



ROOTSTOWN TOWNSHIP COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE DRAFT

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Send your comments or questions to:

Kristin Hopkins, Manager of Planning Services

CT Consultants

8150 Sterling Court

Mentor, Ohio 44060

khopkins@ctconsultants.com

Phone: 440-951-9000

Fax: 440-951-7487

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The update of the Rootstown Township Comprehensive Plan has been a systematic deliberative process of the Citizens Advisory Committee (comprised of the Zoning Commission, Trustee representative and 20 citizens). Over the course of nine months, the committee met several times, conducted public meetings and obtained feedback from stakeholders, and *presented a draft plan to the Rootstown Zoning Commission and Board of Trustees*. The resulting Plan Update is a product in which the Township can take an enormous amount of pride. The Plan is designed to be a working tool for those who will use it – the Township Zoning Commission and Board of Trustees – in their decisions related to land-use policies and procedures, as well as for all property owners, developers and business owners who wish to invest in our community. The purpose of the Plan is to provide both a vision and a pragmatic road map that will be used on an ongoing basis to guide the future of our Township.

The Rootstown Township Board of Trustees is grateful to the many interested persons who contributed to the formulation of the policies and recommendations contained in this Plan. Without such collective input, this Plan would not be as useful or complete.

CAC Committee Members include:

Allen Ballou
 Jerry Biltz
 Tom Biltz
 Don Boyle
 Steve Brown
 Roger Carpenter
 Ken Christensen
 Stan Dannemiller
 Jake Der

Arthur Domres
 John Gordon
 Sharon Hissom
 Mike Kerrigan
 Scott Krieger
 JD Langguth
 Al Marzec
 Jordan Michael
 Joe Paulus

Joe Postlethwait
 Carl Schrickel
 Tom Siciliano
 Theresa Summers
 Rob Swauger
 George Tishma
 John Wray

CHAPTER 1.

INTRODUCTION

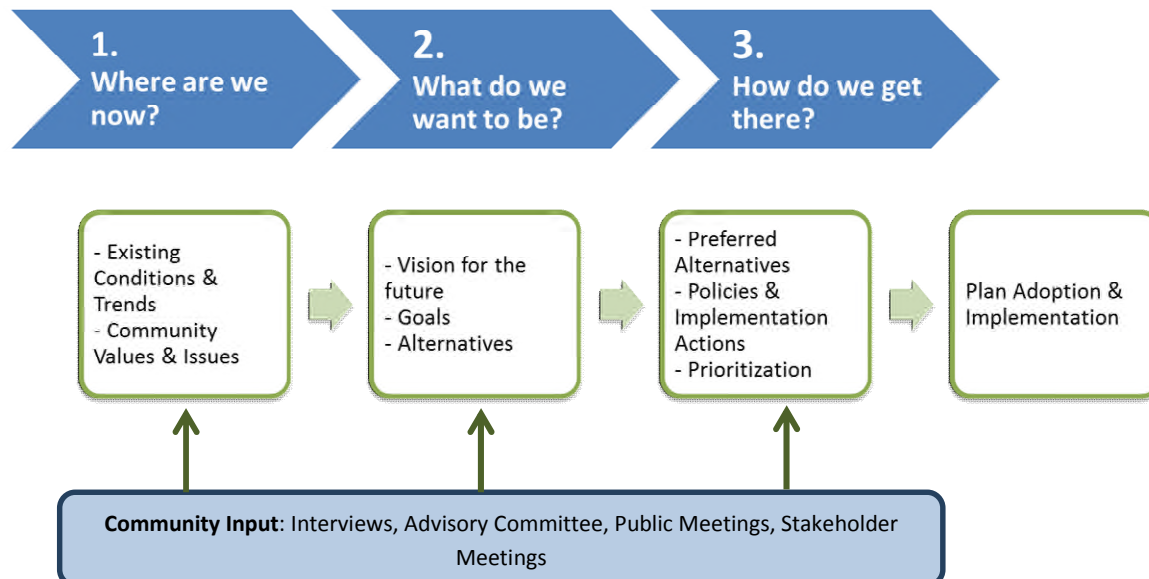
Purpose of a Comprehensive Plan

A Comprehensive Plan is an important tool to guide development policy, land-use and zoning decisions in a way that reflects the overall vision of the community. Key characteristics and components of a comprehensive plan include:

- Set of policy statements (& maps) to guide future land use and development
- Supported by analytic tables, maps, narrative
- Covers all elements related to physical development
- Has a long-range outlook (10 years plus)
- Is general, rather than overly specific
- Guiding document, not regulatory

The Plan reflects the goals and objectives of the Township at one point in time, assesses present economic conditions, and identifies lifestyles and issues important to the community at that moment. In recognition of this, it is essential that the Plan be reviewed and updated periodically to ensure it remains relevant. Rootstown adopted a Comprehensive Plan in 1997 with addendums in 2004 and 2011. The 2016 Update provided the opportunity to assess past policy initiatives and re-evaluate the goals and policy recommendations to ensure they continue to reflect the community’s aspirations.

The Update Process



Public Engagement Process

The Township Trustees appointed an ad hoc Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) to assist the Zoning Commission in updating the Comprehensive Land Use Plan. The CAC was comprised of 25 citizens and stakeholders who had been deliberately selected so that a wide range of perspectives (e.g., business, housing, schools, recreation and other interests) were represented. The committee met monthly from December 2015 through June 2016 during the development of the Plan Update. All of these meetings were open to the general public.

Another method in which the planning process engaged the community as a whole was through two community-wide meetings that were held at strategic points in the process:

- The first community-wide meeting was held in March, 2016 at the Rootstown High School and attended by approximately 60 people. A PowerPoint presentation was given that summarized the issues and basic development goals being considered. Attendees then participated in small group discussions to provide additional comments on the issues and goals.
- The second community-wide public meeting was held in June, 2016. At that meeting, committee members presented highlights of the Plan Update's goals, policies, strategies and actions steps and asked attendees to help prioritize the implementation

At the end of the public participation process, the CAC recommended the final draft of the Plan Update to the Zoning Commission and Township Trustees.

How to Use the Plan

- Identifies appropriate zoning changes
- Guide to future decisions for rezoning, plan approval
- Helps identify future capital improvements for fiscal planning
- Provides predictability for current residents and businesses
- Helps private property owners make decisions about investments in the community

Plan Organization

This plan is divided into five chapters. This Introduction chapter provides an overview of the plan and the process. Chapter Two provides a community overview that highlights trends and existing conditions that have an impact on planning decisions. The Goals chapter sets forth the Township's main vision for the future through a series of goals. Following the Goals chapter is the core component of this plan: Our Policies and Strategies summarize the policies and strategies for each of the major topic areas. The final chapter outlines an implementation strategy for the Township that summarizes the core group of

recommendations. Some of the plan's recommendations require additional study and the development of more detailed action steps that go beyond the scope of this project.

The Comprehensive Land Use Plan update is a policy document that identifies appropriate strategies for achieving the goals of the Township. One of the primary implementation tools is the Zoning Resolution and a number of the recommendations in this Plan Update involve making changes to the zoning regulations. However, amending the Zoning Resolution requires careful and detailed technical analysis. Once the Plan Update process is completed, the next step is a more thorough review of the specific sections of the zoning resolution that were identified for further study during the planning process.

CHAPTER 2.

THE EVALUATION – OUR KEY FINDINGS

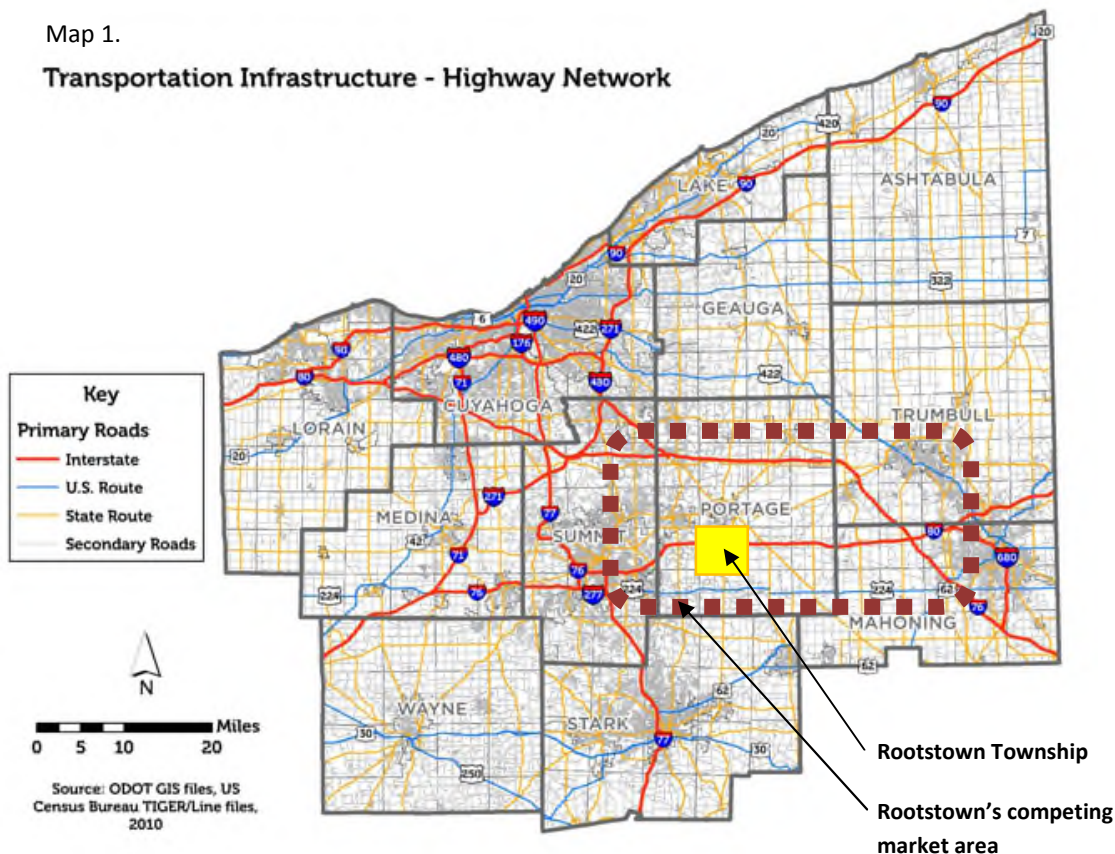
1. Community Profile

Regional Context

Rootstown is one of 18 unincorporated townships in Portage County which also contains 12 cities and villages, notably Aurora, Kent, Ravenna, and Streetsboro. Located in the southwest quadrant of Portage County, Rootstown is approximately 10 miles east of Akron. Rootstown is situated in an advantageous location with access to I-76, SR 44 and SR 14, yet Rootstown is competing with numerous other communities in the southeast sector of the Northeast Ohio market (Map 1) for its fair share of the region’s potential economic development. With this in mind, accessibility to the regional highway network, and beyond, is common to many other communities along Route I-76 (such as Tallmadge, Brimfield Townships and Jackson Township) and the Ohio Turnpike (Streetsboro, Lordstown, etc.) Therefore, while seizing opportunities to take advantage of Rootstown’s locational position, it is even more important to build upon its most significant unique “one of a kind” asset – Northeast Ohio Medical University (NEOMED). Several elements that follow build on this notion and its importance.

