

# 2023 LIBERTY TOWNSHIP, FAIRFIELD COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE LAND USE PLAN

12/18/2023

“This is a pivotal point. Decisions regarding growth and development must strike the appropriate balance among a healthy economy, providing homes for current and future generations, and protecting the County’s agricultural roots and natural landscape.” – (WORKING DRAFT 8/23 FAIRFIELD COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY SECTION 1.1)

The 2023 Liberty Township, Fairfield County Comprehensive Land Use Plan is a comprehensive land use plan that has been developed to guide future growth in this 32,192 acre township over the short term as well as long term.

This document, together with the 2023 Township Zoning Map, attached as **Exhibit “A”**, is necessary due to increased development pressure from the greater Columbus, Ohio metropolitan area to the west of the township and in particular, from the north by the recent and anticipated further development in the area by IT/Tech related industry, including but not limited to Facebook, Amazon, Microsoft, Google and Intel, which will continue to significantly impact Liberty Township, as the middle northern most Fairfield County township. This document is also necessary to clearly state and preserve the Township’s specific goals and plans as they relate to the current Fairfield County Comprehensive Plan, which at this time is in proposed/working draft form.

Liberty Township, as well as much of northern Fairfield County, has seen substantial change over the past decade due to the general unabated outward expansion of the greater Columbus, Ohio metropolitan area. Growth of Pickerington to the west, Buckeye Lake to the east and the I-70 corridor affecting Fairfield County to the immediate north are also factors influencing the planning of Liberty Township’s future growth. Through this document, Township leaders hope to mitigate the effects of future development on the township while maintaining the rural and agricultural nature that community residents want to protect. At times, the future vision for a community contrasts with an individual property owner’s view of the best use of their land. The Zoning Department and Board of Trustees that are responsible for creating this document are aware of these issues and have worked very hard to strike a well conceived balance between the two.

Public sentiment has played a large role in the development of this document. Residents of Liberty Township offered their thoughts and opinions concerning future development at two public meeting on February 27, 2023 at the VFW Hall and on September 13, 2023, at Liberty Union-Thurston High School, both hosted by the Board of Trustees. The information gathered through this process served as the primary guide for decisions made during this planning effort.

Within the body of this document, goals and strategies to achieve them have been developed. The information in this document will provide direction for township officials to follow to achieve those goals. Additionally, a future land use plan has been developed that describes how the township could possibly grow over the next 20 years. This plan will help the township trustees and other community members make important development and zoning decisions for years to come.

The plan has been organized into the following sections:

**INTRODUCTION and OVERVIEW**

**COMMUNITY CHARACTER**

**History**

**Community Services**

**Transportation/Roadways**

**Law Enforcement/Fire**

**Parks and Recreation**

**Waste Disposal**

**Cemeteries**

**Other Services**

**Township Government**

**Revenue**

**Home Rule**

**Facilities**

**Functions, equipment, and employees**

**Zoning**

**Schools**

**PLAN CHAPTER**

## **INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW OF STUDY AREA**

Not only will this plan supply decision makers with information, it could possibly also provide an overall view of the township in twenty years. The comprehensive plan could be used as a guide when deciding on future development within Liberty Township.

Provided in this document are facts, figures, maps, goals and objectives that the township trustees, zoning inspector, zoning commission, zoning appeals board, developers, and citizens could use in evaluating decisions that will impact the township today, tomorrow and into the future. The Ohio Revised Code, Section 519.02, empowers the township board of trustees to establish zoning regulations in the interest of public health and safety, in accordance with a comprehensive plan. This document will serve as the basis and rationale for future zoning decisions that are made in this community.

A major objective of this plan is to provide a policy guide and statement of goals for the future development of Liberty Township. This plan provides a development blueprint, not only for community officials, but also for developers and businesses interested in locating in the community.

This plan is designed with the unincorporated Liberty Township in mind. The Village of Baltimore lies almost entirely within the township but are separate entities with their own governing structure.

The boundaries of the planning area are more or less Licking County to the north, the Village of Baltimore municipal boundary and Walnut Township to the east, Greenfield and Pleasant Townships to the south and Violet Township to the west.

### **LIBERTY TOWNSHIP: A BRIEF HISTORY**

Liberty Township was named after the philosophical concept of liberty by the first settlers who were from Switzerland. They had emigrated from a land where their "liberties" were restricted and they had a desire to perpetuate the change of their new found freedom in America.

Liberty Township was first established in 1805. Prior to 1805, it had been a part of Greenfield Township. It was by proclamation of the Northwest Territories Governor Aurthur St. Clair, that Fairfield County was established on December 9, 1800, at which time, the county contained nearly all of present day Fairfield, Licking and Knox Counties and portions of present day Perry, Hocking and Pickaway Counties.

