices being adopted by local governments. The overall theme is the promotion of more compact, resilient and cost-effective patterns of development.

Community Education & Outreach

- Convene a civic forum series or advisory committee about the land use future of your community. The Going Places framework offers indicators and targets for moving toward greater sustainability. It’s a resource to use while updating a comprehensive land use plan.
- Organize a “Better Block” project to demonstrate ideas for redeveloping a shopping district as a vibrant, walkable place, such as the projects that cities of Akron and Youngstown did in 2015.

Internal operations

- Locate government offices in a mixed-use district with foot traffic to leverage other community assets. For example, the new administration buildings in Xenia and Piqua were placed in those cities’ historic downtowns.
- Provide municipal officials with opportunities to hear about the history and purpose of land-use planning. The Miami Valley Section of the American Planning Association offers an annual Planning and Zoning Workshop on the first Friday of every December, which covers the latest trends in planning.
• Adopt an infrastructure and land-use planning process that considers the long-term sustainability and life-cycle costs of development. The Institute for Sustainable Infrastructure offers Envision, a project assessment tool. The INVEST tool from the Federal Highway Administration evaluates the sustainability of transportation infrastructure.

• Learn about projected weather impacts of climate change, and how green-scaping and protecting local ecosystems can help mitigate and adapt to them.

**Ordinances and policies**

• Review and update your community’s Zoning Code to require, encourage, or at least allow practices related to sustainability.

• Transit-oriented development (TOD) - High quality transit supports development, and dense development supports transit. But this relationship doesn’t happen by accident. It takes planning and the right policies. Greater Cleveland RTA offers guidelines for doing it right. Communities with TOD policies are in a better position to receive capital grants from federal, state and regional authorities for transit, air quality, or brownfields remediation.

• Mixed-use districts — Encouraging mixed-use rather than single-use districts can help create vibrant places with higher property values and can help revitalize areas with outmoded real estate. Ohio-based models include:
  o Mayfield Heights’ [Mixed Use District](#) in its zoning code is an overlay to encourage higher intensity mixed-use development (as an option to the underlying zoning that currently exists on the property).
  o Cleveland’s code for [Urban Form Overlay](#) Districts (to preserve the

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• Envision – Nadja Turek, Woolpert, nadja.turek@wollpert.com, 937.531.1287

• Vacant land re-use — Mike Grauwelman, Montgomery County Land Bank, 937.531.6921, mikeg@mclandbank.com

**Resources**

• Miami Valley Data Commons

• American Planning Association, [Miami Valley Section](#)

• MVRPC [Going Places Initiative](#)

• Miami Valley Regional Planning Commission

• Inclusionary zoning tool kit

• Ohio Balanced Growth Program

• Retrofitting Suburbia by Ellen Dunham-Jones and June Williamson

• Smart Growth America — this includes National Complete Streets Coalition and Institute for Form-Based Codes.

• Transit-supportive density guidance paper
pedestrian-oriented character of unique shopping districts) and Live-Work Overlay Districts.

- Shaker Heights’ Commercial Mixed Use District zoning (see Chapter 1234), which requires designs that “encourage a compact mix of retail, service, office, housing and public activities to coexist in a manner that reflects human scale and emphasizes pedestrian orientation, taking advantage of the convenience provided by multi-modal transportation options and the vitality that mixed uses can bring to a community.”

- **Form-based codes** — there is growing interest in form-based zoning codes, which regulate the form and massing of buildings rather than their uses. While a complete overhaul of zoning is a big project, local communities may want to consider a form-based code for business districts in order to promote the development of walkable districts. [Dublin, Ohio](https://www.dublinohio.gov/) and [New Rochelle, New York](https://www.newrochelle.org/) provide case studies.

- **Inclusionary zoning** — the entire region is stronger and more equitable when all communities offer affordable housing. A model is Montgomery County, MD which has produced 13,000 units of affordable housing while still offering communities an opt out.

- **Density bonuses** — Developers can be incentivized to build in ways that are transit-oriented, mixed-use, and inclusionary by offering density bonuses (increasing the allowable floor area ratio). Cleveland Heights has a special mixed-use zoning overlay district to encourage creative development projects with higher density (see Chapter 1145 of the city code). The American Planning Association has guidance on density bonuses to incentivize the development of affordable housing. Another way to encourage sustainable development practices is with expedited permitting.

- **Cottage development** — One way to encourage attractive housing that’s affordable and relatively dense is to allow cottages in planned unit developments. The units can have shared parking and greenspace.

- **Conservation development** — Communities with larger tracts of undeveloped land and significant natural resources are adopting conservation development codes to encourage the clustering of homes on a portion of the land, thus preserving open space and sensitive natural features and reducing infrastructure costs. Local guidelines are [here](https://www.co.montgomery.md.us/) and [here](https://www.co.montgomery.md.us/). The [City of Fairborn’s 2016 Comprehensive Plan](https://www.cityoffairborn.org/) includes conservation development as a future land use type.

- **Environmental justice** — Consider the impacts of development and infrastructure projects on minority and disadvantaged populations and work to engage such populations in the decision-making process.

- **Health impact assessments** — Consider the health impacts of development and infrastructure projects. [Columbus Public Health](https://www.cph.ohio.gov/) has completed numerous HIA in Franklin County.

- **Development practices to protect water quality** — See the Water Quality chapter and the Ohio Balanced Growth Program’s [Best Local Land Use Practices](https://www.ohiobalancedgrowth.org/).

- **Urban garden zoning** — See Food chapter.

An excellent [checklist](https://www.ohiobalancedgrowth.org/) of recommended codes and policies related to land use has been developed by the [Ohio Balanced](https://www.ohiobalancedgrowth.org/).
Growth Program. It provides guidance for a more thorough review of local codes.

**Broader collaboration**

While home rule allows local governments to make their own land-use plans, these plans are affected by regional market forces and public investments (especially transportation investments). Thus, as communities in the Miami Valley work to ensure their future stability, they should be engaged in regional initiatives, such as:

- The Institute for Livable and Equitable Communities, a joint initiative of the Dayton Foundation, the Del Mar Institute and the Miami Valley Regional Planning Commission
- The Miami Valley Equity Initiative.
- The First Suburbs Consortium of Dayton, Ohio’s efforts to raise awareness of the development and redevelopment needs of the region’s first ring suburban communities.
- The Montgomery County Land Bank’s efforts to deal with blighted properties.
- Long term disaster recovery planning work in the wake of the 2019 tornadoes. This work is being led by the Miami Valley Regional Planning Commission.
- The Ohio Balanced Growth Program’s efforts to promote land use practices that protect water quality.