Map 1.

Transportation Infrastructure - Highway Network



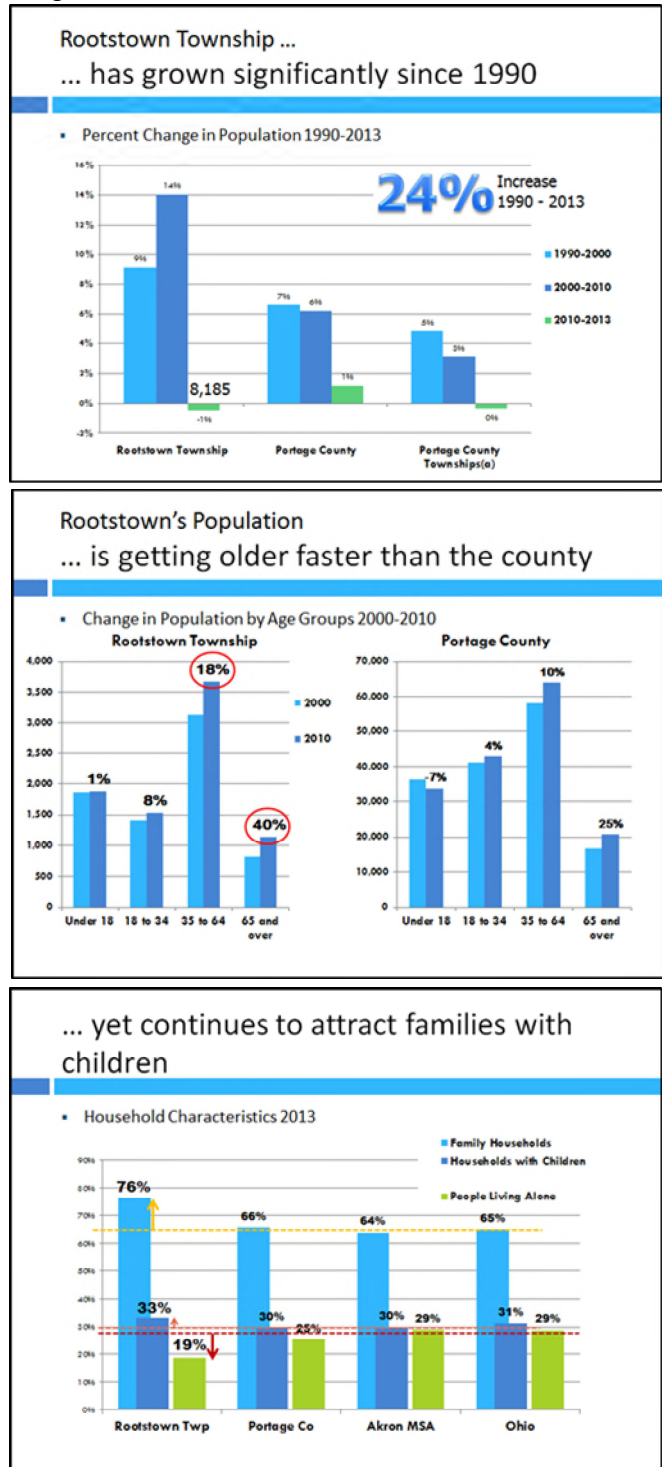
Source: NEOSCC

Population and Housing

Rootstown is one of the larger townships in Portage County. Rootstown has experienced population growth in the past 25 years at a faster rate than Portage County as a whole. Since 1990 the population of the Township has increased 24% from 6,612 residents to 8,185¹ while Portage County has grown at a more modest rate of 15%. Additional population and housing trends include:

- Since 1990, there has been an increase of 29% in the number of households, from 2,250 in 1990 to 2,893 in 2013.
- Rootstown continues to be attractive to families with children, and the number of children living in the Township increased by 1% between 2000 and 2010. However, the number of children under 18 as a percentage of the total population has declined from 26% of the population in 2000 to 24% in 2010. This decline is similar to that experienced in Portage County.
- In contrast, the number of residents 65 years and older increased by 40% between 2000 and 2010. The Township’s proportion of persons 65 years and older increased from 11% to 14%, which is also similar to Portage County’s change.

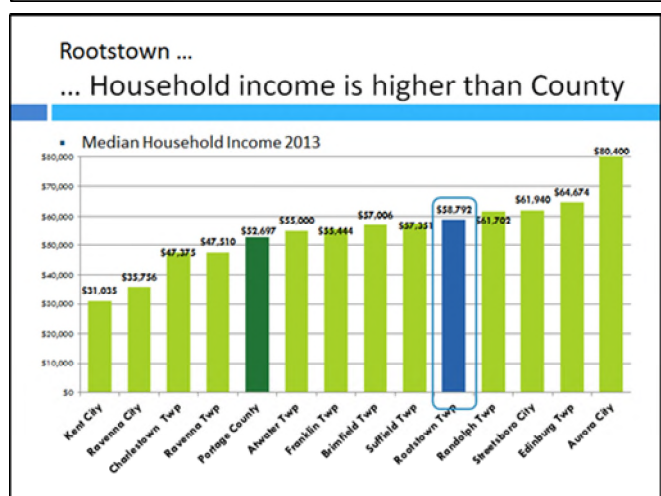
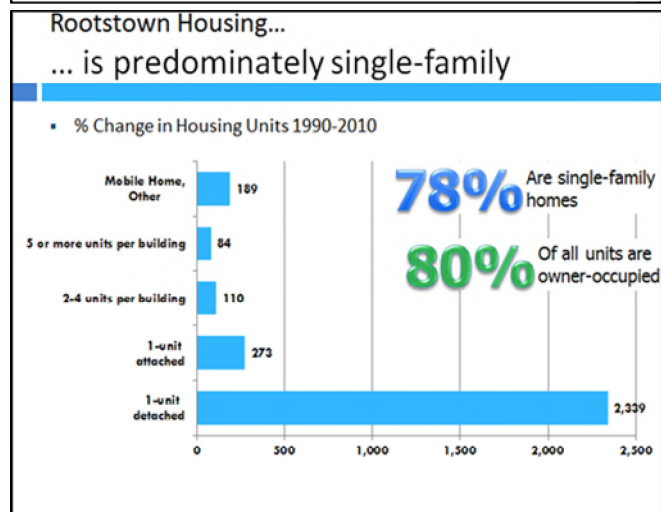
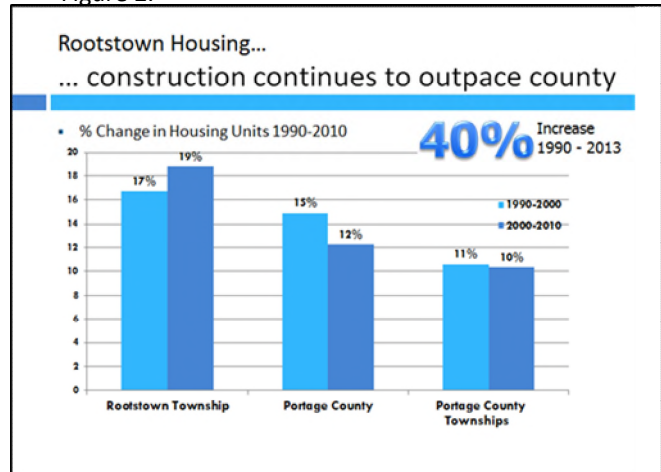
Figure 1.



¹ 1990 US Census and 2013 5-Year American Community Survey.

- From 1990 to 2010 there was an increase of 920 dwelling units (39%) in the Township (from 2,384 to 3,304), of which 630 dwelling units constructed between 2000 and 2010. This is above the average for townships in Portage County (22%), as well as the overall County average of 29%, which factors in the larger population increases in Aurora (84%) and Streetsboro (86%).
- Between 1990 and 2013, the percentage of housing units that are single-family detached homes has remained the same (78%). In contrast, the number of single-family attached units has increased from 2% of the total to 9%, while mobile homes have declined from 14% to 6%.
- The percentage of housing units that are owner-occupied has declined slightly since 2000 from 83% to 80%, which could be attributed to the increased number of single-family attached units.
- Over 35% of all of the housing stock that exists in the Township was constructed after 1990, while 28% is more than 50 years old.
- The median value of owner-occupied housing units in 2013 was \$160,300, an increase of 22% from the 2000 median value of \$130,900. Of the 13 comparison communities, the median value ranges from a low of \$97,500 in Charlestown Township, to a high of \$247,600 in Aurora. Rootstown’s median value was the 5th highest.
- The 2013 estimated median household income in Rootstown Township was \$58,792, which is higher than the \$52,697 median household income for Portage County. The per capita income in 2013 was \$24,426, which was slightly lower than the median per capita income for the County (\$25,332).

Figure 2.



Development Patterns and Trends

From its earliest days of settlement in the 1800s, the Township has historically been a farming community with most of its residential development confined to a few subdivisions located north of Tallmadge Road. However, in line with national trends, Rootstown has become increasingly more developed. Based on its proximity to more urban areas such as Akron, Kent, and Ravenna, Rootstown Township can be considered an “edge” community.

With 27.4 square miles, or approximately 17,550 acres², Rootstown Township is the third largest of the 18 townships in Portage County. As of 2015, about 7,377 acres, or 42% of land in the Township was developed (or otherwise not available for development as is the case with water bodies), while 10,588 acres (58%) are categorized as agriculture, vacant or underutilized. For the developed land, land uses are categorized in one of four categories: Residential, Commercial, Industrial, and Other (which includes parks and protected open space, institutional uses, water bodies, street rights-of-way).

Table 1 provides a detailed description of the growth in development since 1995. Growth has occurred in both residential and commercial/industrial markets. Residential land use has increased 17% since 1995, consuming approximately 737 acres.