For the majority of its existence, Liberty Township has existed as an agricultural community. In 1822-1823 the surveying for the Ohio Canal was taking place. Along that survey line small villages were being laid out. In 1824 in Liberty Township on the south side of the proposed canal a "town" named New Market was born. On the north side was Rome in 1825. These two villages united and became Baltimore. March of 1825 the village of Basil was formed. Later, Baltimore combined with Basil to become what we know today as the Village of Baltimore.

In the last half of the twentieth century, the township began transitioning into a rural bedroom community with a strong agricultural presence. The township is at a point in history where strong agricultural, residential and business contingents all exist in the township and the goal is

to balance them to form a self-sustaining viable community that we all can be proud to call home.

## **COMMUNITY SERVICES**

### **TOWNSHIP ROADS**

Care and maintenance of the township road system is the largest function of townships today. The Township maintains 55.5 miles of roadway. The maintenance of these roads and road right-of-ways includes paving, repairs, snow/ice removal, ditching, and mowing per requirements of the Ohio Department of Transportation and the Ohio Revised Code. Section 6 and 30R are designated MS4 (Municipal Separate Storm Sewer Systems) which require specific OEPA protocols on stormwater. This is a population driven designation, and the County and Township should be aware these permit requirements will likely be applied to larger areas if population increases.

### **LAW ENFORCEMENT**

A board of township trustees has the authority to employ local law enforcement officers and set up a law enforcement district. They are required to apprehend law-breakers in the township and county and they also execute warrants, writs and other legal processes throughout the county.

The Village of Baltimore has its own independent police department.

Liberty Township currently uses the Fairfield County Sheriff's Department for law enforcement.

### **FIRE PROTECTION AND EMS**

Ohio law permits townships to provide fire protection directly or by contract with townships, municipalities and other jurisdictions in order to protect lives and property efficiently. Liberty Township works jointly with Fairfield County to operate the Basil Joint Fire District for fire protection and EMS services.

### **PARKS AND RECREATION**

A board of township trustees may purchase, appropriate, construct, enlarge, improve, repair or equip township parks.

The board may buy suitable land and material, accept a gift, use township funds or levy a tax. If an additional tax is required, it must be submitted to the voters for approval. A township park district may also be established, although the district must be approved by electors of the township, and when established, is run by an appointed board of park commissioners. A park district is a separate political subdivision with taxing authority. Liberty Township currently does not operate any parks. The Fairfield County Park District currently operates 2 parks within the Township, being Smeck Park and Wagner Preserve.

## ZONING

Zoning is the regulation of the use of land and buildings that permit a community to control the development of its territory. It provides for orderly growth by protecting homes and property from harmful use on neighboring properties.

Any zoning restriction must have a reasonable relationship to public health, safety, comfort, convenience, prosperity or general welfare. Ohio law provides for the submission of a zoning plan to the electors of a township and also provides for the administration, enforcement and amendment of the zoning plan if it is adopted. Liberty Township has used zoning authority since 1960 when zoning was approved by township voters.

## WASTE DISPOSAL

Due to the tremendous increase in population, government units in general, across Ohio face a waste disposal problem. Townships are authorized to provide waste disposal services to residents. It may collect and dispose of garbage or it may contract with other political subdivisions for such services. Liberty Township does not contract currently with any waste disposal service provider and residents contract for such services independently.

## CEMETERIES

Townships in Ohio manage more than 1,800 cemeteries. Voters must approve the purchase or appropriation of land for a cemetery, but once it is established, the township trustees have the authority and obligation to sell plots, set up service fees, maintain the cemetery and provide for expansion. Liberty Township currently maintains 10 of 33 cemeteries located within the Township.

## OTHER TOWNSHIP FUNCTIONS

Liberty Township trustees also have responsibility for ditches, roadway drains and other surface water and the control of weeds and brush. Trustees also have authority to erect monuments to commemorate those who died in the service of their country. The Board of Township Trustees may provide artificial lighting when it is determined that public safety requires such lighting. The township may install its own lighting system or contract with an electric company. Currently, the Township does not provide any lighting services. The Township has responsibility for the supervised control of noxious weeds within the township pursuant to Ohio Revised Code sections 5579.04, 5579.08, 4959.11, 971.33-971.35, and 731.51-731.53.

## **TOWNSHIP GOVERNMENT**

### TOWNSHIP REVENUE

Townships receive revenue from local property taxes (although raises in property tax must be approved by voters) and from the gasoline and motor vehicle license taxes, as well as local government money from the state.

## OHIO HOME RULE

Townships possess only those powers expressly delegated to them by statute, or those which are reasonably implied from those delegated, which include the powers previously mentioned. In general, townships do not possess broad police powers or the ability to provide for public health. An exception to this general rule is found in Chapter 504 of the Ohio Revised Code, which permits townships with at least 5,000 residents in the unincorporated area to adopt a limited home rule government. If adopted, limited home rule townships may exercise "all powers of local self government," subject to certain exceptions. Such authority is limited to the unincorporated areas of the township and resolutions of the township may only be enforced by civil fines up to \$1,000. The Township currently does not have limited home rule.

