



The Greene Town Center, Beaver Creek, Ohio

Land Use & Development

Vibrant, walkable, mixed-use districts are increasingly popular and sustainable. 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, townships, and unincorporated hamlets. These communities are of different ages, sizes, and character, with each exhibiting different development patterns. Such diversity makes the Miami Valley a place where all residents can find a community where they desire to live, and every business can find a suitable place to locate.

Even though our communities have unique characteristics, they share regional challenges, such as changes in population. Some communities continue to see population growth, but the region as a whole

has only grown by 0.03 percent since 1980. In addition, our Region's median age is increasing. 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 was higher than the national median age of 37.2. In order to serve our aging population, communities will need to alter the way they plan. For example, as people age, they drive less, especially at night. Our future land use plans must take this into consideration.

Our Region's present development pattern is characterized by urban and suburban sprawl. Sprawl is the expansion of auto-dependent development into rural or less populated areas, creating large distances between residential and commercial uses. To illustrate: our region has roughly the same population as it did in 1970, but 83 percent more developed, urbanized land cover. This trend is unsustainable; it requires a large amount of expensive infrastructure, and eliminates tree canopy.

Luckily, there is a growing demand for vibrant, mixed-use, walkable developments that intermingle commercial and residential land uses. This type of development pattern is highly sustainable, serves the aging population's needs, and creates a sense of community. People of all ages want to live in vibrant front porch style communities, where they can interact with neighbors while leaving their cars behind. They want destinations like cafes, corner markets, and neighborhood parks to be easily accessible by bicycle or on foot. All of the above increase quality of life, reduce sprawl, and minimize community expense in creating and repairing infrastructure.

Climate change is also becoming a land use planning issue. Communities are interested in keeping ecosystems intact, as that can help an area mitigate and adapt to climate change.

Many zoning codes and land use ordinances do not allow for compact, mixed-use developments. Additionally, they provide no guidance in planning for an aging population, climate change, weather extremes, or shifting economics. Communities will need to address these issues when updating their comprehensive plans and zoning codes. Fortunately, there are tools Miami Valley communities can 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 like 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 concerning the desired placement of future land uses in your community. The [Going Places](#) framework offers [indicators and targets](#) for moving toward greater sustainability. It is a good resource to use when 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.
- Create a [pop-up shop event](#) to establish the need for neighborhood corner commercial uses in residential areas.

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.

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- 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

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- 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 does not 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 zoning districts can help create vibrant places with higher property values and can help revitalize areas with outmoded real estate. Ohio-based models include:
 - 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).
 - Cleveland's code for [Urban Form Overlay Districts](#) (to preserve the 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 (site layout) and massing of buildings, parking areas, and landscape areas, rather than the uses of a building or a site. While a complete overhaul of a zoning code 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](#) and [New Rochelle, New York](#) 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 offered incentives to build developments that are transit-oriented, include mixed-uses, or have inclusionary housing, by offering density bonuses (increasing the allowable number of dwelling units per acre). 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 housing development — One way to encourage attractive housing that is affordable and relatively dense is to allow [cottages in planned unit developments](#).
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Cottage homes are relatively small with lots often 3,000 sf or less and they surround a large shared greenspace.

- [Conservation subdivisions](#) — This type of development, coined by author and planner Randall Arendt, “encourages the preservation of environmentally sensitive areas without reducing residential densities.” At least 50%-70% of the environmentally sensitive land, undeveloped greenspace, or agricultural land must be placed in conservation easements in perpetuity. Homes are then clustered on the remaining portions of land, allowing for reduced infrastructure costs.
- Conservation Development – Similar to conservation subdivisions, this style of design requires 40% of the natural area to remain as open space. Conservation easements are not required and the developed area can be residential or non-residential. Local guidelines are [here](#) and [here](#). The [City of Fairborn’s 2016 Comprehensive Plan](#) includes conservation development as a future land use type. The Ohio Balanced Growth Program includes guidelines [here](#).
- [Environmental justice](#) — Consider the impacts of development and infrastructure projects on minority and disadvantaged populations. Work to engage these populations in the decision-making process.
- [Health impact assessments](#) — Consider the health impacts of development and infrastructure projects. [Columbus Public Health](#) 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](#).
- Urban garden zoning — See Food chapter.
- An excellent [checklist](#) of recommended codes and policies related to land use has

been developed by the [Ohio Balanced 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 Montgomery County’s mature and maturing 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.
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