Table 1. Generalized Land Use

Land Use Category	Developed 1995	Developed 2015	Increase in Acres	Percent Change
Residential	4,272	5,009	737	17%
Commercial	99	282	183	185%
Industrial	129	208	79	61%
Other (Parks & Protected, Institutional, etc)^(a)	1,160	1,878	718	62%
SubTotal	5,660	7,377	1,717	30%
% of Total Township Area	32%	42%	10%	
Vacant/Agriculture	11,891	10,173	-1,718	
Total	17,550	17,550		

Notes:

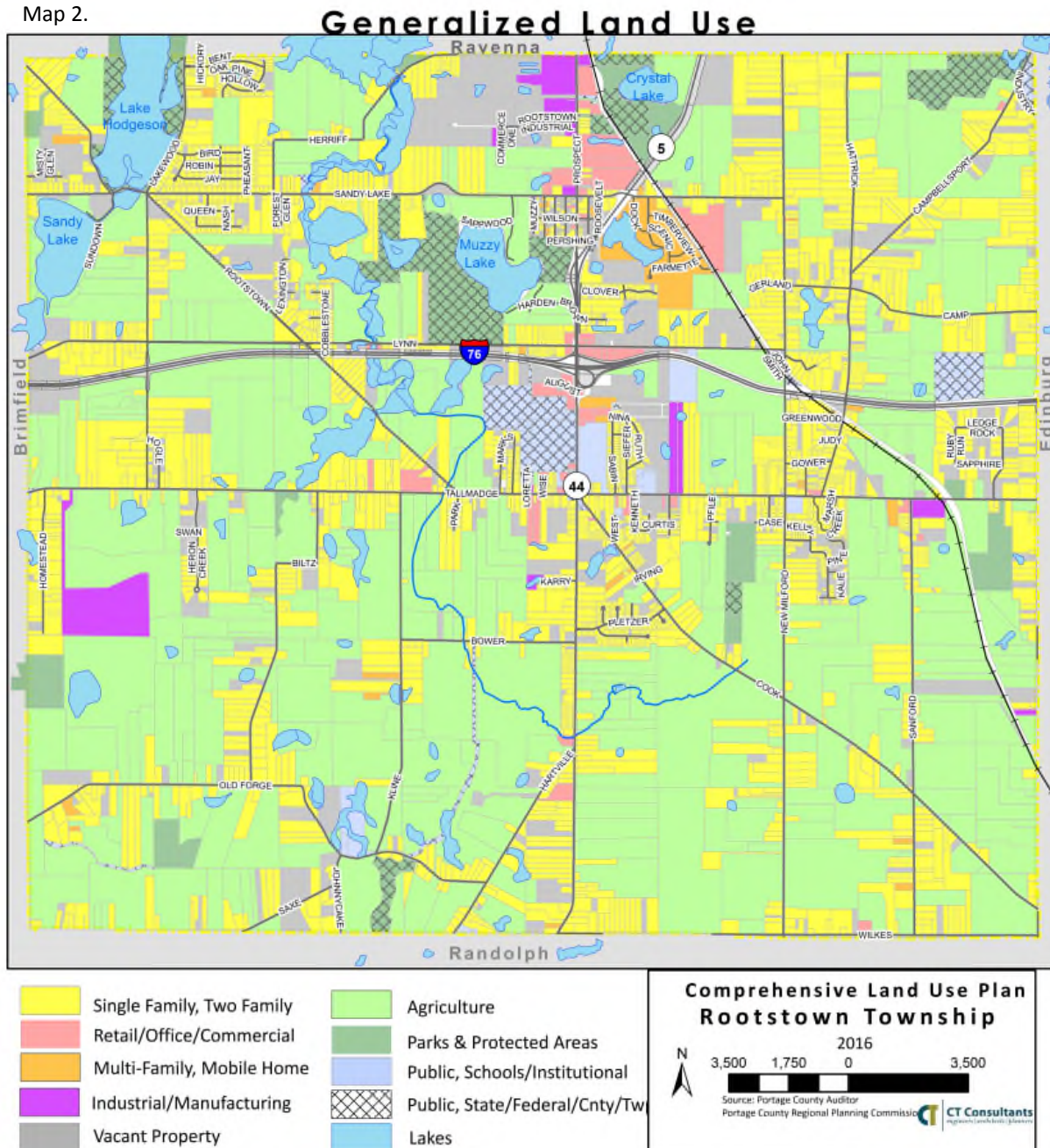
^(a) 2015 figure includes public owned park land and private protected land via conservation easements, riparian protection, wetland reserve as well as NEOMED; Township Facilities; churches, cemetery; water bodies, right of way. 1995 figure is based off of schools; cemetery; water bodies; right of way.

SOURCE: Land uses are based on Portage County Auditor’s parcel land use data. The auditor’s parcel land use data may overly represent the development change in acres because any portion of a property that is developed is recorded as fully developed. Parks and Protected land was quantified using Portage County Regional Plan Commission GIS data.

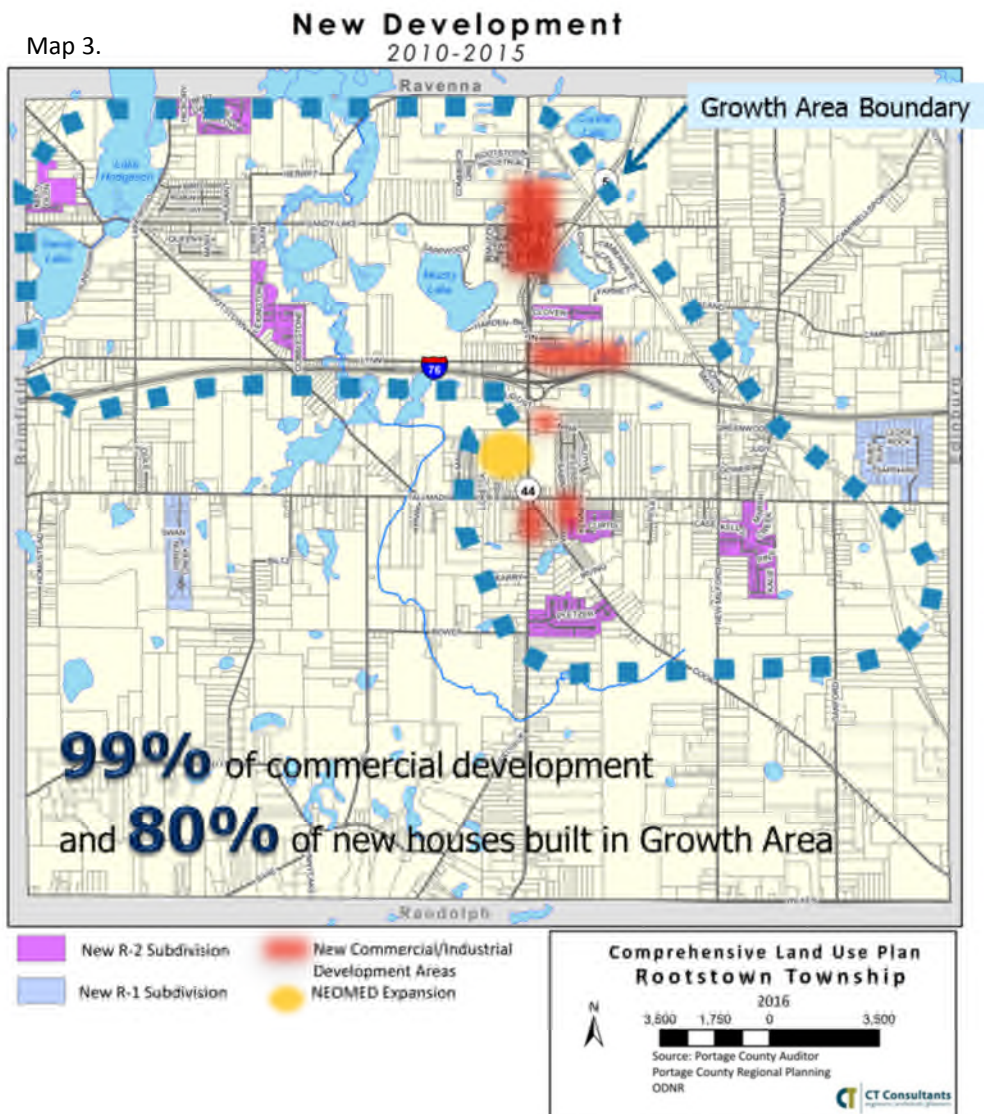
Map 2 on the following page illustrates the location of the various land uses in the Township.

² Figure reported by the 1997 Plan Table 9.

Map 2.



Of the 7,377 acres that are developed, 5,009 acres (70%) are devoted to a residential use, primarily single-family dwellings. As stated earlier, historically, residential development occurred mostly in subdivisions, which continued to be the case between 2000 and 2015. Map 3 indicates the locations of the newer subdivisions. Two of the nine newer subdivisions are large lot (minimum 1.5 acre) subdivisions built in the R-1 residential zoning district outside of the growth area boundary, and with on-site septic systems.



Nonresidential development is concentrated along SR 44 and Tallmadge Road with the most intensely developed area being along SR 44 on both sides of the 1-76 interchange. There are approximately 282 acres of commercial development and 208 acres of industrial development.

New industrial development has occurred at the northern end of Prospect St. near the Township boundary. Older industrial development is located along Tallmadge Road east of SR 44. The Township has one retail shopping center which is located south of the 1-76 interchange. Other services and retail stores are more scattered along SR 44 and Tallmadge Road and are not part of a unified development. There are approximately 115 additional acres devoted to Northeast Ohio Medical University (NEOMED), Rootstown School District and the Township Hall/offices all located in the town center area.

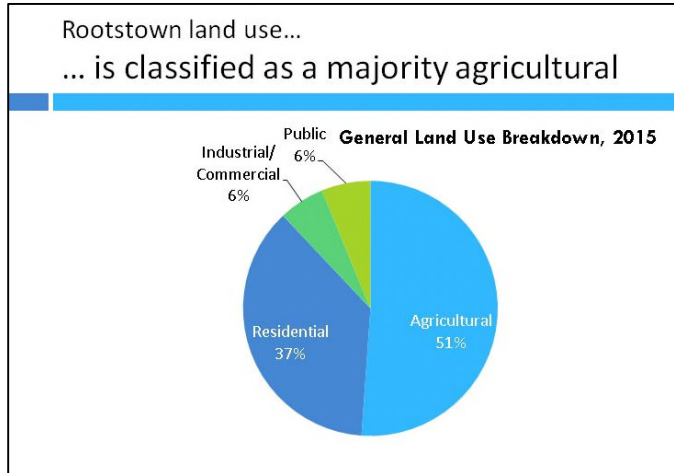
As a result of the new commercial and industrial development there has been a shift in non-residential tax base - from 9% of total property tax valuation in 1995 to 18% of the total in 2014.