## TOWNSHIP FACILITIES

The Liberty Township Hall, located at 2095 Reynoldsburg-Baltimore Rd., is an approximately 2,400 sq. ft. building. The Township also owns a maintenance building at 2060 Reynoldsburg-Baltimore Rd., which is an approximately 3,456 sq. ft. building. These two properties total roughly 9.5 acres.

## TOWNSHIP FUNCTIONS, EQUIPMENT, AND EMPLOYEES

The Liberty Township Road Department has three full-time employees.

Responsibilities include paving, berming, and ditching the township roads; mowing township right-of-way and grounds; snow/ice removal; removal of debris (trees, dead animals, etc.) from roads; and other physical labor needed by the township.

The Liberty Township Zoning Department has one part time zoning inspector, whose responsibilities include inspections and enforcement of the zoning resolution and staff reports to the BZA, Zoning Commission, and Township Trustees regarding land-use planning and zoning.

## JOINT FUNCTIONS:

Fire protection for the Township is supplied by the Basil Joint Fire District, in cooperation with Fairfield County.

Law enforcement is supplied by the Fairfield County Sheriff's Department.

## TOWNSHIP TRUSTEE APPOINTED COMMITTEES AND THEIR FUNCTION(S)

Boards Comprised of Township Appointees Only:

ZONING COMMISSION: Pursuant to ORC 519.04, Duties of the Zoning Commission The Commission's duties include:

1. Initiate proposed amendments of the zoning resolution.

2. Review all proposed amendments to this resolution and make recommendations to the board of township trustees.
3. Review all planned unit developments and planned rural business community service districts and make recommendations to the board of township trustees as provided in this resolution.
4. Review all proposed changes to the official zoning map and make recommendations to the board of township trustees as specified in Article 6.
5. Review all proposed changes to the Comprehensive Land Use Plan and Future Land Use Map and make recommendations to the board of township trustees.
6. Serve as an architectural review commission to enforce compliance with any zoning standards adopted and pertaining to landscaping or architectural elements as delegated by the board of trustees per O.R.C.

#### BOARD OF ZONING APPEALS

In exercising its duties, the board may, as long as such action is in conformity with the terms of the zoning resolution, reverse or affirm, wholly or partly, or modify the order, requirement, decision, or determination appealed from and make such order, requirement, decision, or determination as ought to be made, and to that end shall have the powers of the zoning inspector from whom the appeal is taken. A quorum of the board and the concurring vote of a majority of the board in attendance shall be necessary to reverse any order, requirement, decision, or determination of the zoning inspector, or to decide in favor of the applicant on any matter upon which it is required to pass under this resolution or to effect any variation in the application of this resolution.

For the purpose of this resolution, that board has the following specific responsibilities:

1. To hear and decide appeals where it is alleged there is an error in any order, requirement, decision, interpretation, or determination made by the zoning inspector.
2. To authorize such variances from the terms of this resolution as will not be contrary to the public interest, and enforcement of the zoning resolution will result in practical difficulties and so that the spirit (intent) of the zoning resolution shall be observed and substantial justice done.
3. To grant conditional use permits as specified in the official schedule of district regulations and under the conditions specified in Article XI as well as additional safeguards specified by Board of Zoning Appeals in order to uphold the intent of the zoning resolution.

District Advisory Council (DAC): The township trustees appoint one member to this board, which oversees the legislative functions involving water and sewer facilities in the Fairfield County Water & Sewer District.

Basil Joint Fire District Board: The township trustees appoint one trustee to sit on the fire board, which has legislative authority of the joint fire district. The Basil Joint Fire District is comprised of

several government entities. Each entity appoints an elected public official to sit on the fire board, so that each entity is represented in the management of the fire district.

Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Policy and Commission Committees: The trustees appoint one person to serve as the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC) representative on these committees. MORPC includes 44 local governments that represent over 1.6 million citizens in the Central Ohio region. MORPC works for the overall improvement of the region, discussing regional issues and developing collaborative partnerships to address them. MORPC also serves as the federally-designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for Franklin, Delaware, and parts of Fairfield and Licking Counties. In this role, MORPC develops regional plans and policies to enhance mobility, reduce congestion, and meet air quality standards.

## **SCHOOL SYSTEMS**

Within Liberty Township there are the following school districts that serve the students of this community: Bloom Carroll Local, Liberty Union, Pickerington Local, Southwest Licking Local and Walnut Township Local.

Additionally, the Eastland Vocational and Fairfield Career Center School offers area students the opportunity to gain career-specific training as an alternative to traditional high school education. School district boundaries do not change with annexation of land, those boundaries stay fixed.

## **POPULATION AND HOUSING**

In 2020, the population of Liberty Township was 8,214. As the number of residents and businesses increase in the adjacent communities, the amount of traffic in and around Liberty Township will increase.

The township has seen a steady increase in the number of zoning permits issued over the past decade and expects the numbers to continue to increase.