While the Township demonstrates development patterns indicative of small town suburbanization, according to the Portage County auditor land use records there are still 8,670 acres classified as

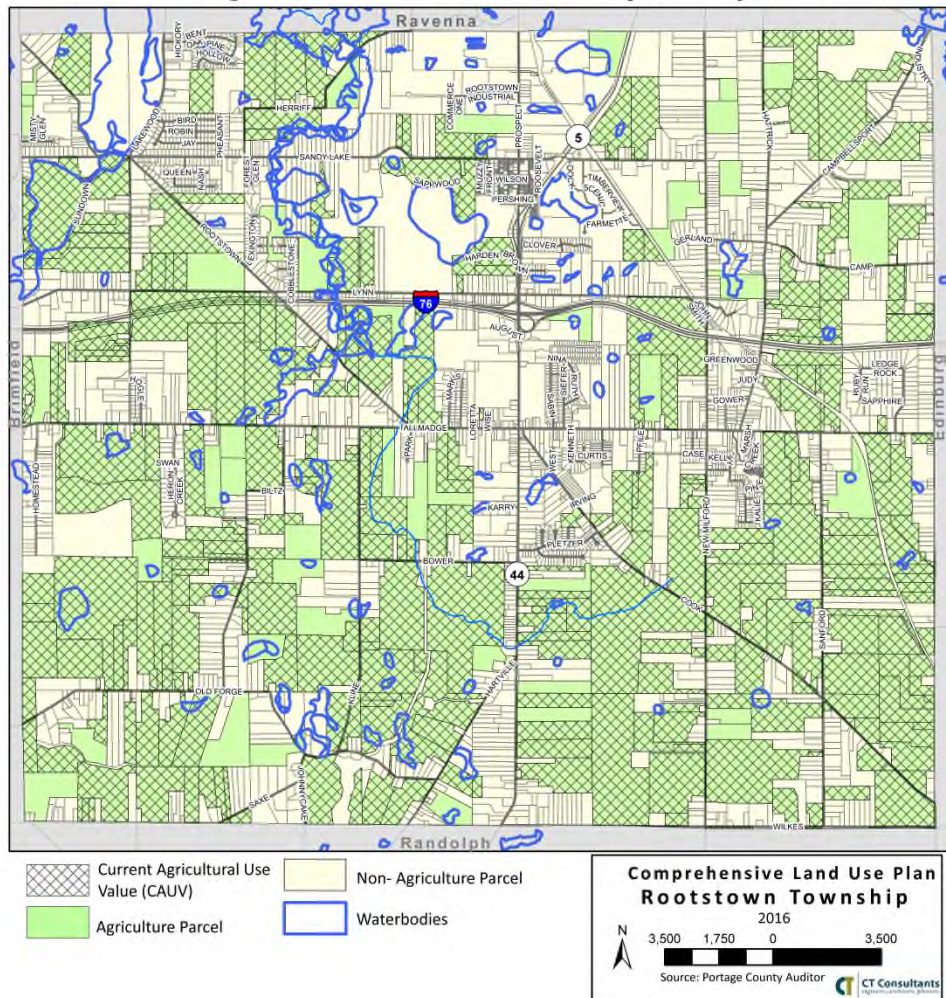
agricultural land which comprises approximately half of the Township. Of the agriculture parcels approximately 7,480 acres (86% of agriculture parcels and 44% of the Township as a whole) participate in Ohio’s Current Agricultural Use Value (CAUV) tax program (see Map 4).

The CAUV program allows commercial farmland to be valued below market value based on its current use as farmland (or other agricultural use) rather than its “highest and best” potential use. The intent of the program is to provide relief on property taxes for working farmers. However, the substantial amount of land classified as commercial farming may be misleading as the 2013 American Community Survey reported only 38 residents employed in the agricultural industry.³

Figure 3.



Map 4. **Current Agricultural Use Value (CAUV) Parcels**



³ It is important to keep in mind that the results of the ACS are self-reported and that there is a margin of error of +/- 34. The 2014 ACS reported only 9 people in the agricultural industry with a margin of error of +/- 14.

Remaining Vacant/Underdeveloped Land Zoned Nonresidential:

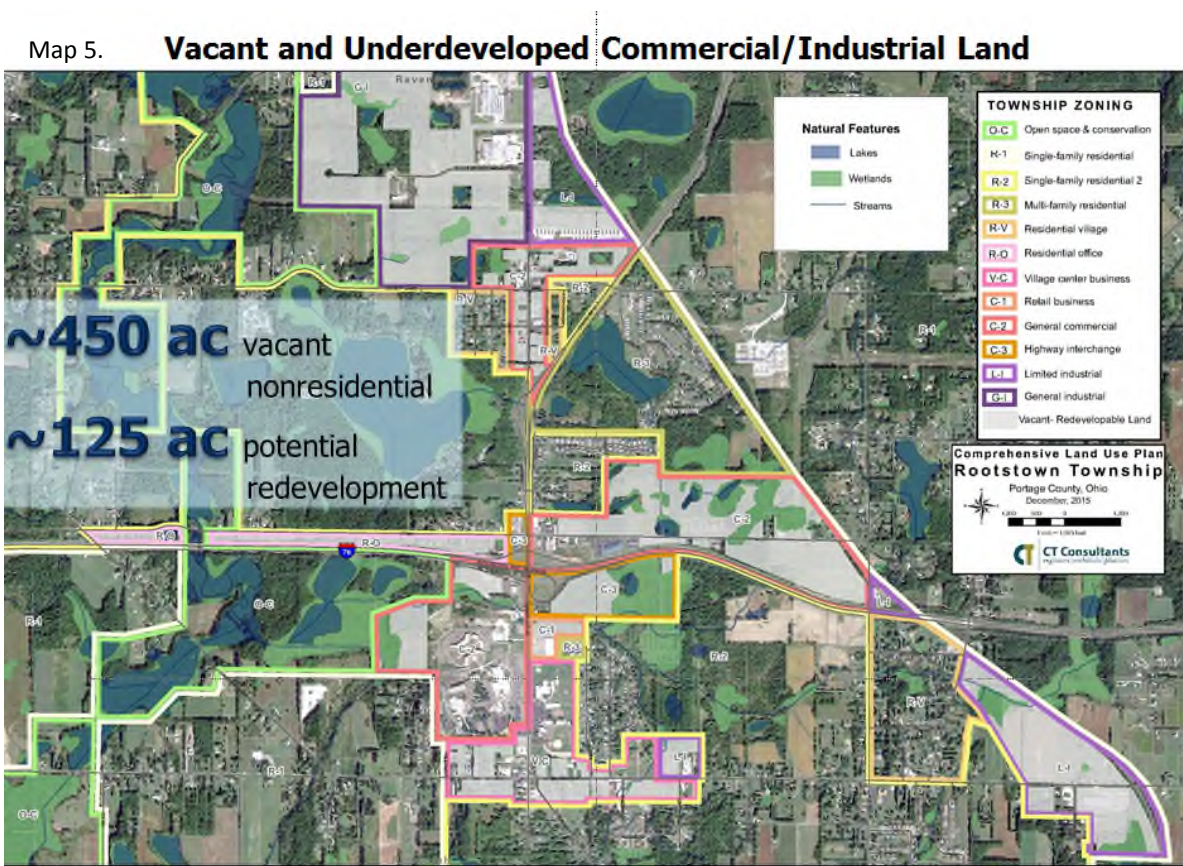
Based on an analysis of the parcels in the commercial and industrial districts there are approximately 575 acres of land that could accommodate nonresidential development, see Table 2. This includes approximately 450 acres of whole parcels of vacant land as well as the underutilized portion of developed parcels when the undeveloped portion exceeded 1 acre. In addition, there are approximately 125 acres of land that could be redeveloped, such as residential parcels (which are nonconforming uses in commercial and industrial districts), small underutilized portions of developed land, and small vacant parcels that require land assembly to create viable development sites.

Table 2. Vacant and Redevelopable Land Zoned for Nonresidential Development

Acres	C-1	C-2	C-3	R-O	V-C	L-I	G-I	TOTAL
Vacant*	5	110	20	-	15	100	200	450
Redevelopable	-	50	-	25	30	20	-	125
TOTAL	5	160	20	20	45	120	200	575

*Areas impacted by existing environmental constraints such as wetlands, flood plain and water bodies are not included.

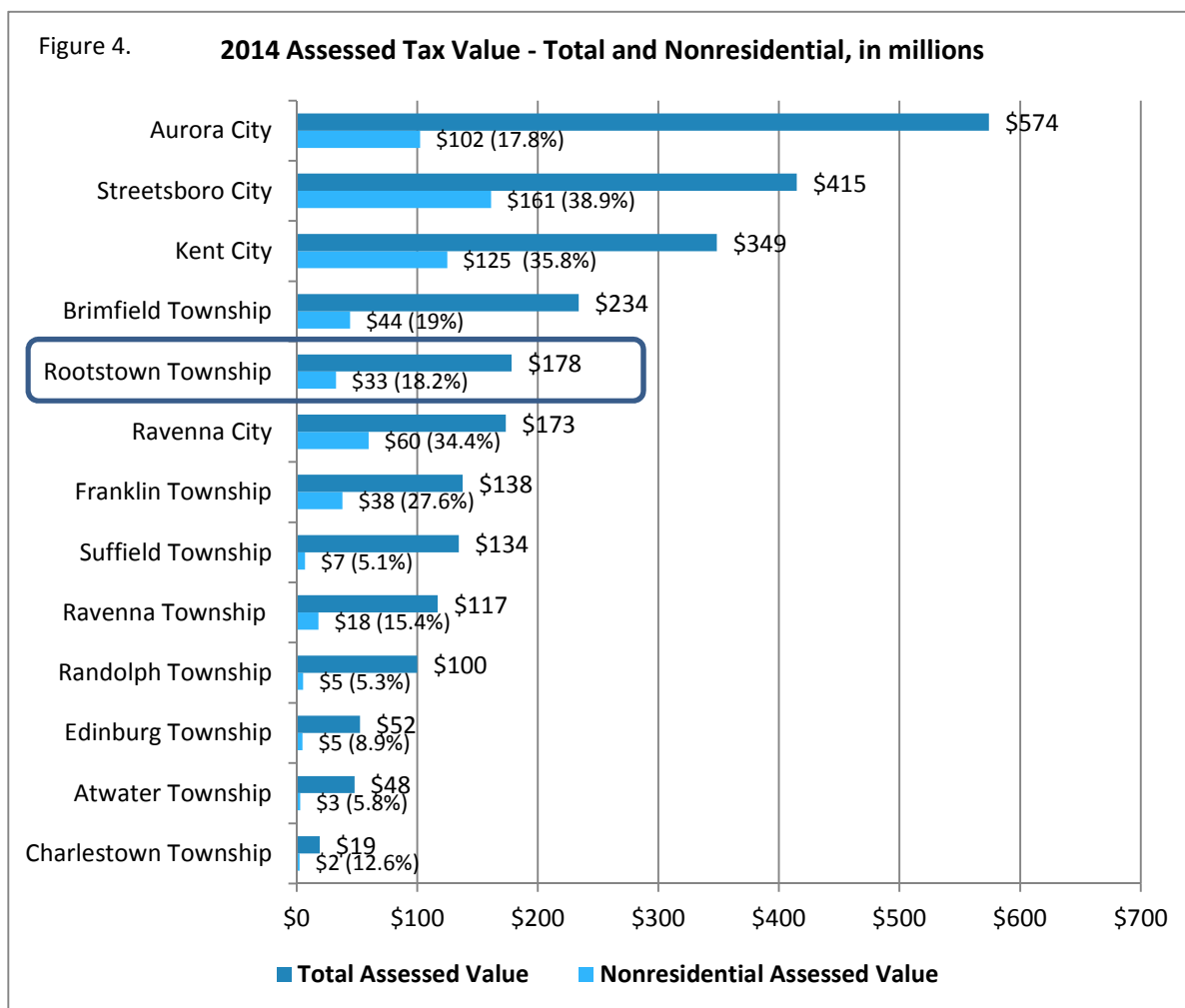
If growth continues at the same rate as in the last 15 years, an additional 1,000 acres would be needed during a reasonable 20 to 25 year forecast period. An allowance for an additional 50% cushion would result in 1,500 acres being developed during this period.