Another statistic to review when examining the makeup of a community is the age distribution of its inhabitants. This can give an idea of the services and facilities that may be needed, especially for the young and old populations. Children will need schools, and the elderly may need more care and access to health facilities. The median age in Liberty Township is 38.4 years old, which roughly mirrors Fairfield County as a whole. Roughly 22% of the Township population are School-age children. It is difficult to tell whether this group will stay in the community or leave to live somewhere else. It should be assumed that some will leave to go to college or find jobs elsewhere. It is important that the community remains attractive to the next generation so people will want to stay or move into Liberty Township.

## **EDUCATION AND INCOME**

According to the 2020 Census, Liberty Township has 29.4% of residents having attained a bachelor's degree or higher. Median household income for the Township was \$83,333.00 in 2020. In general, these levels are comparable with the state of Ohio as a whole.

## **TRAVEL TIME TO WORK**

A large percentage of Township residents commute outside of the Township for employment based on community input. In many cases, they have specifically relocated to Liberty Township to allow them to live in a rural/agricultural setting, escaping the cramped and confining nature of urban or traditional



suburban living and the travel time required to employment outside of the Township and even the County is acceptable and in fact preferred. These residents rely on the Township to provide reliable traffic routes to allow them to make their necessary work commutes. They also are relying on the Township to maintain the bucolic nature of their domiciles, for which they are willing to commute to.

## **NATURAL RESOURCES**

### Township Flood Hazard Areas

A floodplain is any land area susceptible to inundation by floodwaters from any source. Floodplains are measured in terms of the amount of storm water it takes to cover them. Storm events are measured in years such as five-year, 10-year, 20-year, 50-year, 100-year, and 500-year. The standard measurement is the 100-year storm and floodplain. A 100-year floodplain is the land area having a one percent annual chance of flooding in any given year as determined by FEMA FIS studies.

The 100-year floodplain is somewhat of a misnomer however, because an area could have a 100-year flood two years in a row—unlikely, but possible.

The floodplain map, attached hereto as **Exhibit “B”**, shows the floodplains of Liberty Township as determined by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) on their Flood Insurance Rate Map (FIRM). Lending institutions use FIRM maps to determine the need of flood insurance for structures. Because floodplains were carved by streams and rivers, and are prone to flooding, they are an important planning consideration. Any development within floodplains can effect the direction, flow, and level of the watercourse during periods of high water or flooding. In other words, if fill material is placed or a house is constructed in a floodplain, it will alter the boundaries of the floodplain downstream. This is because structures or fill take up valuable space that would otherwise act as a natural retaining area for floodwaters to spread into and slow. Enough fill or development could change the probability of flooding downstream from one in 100 each year, to one in 75 or less. Development and careless filling of floodplains have increased flooding in this nation, as seen in many parts of the country, including the Great Mississippi Flood of 1993. Not only does development in the floodplain increase dangers downstream, developments in the floodplain are at higher risk of damage due to flooding. This damage includes fill material and debris from destroyed structures upstream colliding with structures in the flood plain downstream. Many bridges are washed out in floods because house and construction debris clog their free-flow area, compromising their structural integrity. Because of the potential for public and private damage, loss of life, and insurance rate decisions all are affected by materials and structures in floodplains. Ohio Counties have tightened regulations for floodplains in the last couple of decades. Permits must be obtained from the Fairfield County Planning Commission before any development, including filling and excavating, can take place in known 100-year floodplains.

Protecting floodplains from development offers several benefits in addition to reducing the risk of loss of property and life. Floodplains are natural floodwater storage areas. They reduce the impact of any given storm, slowing the water so it does not become a flash flood. Floodplains are prime areas where groundwater is replenished. Thus the type of land use activity that occurs in these areas must not pollute the surface water, as it will serve as a source of aquifer replenishment.

Further protection of the floodplains through township zoning will help protect unsuspecting residents from personal danger and loss of property. One way to help is using floodplain areas as open space.

Passive recreation areas are also well suited for these areas, since no structures or filling is needed for these activities. In recent years there are numerous areas in which a floodplain has been used for open space, such as recreational fields. When flooding occurs, there is little property damage, since there are no habitable structures on the property.

Many soil properties, such as depth to the seasonal high water table, slope permeability, and depth to bedrock, can limit urban development. Wet basements, malfunctioning onsite sewage disposal systems, erosion on construction sites, and flooding are problems if soil features are ignored. Within the township, special attention should be paid to shallow excavations, construction of dwellings and commercial buildings, local roads and streets, and lawn and landscaping. These items benefit by identifying the soil type in the initial planning stages. When researching the type of soil found within a site, the National Resource Conservation Service and the Fairfield County Soil and Water Conservation District are valuable resources in determining soil type.

Careful attention should be given to Township areas where the soil may be less suitable for development and where agriculture is the higher and better use. Building on these soils can lead to problems, such as building collapse and ground water contamination. During construction, proper grading must be done to allow water flow in the proper direction, as well as to ensure the building is not on soil that is high in plasticity or with a high organic content.