Township Tax Base and Financial Trends

A community’s financial situation is a significant determinant of its ability to provide quality levels of public services and maintain its public infrastructure. By state law, townships are not entitled to impose an income tax. Therefore, the primary source of revenue for township government is the collection of property taxes, which is directly tied to the composition of land uses. Assessed valuation is used to determine the value of real estate for tax purposes. This valuation takes into account the overall quantity of development, quality of the properties and market conditions of the area.

For the 2014 tax year, Rootstown Township’s assessed tax valuation totaled \$178.3 million; 74.1% of which was attributed to residential land, 18.2% to commercial and industrial land, and 7.7% to agricultural land. This percentage is near the average for the County but is significantly less than the 35% to 40% non-residential valuation for larger, more developed communities such as Streetsboro, Kent and Aurora, see Figure 4. For communities that hope to attract economic development, this is an important indicator of economic health and of how well that objective is being achieved without increasing the tax burden on residential property.



The Township’s total valuation of \$178.3 million is an increase of 162% since 1995. Much of this growth in value is due to non-residential development, as indicated by a 427% in nonresidential tax valuation since 1995, and the increase in the proportion of the Township’s valuation attributed to nonresidential land – from 9% in 1995 to 18.2% of the total Township valuation, see Figure 5.

During this same general period the Township’s revenue increased 63% from \$1.15 million in 1998 to \$1.89 million in 2013. Over the years, local taxes have comprised an average of 66% of the total revenue received by the Township, see Figure 6.

Figure 5.

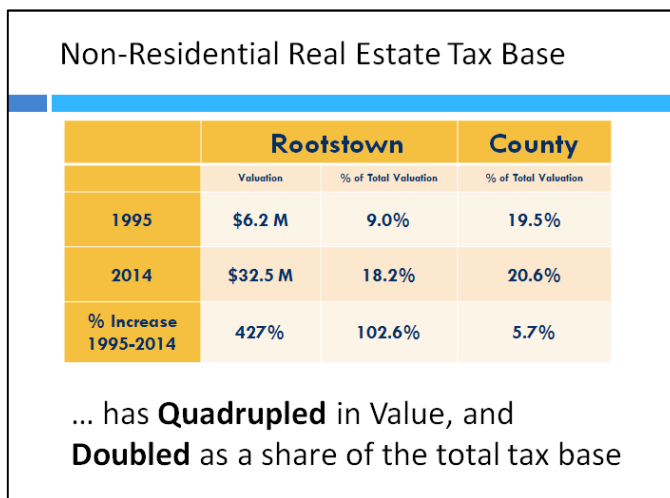
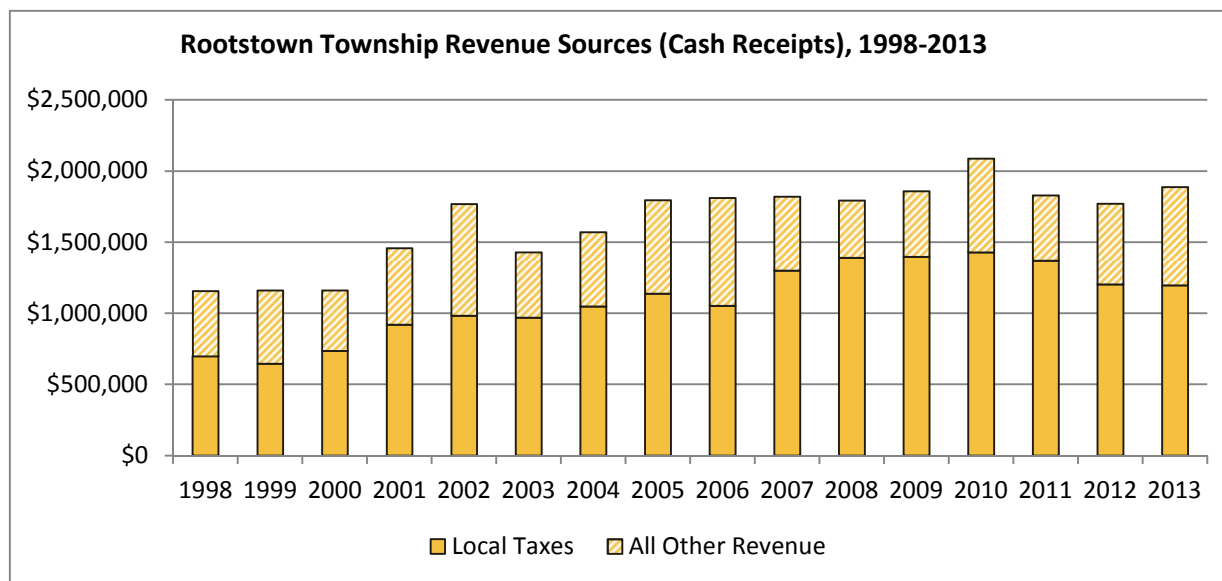


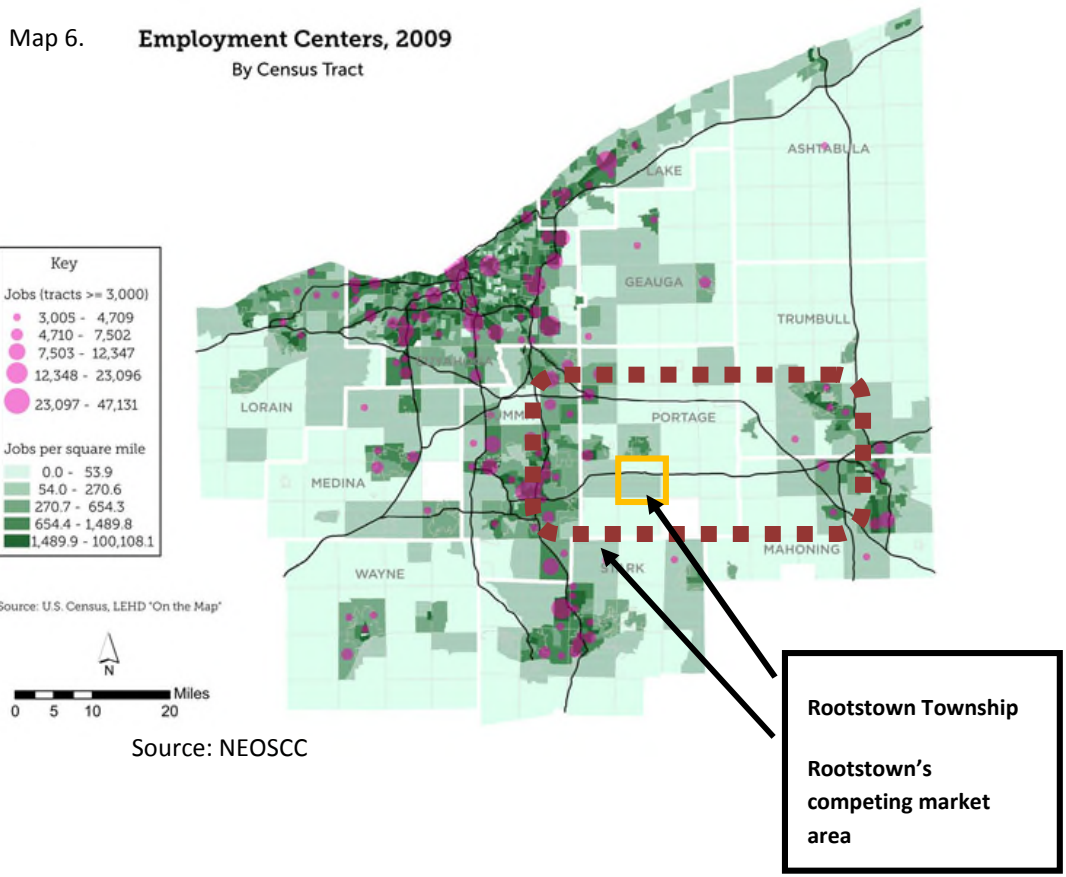
Figure 6.



Economic Development

Rootstown is located in the southeast sector of the Northeast Ohio commercial and industrial real estate market.

- There are an estimated 1,405 jobs in Rootstown, nearly 45% (629) of which are in educational services, while the next highest concentration (15%) is in Food Services and Accommodations. Only 249 residents work in the Township, while 3,281 travel outside the Township to their place of work.
- The rural character of the Township is changing. Only 38 individuals were estimated to be employed in agriculture in 2013. This is less than 1% of the total number employed. It is anticipated that other individuals participate in agriculture but not as a full time employment.
- Rootstown faces a competitive economic market with many communities competing for economic development as shown in Map 6.



The Portage Development Board (PDB) is the economic development coordinating body for the County its local jurisdictions. The PDB reports both an Enterprise Zone (EZ) a Community Reinvestment Area (CRA) are already established in Rootstown. These programs are mechanisms for business attraction and job creation but operate slightly differently. The CRA was created in 1985 and located roughly near the industrial park. There are no active agreements. The Enterprise Zone encompasses the entire Township, according to PDB, but applies only to manufacturing. Both provide tax breaks to industries that locate within the area

Enterprise Zone

Portage County Enterprise Zones are designated as limited authority, non-distressed zones. Property tax exemptions of up to 75% in municipalities and up to 60% in unincorporated areas are allowed on new real and personal property taxes for up to ten years. Exceptions are permitted with approval from the local school district. The president of the Portage Development Board (PDB) serves as Enterprise Zone Manager.

Source: PDB

Community Reinvestment Areas

CRA's are designated portions of municipalities or unincorporated areas of counties where property owners can receive tax incentives for investing real property improvements. The Community Reinvestment Area (CRA) Program is a direct incentive property tax exemption program. The program permits municipalities or counties to designate areas, where investment has been discouraged, as a CRA to encourage revitalization of the existing housing and building stock and the construction of new structures. The program can provide real property tax benefits on the value of residential, commercial and industrial building improvements. A pre-July, 1994 CRA authorizing legislation can only be amended twice after July 1994 and still continue operation under the pre-1994 laws. A third amendment would invoke the new CRA rules.

2. Assets

Town Center/Character

The creation of the Village Center (V-C) Zoning District was a direct outcome of the implementation strategies from the 1997 Comprehensive Plan. The area now designated as VC located along Tallmadge Road was previously zoned as General Commercial (C-2). The zoning for the district has stricter development standards than it had when it was zoned C-2 Commercial, including limits on the intensity of new uses, a mandatory setback to allow for both the potential road widening and close-knit/new urbanist feel, and a requirement that new parking be located behind the building. The Zoning Resolution also lays out the unique character of the V-C District and requires the maintenance of small-scale residential design. However, the vision outlined in the 1997 Plan has not been achieved in its entirety.

In its current form, the Town Center has a disjointed feel and does not adequately “encourage a mix of uses in a compact, yet cohesive, ‘village’ environment” as the zoning code intends. The district lacks a cohesive design and architecture style to foster an aesthetically pleasing and welcoming atmosphere.

NEOMED

The Northeast Ohio Medical University (NEOMED), established in Rootstown Township in 1973, trains physicians, pharmacists, researchers and other health professionals in an interprofessional environment. In 2011, NEOMED became a free standing four year public university. Over 1,600 students and faculty attend and work at NEOMED, with a large majority commuting daily to the university campus. In 2011, NEOMED began transforming its 450,000 square foot campus in order to offer better education and research facilities, student life amenities, and larger accommodations designed to address growing class sizes. As part of this expansion, NEOMED constructed a new Research and Graduate Education Building, Residential Housing Village, and a Health and Wellness Complex.

With the support and resources of NEOMED, the Bio-Med Science Academy opened on the NEOMED campus in August 2012. The Academy is a member of the Ohio STEM (*Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics*) Learning Network, an organization committed to helping the state of Ohio inspire and train the next generation of science and technology leaders. It is the first rural STEM school in Ohio and the only one in the nation that is located on the campus of a medical university. The academy is a tuition-free public high school open to all Ohioans. It has an enrollment capacity of 350 to 400 students

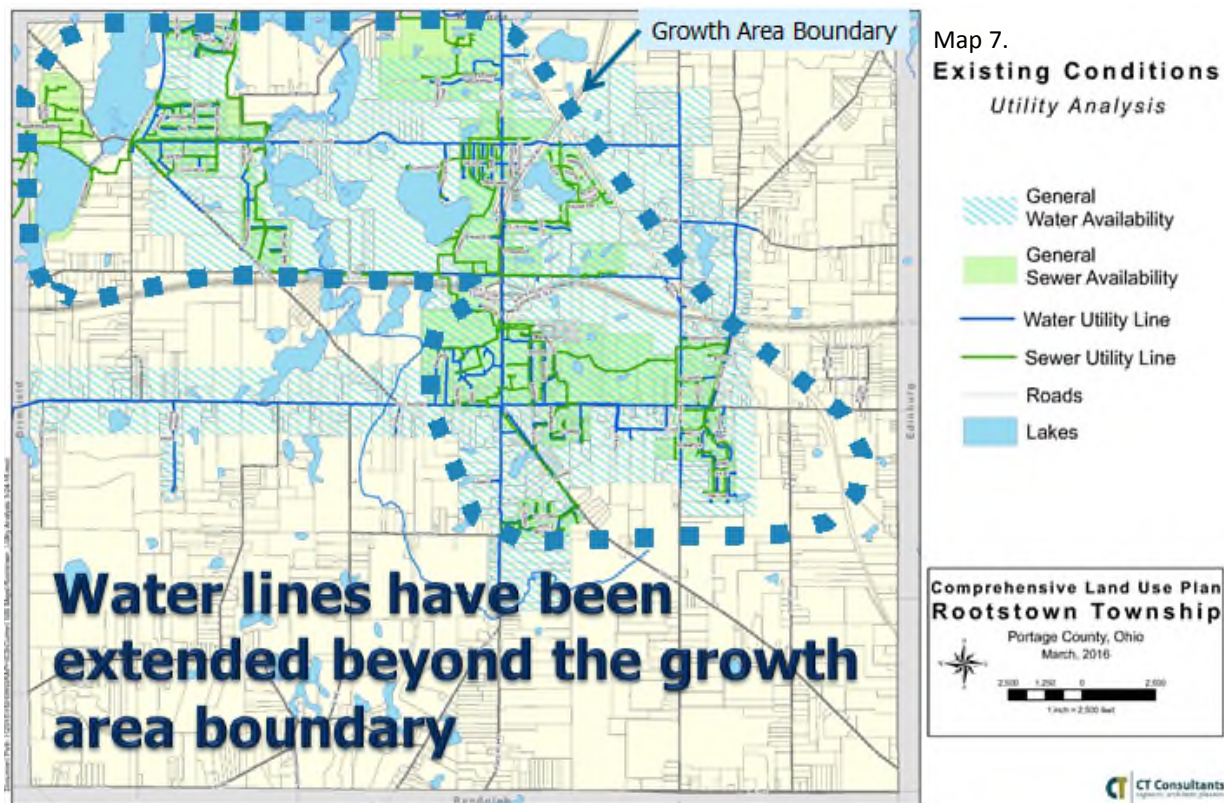


New housing at NEOMED

Source: NEOMED website

Infrastructure

The location of water and sanitary sewer lines guides commercial, industrial, and residential development patterns for a community. New development is dependent on infrastructure and is much more likely to occur in areas where it is readily available.



In recent years, the water lines in Rootstown have been extended beyond the growth area boundary. This includes the installation of a water line along Tallmadge Road, west of SR 44, south down SR 44, and east of the railroad tracks north of I-76, see Map 7. In November 2015 the Rootstown Water Service Company was dissolved and transferred to Portage County Water Resources.

Parks and Open Spaces

Rootstown has one park, Rootstown Community Park, located adjacent to Gracie Fields and extending north to Case Avenue. The park currently has a stocked pond, three pavilions, and a playground area. In 2015 the Township Trustees created a Park Commission which is charged with further developing the park land. The Commission conducted a community survey in Spring 2016 to solicit input from residents of Rootstown about what they would like to see as part of the Township Park.

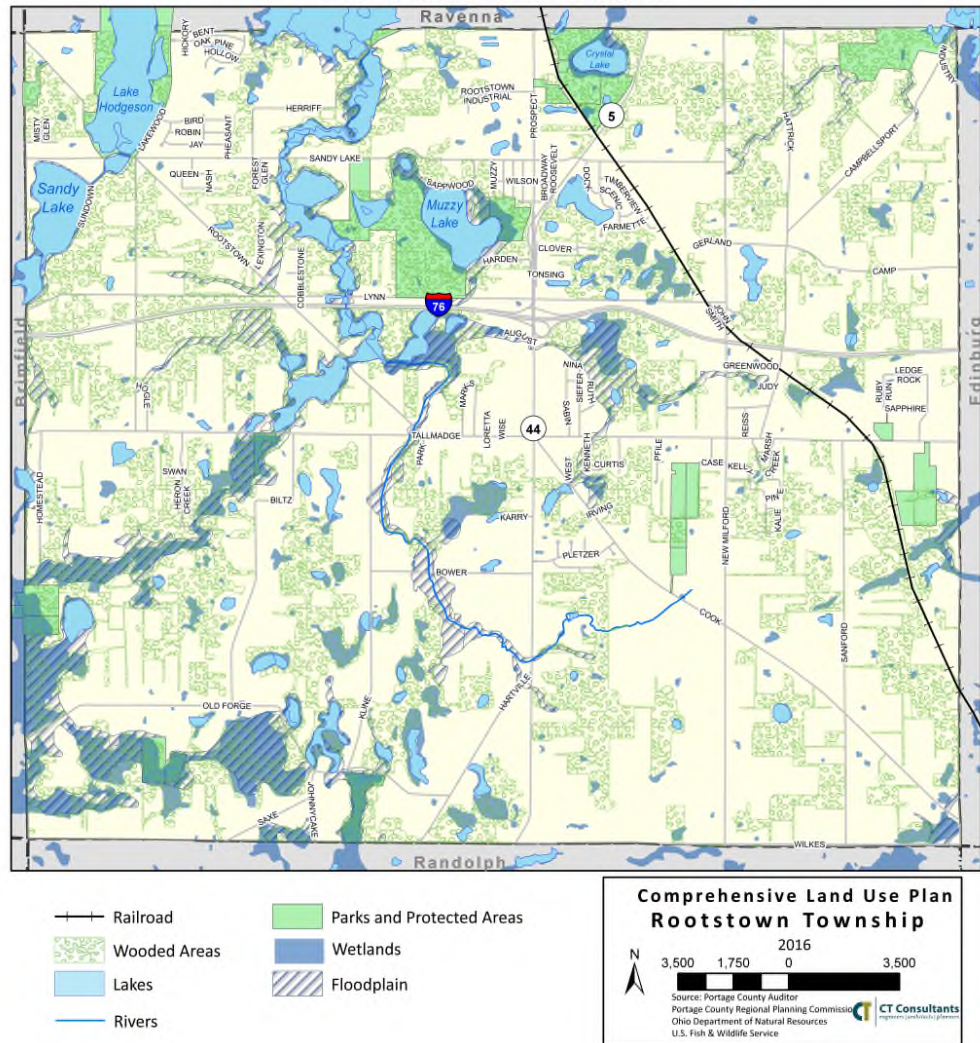
Gracie Fields, located along Cook Road adjacent to the Township Park, is a private facility used for intensive recreation, field sports and other uses.

Rootstown is also home to other protected open space and public parklands owned and maintained by other jurisdictions including Triangle Lake Bog (ODNR), a nature preserve along Crystal Lake (City of Ravenna), Lake Hodgson (City of Ravenna), Lake Hodgson (City of Ravenna), Dix Preserve (Portage Park District) as well as other riparian protections and easements.⁴ A portion of the West Branch State Park (ODNR) is located in the north east corner of the Township and includes over 5,300 acres of natural areas and a 2,650-acre lake. It is a popular destination for camping, hiking and horseback riding as well as boating, fishing and swimming. (See Map 8)