Liberty Township has productive farmland that has not been developed. Preserving this is a primary Township goal. While many factors determine agricultural productivity, soil make-up plays a key role in this equation. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) considers certain soils to be productive farmland soils, based on their crop yield potential with regard to minimal input of energy and economic resources. Further, soils which are considered to be productive farmland soils must be best suited to produce food, feed, forage, fiber, and oilseed crops. The USDA as well as the Fairfield Soil and Water Conservation District (see their Memorandum dated August 10, 2023) has identified these soils because the supply of farmland in general is limited (see the Fairfield Soil and Water Conservation District's letter/Memorandum dated August 10, 2023). As of the Fall of 2023, Liberty Township has 133 farms enrolled in the Agricultural District with a total of 26,146.19805 acres enrolled in County C.A.U.V.

Land that has the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing food, feed, forage, fiber, and oilseed crops is also available for these uses in the Township. It has the soil quality, growing season, and moisture supply needed to produce economically sustained high yields of crops when treated and managed according to acceptable farming methods, including water management.

In general, productive Township farmlands have an adequate and dependable water supply from rain or irrigation, a favorable temperature and growing season, acceptable acidity or alkalinity, acceptable salt and sodium content, and few or no rocks. They are permeable to water and air. Productive farmlands are not excessively erodible or saturated with water for long periods of time, and they either do not flood frequently or are protected from flooding. Township residents have voiced their desire to continue an agricultural way of life in this community. Looking at the Township Zoning Map may help local leaders determine proper land use patterns and allowed development density in different parts of the community.

## **TOWNSHIP WETLANDS**

Wetlands are important resources for several reasons. First, many unique plants and animals make their homes in these areas. Second, wetlands supply valuable groundwater recharge by acting as filters for surface runoff percolating back into the aquifers below. Third, wetlands are an important resource because they serve to join surface and groundwater sources, which can improve stream flow during drought periods. Fourth, during rainy periods, wetlands can absorb excess water, and then discharge it slowly back into the surrounding land, averting potential flood damage. Finally, wetlands are a valuable natural resource.

Although large-scale benefits of functions can be valued, determining the value of individual wetlands is difficult because they differ widely and do not all perform the same functions or perform functions equally well. Decision-makers must understand that impacts on wetland functions can eliminate or diminish the value of wetlands.

According to the federal Clean Water Act, anyone who wants to discharge dredged or fill material into the waters of the U.S., regardless of whether on private or public property, must obtain a Section 404 permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) and a Section 401 Water Quality Certification (WQC) from the State of Ohio.

The 401 Water Quality Certification and Isolated Wetland Permit reviewers evaluate applications for projects that would physically affect waters of the state, including streams, lakes and wetlands. Section 404 of the Clean Water Act (33 USC 1344) requires authorization from the Secretary of the Army, acting through the Corps of Engineers, for the discharge of dredged or fill material into any waters of the United States, including wetlands. Discharges of fill material generally include, without limitation: placement of fill that is necessary for the construction of any structure, or impoundment requiring rock, sand, dirt, or other material for its construction; site-development fills for recreational, industrial, commercial, residential, and other uses; causeways or road fills; dams and dikes; artificial islands; property protection or reclamation devices such as riprap, groins, seawalls, breakwaters, and revetments; beach nourishment; levees; fill for intake and outfall pipes and underwater utility lines; fill associated with the creation of ponds; and any other work involving the discharge of fill or dredged material. A Corps permit is required whether the work is permanent or temporary. Examples of temporary discharges include dewatering of dredged material prior to final disposal, and temporary fills for access roadways, cofferdams, storage and work areas.

## **TOWNSHIP CREEKS AND STREAMS**

Riparian corridors are very important to the diversity of an ecosystem. They serve as a way for nature to filter harmful chemicals and sediment, provide important habitat and take up important nutrients that refresh the ground water supply. Several streams exist in Liberty Township. During development review, the township and the Fairfield County Regional Planning Commission should work together to save these riparian corridors. Later in the plan, ideas are presented on ways to protect these delicate areas.

Poplar Creek flows to the south starting at the northern township border in the western side of the Township.

Walnut Creek flows from east to west in the southern portion of the Township and Pawpaw Creek flows from north to south in the eastern part of the Township. These and the various other intermittent

creeks of the Township are shown on **Exhibit "B"**. The Northeast portion of the Township drains into the sensitive Buckeye Lake basin.

## **WATER QUALITY, AND WATERSHEDS**

Typical higher density housing developments employ a retention or detention pond to act as a storm-water management structure. MS permit overlap/OEPA requirement for water quality.

Watersheds are characterized by the location of the pour-point, or mouth, of the main flow of water to which all other points of flow join and eventually drain from the watershed. Some of the rainfall in the area of a watershed will flow on top of the ground or find its way via underground water paths to the stream in the watershed. Some of the water will evaporate, be used by people or plants, or be held in the soil or underground.

Watersheds are dynamic places, becoming alternately wet and dry due to high water and low rainfall conditions, with many differences in quality and flow, depending on the season, the year, and even with what happens during a single storm. This is best illustrated by examining the components of the hydrologic cycle.