Natural Resources

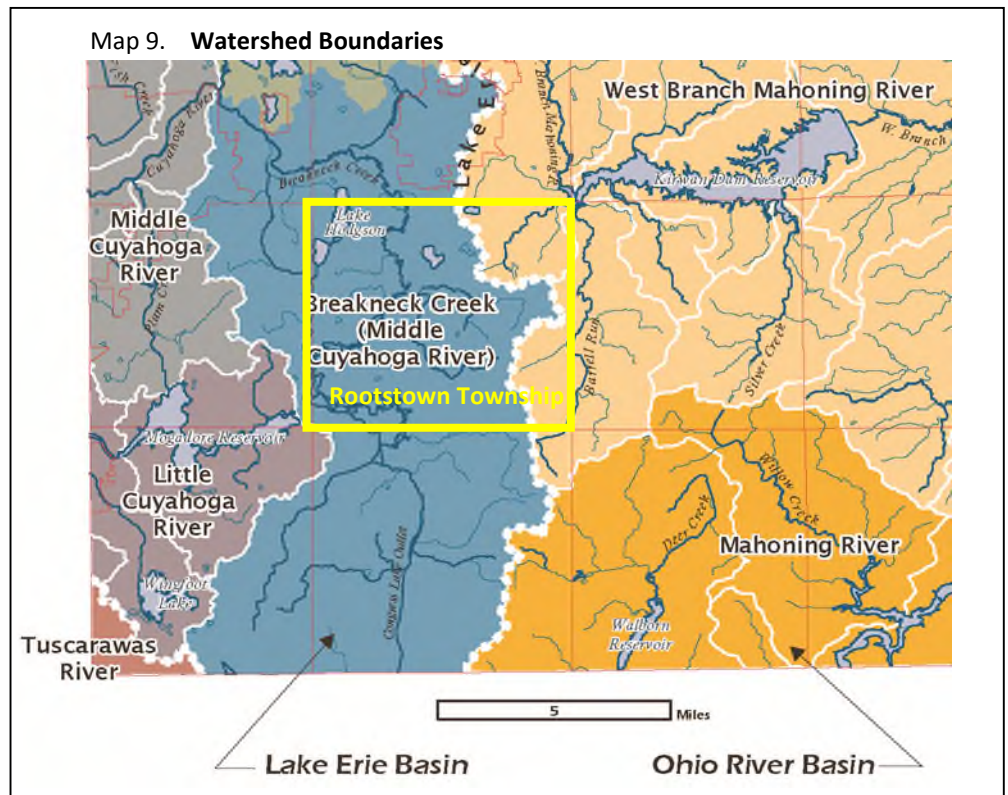
Rootstown Township has several important natural resources, both in terms of ecological health as well as community character and identity. Among these are waterways, wetlands, forested lands, and active farmland. In order to identify the best ways to protect these natural landscapes and their various components, one must first inventory the critical natural features that are present, and understand how these features fit into the broader ecosystem.

Map 8. **Parks & Natural Features**



⁴ Source: Portage County Regional Plan Commission GIS Data

Land in Rootstown Township falls into two different watersheds based on where water drains. The western two-thirds of Rootstown Township is part of the Breakneck Creek watershed while the eastern portion is part of the West Branch of the Mahoning River watershed, see Map 9 Watershed Boundary Map. These watersheds are home to a great diversity of plant and animal communities and endangered species.



Source: EPA Digital Watershed Data

Understanding the interconnectedness of the ecosystem helps underscore how the conservation and protection of natural features within Rootstown Township are important not only to residents and businesses in Rootstown Township, but also to those within the entire watershed in terms of flooding, erosion, and water quality.

- Open water channels such as rivers and creeks serve as drainage ways that allow water to flow from high elevations to permanent storage areas, which for most of Northeast Ohio is Lake Erie.
- Wooded areas and trees influence water flow, filtration, runoff and soil erosion, and provide clean water. Wooded areas act as a barrier to floodwater and their root system create space between soil particles that allows a greater amount of rain water to soak into the ground.
- Riparian areas are the areas adjacent to river and creek corridors that are naturally heavily vegetated land. Riparian areas left in their natural state absorb and slow water, stabilize banks, shade and cool surface water, filter pollutants, and support habitats by providing nutrients and woody debris.
- Wetlands are areas covered by water or areas having waterlogged soils for long periods during the growing season. They generally include swamps, marshes, bogs and similar areas. Wetlands are an important natural resource because they reduce flooding by providing temporary water storage during storm events, which slows the downstream flow of water. Since wetlands detain water, pollutants have a chance to filter out, thus improving water quality. Some wetlands are hydrologically connected to groundwater systems; therefore, wetlands can be important to recharging the groundwater reservoirs. Wetlands also provide food and habitat for many animals.

3. Activities Since 1997 Plan

Zoning

Since the completion of the 1997 Plan, Rootstown Township has implemented a number of zoning changes, including many that were recommendations in the Comprehensive Plan.

- Expanded the C-2 General Commercial District along Lynn Road, east of SR 44 to the railroad tracks
- Created a new L-I Limited Industrial District and applied it to the east side of Prospect Street north of Sandy Lake Road.
- Modified the Industrial District standards to include additional landscaping requirements and to establish performance standards related to monitoring various aspects of operations such as levels of noise, odor, vibrations, etc.
- Created a new V-C Village Center District and applied it to the Tallmadge Road frontage from Rosalind Drive east of SR 44 and to Loretta Drive west of SR 44.
- Created a new R-V Residential Village District and applied it to the New Milford neighborhood (at the NE quadrant of New Milford and Tallmadge Roads) and the Ravenna Building Company Allotment at the intersection of Sandy Lake Road and Prospect Street.
- Expanded the R-2 Residential Zoning throughout the growth area north of I-76.
- Modified the residential zoning district standards to allow farmers greater use of large parcels in ways that ensure that adjacent neighbors are not adversely impacted. Greater flexibility is allowed for farmers to operate more business related uses when accessory to a farm.
- Rezoned the NEOMED campus to the C-2 General Commercial District.

Township Park Development

Between 2005 and 2007, the Township Trustees purchased approximately 36 acres adjacent to the existing Gracie Fields for use as a community park. In 2015, the Trustees established a park commission charged with planning and carrying out the development of the property.

Current Initiatives

- Consideration of Joint Economic Development District (JEDD) to enable the Township to collect income tax from local workers
- School district analyzing Potential for New School Site (contingent on funding)
- NEOMED plans additional development (more dormitories, retail)
- Park Commission underway with Park Master Plan
- Residential Zoning Updates for lake communities
- Establishing an architectural review process and development of design guidelines

4. Summary of Issues

Using the data regarding the existing conditions and assets in Rootstown as well as their knowledge of the community the Advisory Committee created the following list of key issues to be addressed. From this list of issues and a desire to build on the Township's assets, community goals were formed to guide the plan.

- Based on recent growth trends, it is expected that the Township will continue to attract new residential and nonresidential development. Some of the consequences of Increasing Population, include:
 - The need for a community tax base to pay for expanded services, police and fire;
 - The Need for new schools or upgrades/improvements to the existing school buildings due to growth;
 - Balancing supply and demand (providing for people already here vs. newcomers).
- Residential development:
 - Residents want services, but Township needs to find a way to pay for the services – or residents have to tax themselves to cover the cost;
 - Concerns about the number of rental units;
 - Concerns about the viability of older residential neighborhoods.
- Appearance/Quality:
 - Desire for a Western Reserve look.
 - But with pace of development and current economy, improvement may take a long time....
- Economic Development:
 - The Township needs nonresidential development to help generate tax revenue needed to support services (due to loss in state funding); the current model is not sustainable. Now is the time to act.
 - Underutilized industrial district - why is the vacant industrial park with an internal road still sitting undeveloped?
 - The schools now located in the town center may or may not move – will need to integrate schools into the town center concept if they don't move.
 - Need to better understand the benefits of a JEDD.
- NEOMED is thriving and has additional plans for expansion. The Township and NEOMED need to work together for a better future.
- Infrastructure:
 - Traffic along SR 44;
 - Need better understanding of water and sewer to help guide future development

CHAPTER 3.

OUR ASPIRATIONS

We need to know where we want to go, so we can choose the right paths to get there.

In order to evaluate the options available to the Township, it is first necessary to establish the basic long-term future desired for the community. To a large extent, the goals from the previous planning studies remain valid as evidenced from an evaluation of the existing conditions and discussions with the Citizens Advisory Committee and general public.

However, in the discussions regarding Township goals, the following three statements became fundamental “guiding principles” that supported and helped shape the goals.

- The Township recognizes that in order for the Township to be sustainable over the long run, it must operate in a fiscally responsible manner.
- A sustainable community is achieved through partnerships with the business community, citizens and local government.
- We value . the center of the Township anchored by NEOMED, the history and historic character of the buildings at the SR 44 / Tallmadge Road intersection, as well as the rural areas where wooded areas, open space and – to some extent - farmland are the primary characteristics.

The following goals provide a general framework on which planning policies and implementation measures have been developed.

Maintain Balance

We will retain a balance of developed areas and rural areas.

Our goal is for the Township to maintain its open rural character while providing, in selected locations, an adequate balance of nonresidential uses. An appropriate balance of residential and non-residential land uses will ensure good schools and a high level of community services at reasonable tax rates.

Foster Economic Development

We will have thriving businesses in our core development area (SR 44).

Cultivate a Positive Image

We will have well designed and memorable buildings and public spaces that strengthen our sense of place, create a positive image, attract visitors, and foster community interaction.

It is important that Rootstown have a sense of place and a unique, identifiable image which is characterized by its community gathering places and cohesive development appearance, both of which convey a sense of mutual responsibility and support among neighbors.

Promote Placemaking in the Town Center

Our town center will be strong, vibrant and walkable and known for its quality businesses and design.

NEOMED will continue to be an important and valued asset.

Preserve Rural Areas and Natural Resources

We will preserve key natural areas and provide connections to them from the town center and residential areas.

Enhance Community Amenities

We will provide community amenities on par with cities, such as a library, community center and senior center.

Maintain Housing Choice

We will have a diverse range of quality housing units to provide choices that attract and retain residents.

Sustain Township Services

We will continue to provide quality Township services such as fire protection and road improvements.

CHAPTER 4.

OUR POLICIES AND STRATEGIES

The general development policies in this chapter are the best means of carrying out the Township's vision. They address broad policy guidelines, specific land use recommendations, and administrative issues that are important to the on-going planning agenda of the Township. The policies establish recommendations in the areas of future land use, economic development, natural features and open space preservation and transportation.

Rootstown still has a large percentage of agricultural and undeveloped land. Yet there are areas that will continue to attract development for a variety of reasons. While the Plan recognizes the importance of maintaining and preserving the rural qualities of the Township, this objective must be balanced with economic development initiatives that will direct growth in areas best suited for it. At the same time, economic development will increase the Township's fiscal stability by increasing the non-residential tax base and reducing the tax burden on residential property owners.

1. MAINTAIN BALANCE

In order to accomplish both the desire to encourage economic growth and development as well as to preserve/conservate the open space and the rural character of Rootstown, the Township continues to advocate a two tiered approach to development. This is accomplished by delineation of a "growth area boundary" within which are the preferred locations for development while the preservation of rural character is promoted outside of the growth boundary. This is essentially saying that desired and expected development will be accommodated in a manner that balances the tension between the economic development and rural objectives with a clear distinction between the two. Plans that identify appropriate development areas and conservation areas are a primary mechanism for ensuring the long-term sustainable economic, social and environmental health of the Township as well as the region.

Strategy 1.1: Maintain the general growth boundary area as laid out in the 1997 Plan with some adjustments. Confine growth to the central and northwest quadrants of the Township, centered primarily around 1-76 and SR 44. A secondary area for development, primarily residential, is along Tallmadge Road between the western Township boundary and the village center. This is essentially the approach adopted in the 1997 Plan. Map 10 illustrates the application of this two tiered approach.

The boundaries for the growth area continue to be based on the following considerations:

- Include the existing sewer district and any areas where plans have already been formulated to extend sewers.
- Include the existing R-2 and R-3 residential zoning districts, which include the older residential developments that have higher densities than is typical of most of the Township.