In a watershed, activities on the land interact with the natural hydrologic cycle. Important nutrients and chemicals are circulated throughout the watershed's system and supply a basic nutritional source for aquatic (fish, aquatic insects, etc.) and terrestrial (birds, small mammals, etc.) species.

People also use these environments to grow food. Where and how these human activities occur have major effects on the movement of water, water quality, and the quality of the natural habitat that remains. Ideally, we want watersheds that continue to function as healthy ecosystems and serve as productive systems for people.

Public officials, land use planners, builders and developers need to consider these factors in relation to the region in which they are building communities and the land use occurring within that region, for what happens there affects what occurs at the local level. In other words, groundwater resources do not stop at the political entity's border; they have their own distinct region known as a watershed, for which they serve and are affected by. Therefore, it is important for officials, land use planners, builders and developers in these regions to work together to ensure water resources and the quality of those resources is available and healthy for all.

Two major factors contributing to groundwater quality and availability are density and land use. Zoning densities that allow too many new homes in an aquifer recharge area can lead to contamination of groundwater from septic systems. When areas of widespread impervious cover (such as big box retail and large warehousing or facilities, with their extensive rooftops and parking areas) are sited atop groundwater recharge areas, aquifers fail to replenish at their normal rate, resulting in depleted groundwater supplies. These are harmful effects that poorly managed development can have on the quality, quantity, and availability of our water resources.

In addition to density, a community needs to consider the types of land uses that are occurring in areas susceptible to ground water pollution, limited recharge, and low yield. Areas of low yield should have lower density development when served by on-site water and wastewater systems, because the ground

water resources are not sufficient to meet the demand. Additionally, these areas are not going to be suitable for business or manufacturing processes, which require large quantities of water.

Areas susceptible to ground water pollution should consider not allowing such uses as manufacturing of hazardous substances and materials, on-site storage of hazardous substances and materials, junk yards, petroleum product manufacturing, vehicle maintenance shops, or fueling stations, laundries and dry cleaners, electronic and other equipment manufacturing, metal plating industry and other uses involving high toxicity risks including prior drained hydric soils.

### **DRINKING WATER PROTECTION**

The Township residents rely on private water wells primarily and therefore has a high susceptibility to contamination of aquifers. The water resources are important to a comprehensive planning effort to ensure they are not compromised by future development. The Township strives to protect the residents drinking water sources. One goal of this plan is to limit the future expansion of uses that could cause harm to this valuable resource.

Liberty Township may consider implementing a Wellfield Protection Zoning District. This district should be implemented as an overlay district, which replicates the Ohio EPA's mapped five-year Protection Zone for the District's water wells.

### **COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT**

Members of the township through Township Trustee meetings and general canvassing by the Board have allowed the community to voice their thoughts and opinions regarding the future development of the Township.

The data received from these public meetings, helped to shape the land-use recommendations of this plan. The Zoning Commission and Board of Trustees relied heavily on this input to make decisions regarding the future development of our community.

Listed in the following Plan Chapter are some of the most notable aspects that were drawn as a result of the community responses.

### **PLAN CHAPTER**

The plan chapter represents a culmination of the work that has been done during the planning process. The information in this section of the plan will be used as a guide to bring the vision and goals of this community into reality. The plan chapter will help guide the future development of various types of land uses as well as the infrastructure and facilities needed to support all facets of the township.

Included here are maps that indicate places in the township that are considered most suitable for different land uses. Along with those maps are descriptions of those uses and the elements that should be incorporated in their makeup. Also included in this section are "concepts" that can be used to stimulate ideas for future projects.

The recommendations in this chapter are based on community survey results, as well as citizen input from public meetings held over the course of this project. This chapter should serve as the basis for zoning decisions in the future. It should not, however, hinder the zoning commission, board of zoning appeals or the township trustees from making decisions that will benefit the future success of the

township. It should be used to guard against unguided or ill-conceived development that would have a negative affect on Liberty Township, while providing concrete solutions to work toward the greater good of this community.

## **VISION STATEMENT**

Liberty Township, like many other unincorporated areas, has long enjoyed a proud rural history. The rural makeup of this community serves as the fundamental basis for the strong desire within the Township to maintain as much of that history as possible. With the passage of time, urban areas extend their reach into the untouched areas of our landscape. If this development continues, unrestrained by the Township itself, the rural nature of Liberty Township will fade. This plan seeks to properly plan for future growth to make sure that doesn't happen. The residents of Liberty Township treasure its rural heritage and seek to maintain it far into the future. For new residents, the rural nature of the community has repeatedly been voiced as a main reason for their relocation to Liberty Township.

To fulfill the promise of a continued rural lifestyle in Liberty Township, steps must be taken to ensure that goal is realized. A balance of different land uses will be critical to the future health and well being of this community. By diversifying the makeup of land use in the community, Liberty Township will be able to adequately provide needed services to its residents without overburdening the township budget. The township should strive to be self-sufficient and encourage the development of services to meet the needs of its residents. Most importantly, these steps will help to build upon the strong rural foundation already existing within this community.

## **LAND USE**

### **BALANCE OF LAND USES**

An important consideration when developing the future land use map is the cost that each type of land use incurs in terms of community services. It is important for a community to balance the types of land uses that it has in its jurisdiction. Thought should be given to the costs versus revenues for each type of land use. The American Farmland Trust has participated in Cost of Community Services studies in at least 151 communities since 1980. Liberty Township has participated in these studies. Over the course of these studies, findings suggest that residential development does not generate as much revenue as it costs a community for services, while industrial/commercial uses and working and open lands have generated fiscal surpluses. The Farmland Trust contends that communities pay a high price for unplanned growth, and scattered development frequently causes traffic congestion, air and water pollution, loss of open space and increased demand for costly public services. For this reason, it is important to understand the relationships between residential and commercial growth, agricultural land use, conservation lands and the communities' bottom line. The planning committee recognizes this fact and has attempted to balance the types of land uses found on the future land use map for the Township.

Township officials should review this document with potential developers, and work with them to create projects that meet the vision and intent set forth in these pages. However, this document should not prohibit the zoning commission, board of zoning appeals and the township trustees from being flexible and creative when working with those who want to locate businesses and homes in the community. It is important that future development compliments existing infrastructure and community facilities. Any

development that happens in Liberty Township should benefit both the community and the property owner, with minimal financial and physical consequences to the Township and its residents.

There will be occasions where deviating from the future land use map will be appropriate and in the best interest of this community. When and if officials choose to deviate from this plan, sound reasoning must be employed. It should be shown that school systems have enough capacity, and that adequate infrastructure, such as roads and water and sewer services, would support further development. It should also be shown that the proposed development will not negatively impact the rural character of the community. Finally, it should be shown that the proposed development will not unduly impact surrounding residents and property owners who have made investments based on the current zoning district designation.

## **FOCUS AREAS**

To best understand the land use recommendations of this plan, the township has been divided into three sections. Each of these areas has its own unique qualities, meaning the future vision for each of them will differ from the others. The following narrative further describes each section and how it should develop in the future.

### **WEST CORRIDOR SECTION**

The Western Corridor, spanning Liberty Township from north to south, is a defining area for this community. Therefore, careful thought and well-conceived strategies have been employed by the Liberty Township Trustees in creating a plan for this part of the township. The planning committee recognizes the importance of this corridor and has developed a future land use map and land use narrative with the whole community in mind.

As with any other rural community on the fringe of sprawling development, Liberty Township is faced with challenges. Typical concerns, such as increased traffic, annexation, unattractive future development and loss of rural environment are a part of the land use conversation in this community. The Liberty Township Planning Committee has acknowledged these issues and has made decisions that it feels will protect the Township from unfettered and unguided development.

### **NORTH CORRIDOR SECTION**

The North Corridor Section is the northern most portion of the Township, with impact from I-70 . Two areas of this section are the predominant areas of the Township, conducive to commercial use. The area shown on the future land use map is located in the areas of SR 310 and the SR 204 and SR 158 and Blacklick Rd., NW area.

Future industrial development in the township should primarily be considered in the areas designated in this section as zoned for industrial and manufacturing growth. Also in this section are a few areas where local level commercial businesses should locate. Future additions of local commercial use areas should be contained to those areas. Too much retail development could over saturate the township with that type of development, which typically does not contribute much in the way of tax dollars.

Because of the existing roadways in this area it may be better able to absorb the added traffic that this type of development would generate. Additionally, the land identified as suitable for commercial and higher density development is located along the Northeast and Northwest sections of the Township. The

remainder of the North Corridor Section should be reserved for single family residences and agricultural production.

## **BALTIMORE**

The Township will continue to work with the independent Village of Baltimore, looking to maximize sound development of both the Village and the remainder of the Township.

## **REMAINDER OF UNINCORPORATED TOWNSHIP SECTION**

The land in the remainder of unincorporated Liberty Township is primarily agricultural in nature. Current use is primarily agricultural, with a few areas zoned Rural Residential. These uses are in line with current zoning in the area. Members of this community have consistently noted their desire to maintain a rural environment in the township. This land has been in agricultural production for many years and should so continue far into the future. This would be a prime area to utilize farmland preservation programs such as the Agricultural Easement Purchase Program, offered by the Ohio Department of Agriculture, or a Transfer of Development Rights program.

Subdivisions that maximize open space, use little infrastructure and contribute to the rural feel of the township should be encouraged in this area and that do not overburden the school systems may be considered in this area.

## **LAND USE DESCRIPTIONS**

See the Liberty Township Zoning Resolution of Fairfield County for complete descriptions of the following zoning classifications:

RURAL RESIDENTIAL DISTRICT and AGRICULTURAL DISTRICT

PLANNED RESIDENTIAL CONSERVATION OVERLAY DISTRICT

PLANNED RURAL BUSINESS & COMMUNITY SERVICE DISTRICT

SMALL SCALE COMMERCIAL DISTRICT

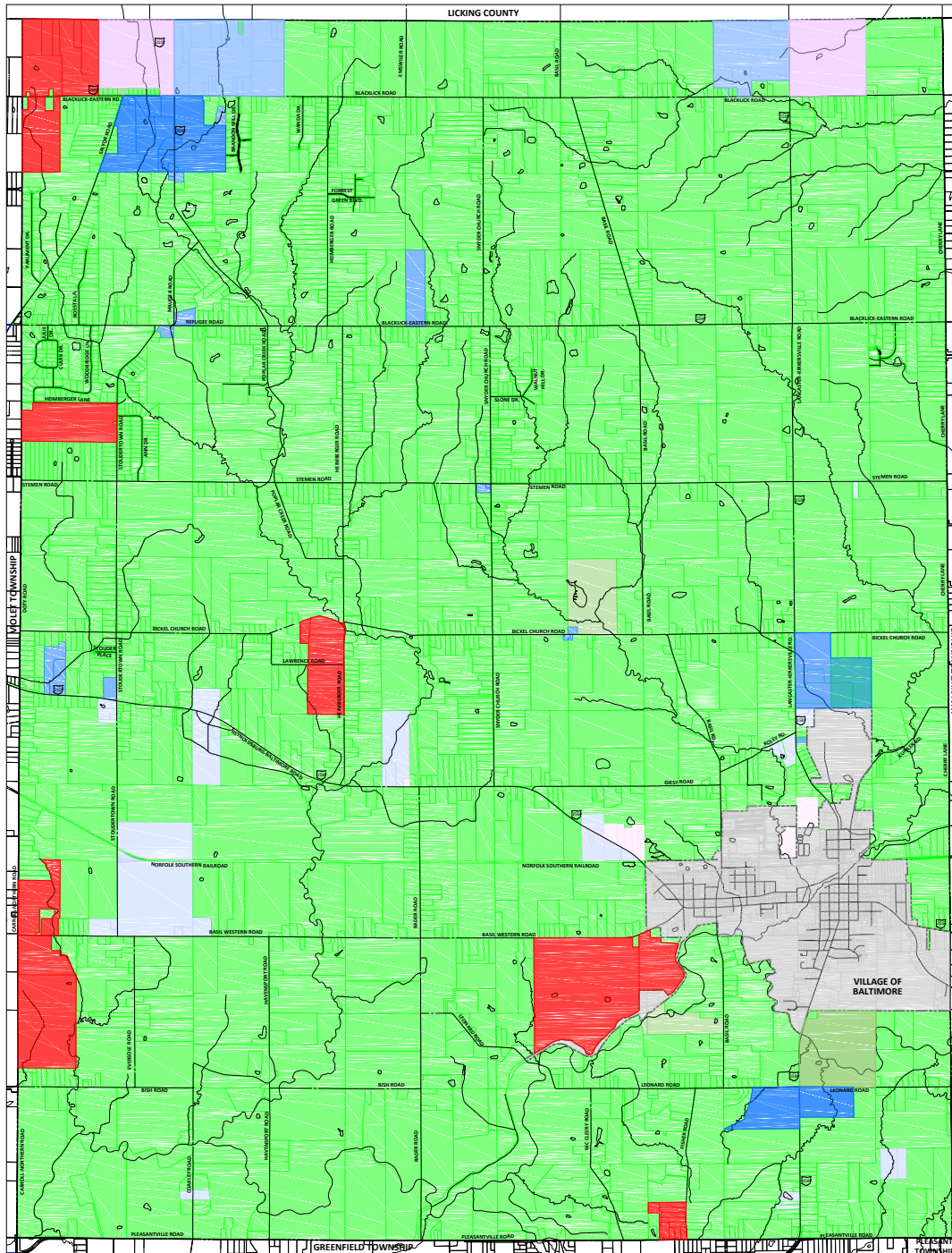
HIGHWAY BUSINESS COMMERCIAL DISTRICT

GENERAL INDUSTRIAL DISTRICT

FLOOD PLAIN OVERLAY



# 2023 LIBERTY TOWNSHIP, FAIRFIELD COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE LAND USE PLAN



### COMPREHENSIVE LAND USE PLAN LEGEND

- VILLAGE OF BALTIMORE LIMITS
- RURAL RESIDENTIAL AND AGRICULTURAL DISTRICT
- GENERAL INDUSTRIAL DISTRICT
- PLANNED RURAL BUSINESS AND COMMUNITY SERVICE DISTRICT
- SMALL SCALE COMMERCIAL DISTRICT
- HIGHWAY BUSINESS DISTRICT
- RURAL RESIDENTIAL AND PLANNED UNIT DEVELOPMENT (PUD) DISTRICTS
- PLANNED RESIDENTIAL CONSERVATION AND OVERLAY DISTRICTS
- TOWNSHIP BOUNDARIES



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