- Use existing features that serve as logical boundaries for growth. These include the railroad to the east and the existing O-C Conservation Zoning District boundary south of the Portage Landfill.

Adjustments to the growth boundary were made in 2004 to eliminate areas that were still zoned R-1 and had no access to utilities. Since then water lines have been extended beyond the Growth Area along Tallmadge Road west from Marks Avenue to the western Township limit. Based on the location of the water line and the potential demand for new residential development, the 2016 Plan Update expands the growth area boundary to include the western Tallmadge Road area. The total area included in this defined boundary is approximately 7,600 acres, which is about 43% of the Township. (See Map 10 Strategy 1.1)

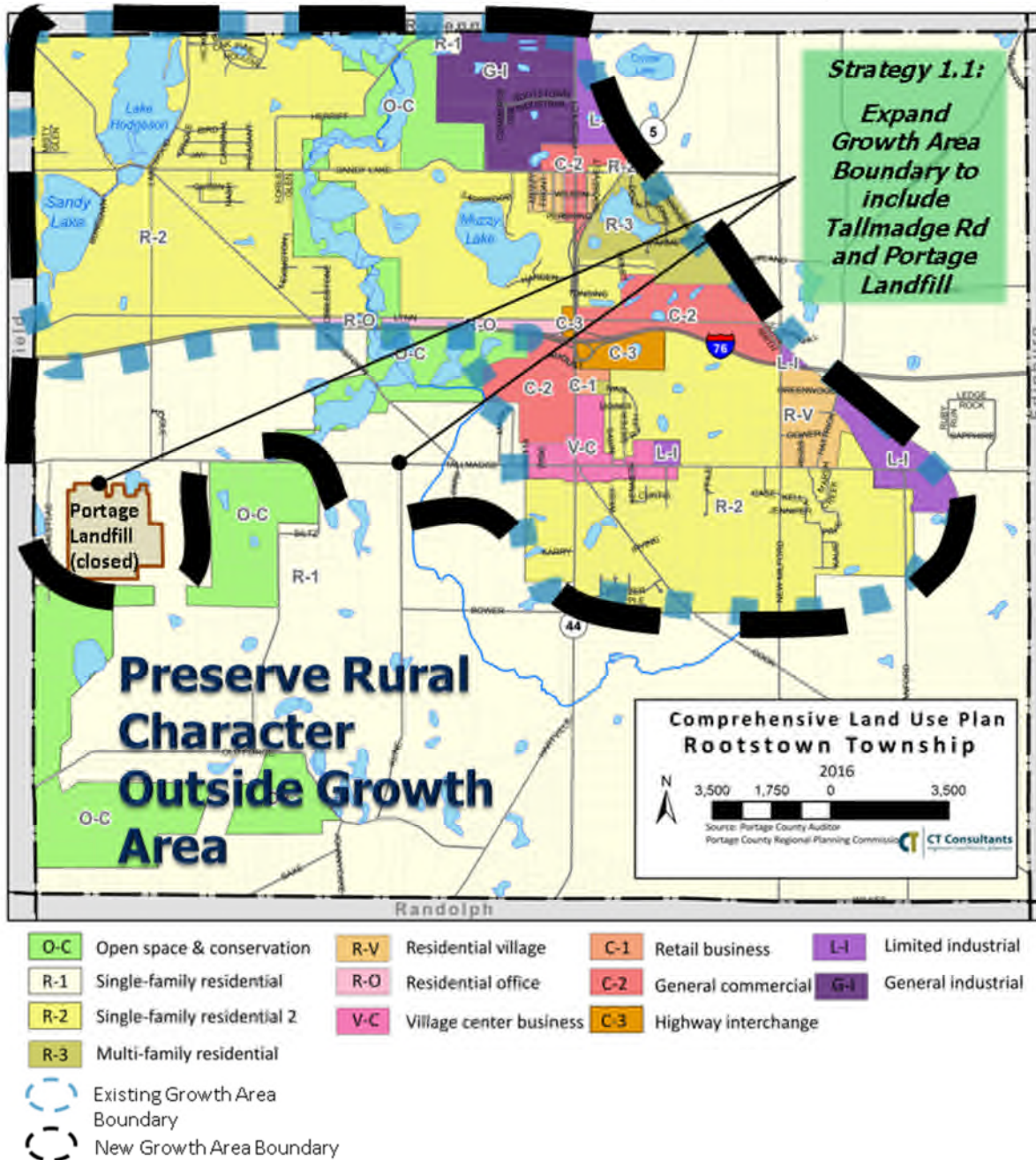
Future adjustments to the growth area boundary are warranted whenever changes occur to the key influencers such as the location of community facilities and an expansion of sewer service. For example, if the Rootstown school campus moves, it would be appropriate to adjust the GA boundary as necessary to encourage the development of smaller lot residential subdivisions (e.g. 13,000 square foot lots as permitted in the R-2 zoning district) near/ surrounding the site of the new school district campus.

Policy: Continue to encourage and promote new development within the "Growth Area." In the GA encourage both economic development and medium density residential development in order to:

- Increase the tax base through new development.
- Take advantage of access to the interstate.
- Build on existing commercial and industrial development and provide for economic development in a way that minimizes impacts in other, more rural areas of the Township.
- Minimize future infrastructure requirements - such as road improvements and utilities - by concentrating most of the development in a compact area.

In order to implement this policy, land should be zoned to accommodate the appropriate density.

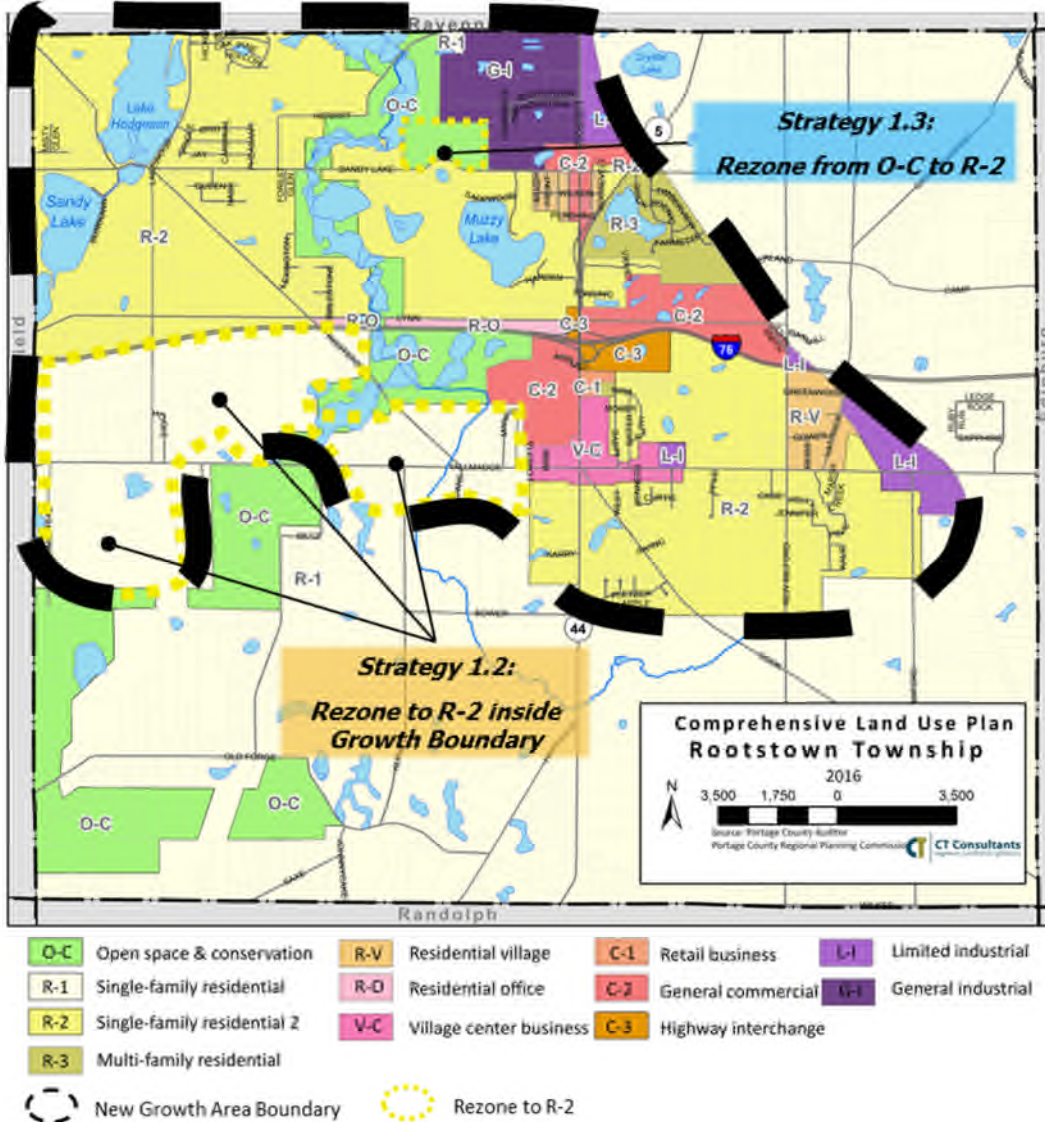
Map 10. **Township Zoning and Growth Boundary**



Strategy 1.2: Within the Growth Area, rezone land from R-1 to R-2 to take advantage of existing water and/or sewer availability (See Map 11 Strategy 1.2).

Strategy 1.3: Rezone specific lots along Sandy Lake Road that back up to industrial land from O-C to R-2 to be consistent with other residential parcels in the vicinity (See Map 11 Strategy 1.3).

Map 11. Recommended Residential Rezoning in the Growth Area



Policy: Continue to encourage and promote the preservation of rural character and low density development outside the "Growth Area." It is important to note that much of the land outside the Growth Area is zoned R-1, which allows new large lot residential subdivisions (1.5 acres lots), and two recent subdivisions have been built at that density.

2. FOSTER ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Economic development should be confined within the growth boundary, primarily along the SR 44 corridor where there are still a number of sites available that are suitable for nonresidential development. Promoting new development in this location makes sense for a number of reasons: proximity to I-76 meets the general location criteria for business development; helps the Township meet its economic development objectives; confines increased traffic to selected streets; minimizes impact on existing or proposed residential areas; confines the need for sewer and water extensions to a more compact area; and reflects the pattern of existing zoning.

Policy: Retain the SR 44 corridor as the primary focus for economic development. This core area is where all of the nonresidential zoning is located, and it will continue to be the Township's economic development focus.

Strategy 2.1: Concentrate first on developing the areas already zoned for nonresidential uses. This strategy is based on past trends, expected outcomes, and the amount of land currently available. There are approximately 300 acres of vacant and developable industrial land and 150 acres of vacant and developable commercial land.⁵ Based on recent development trends, this amount of land area should be sufficient for the foreseeable future to accommodate demand for new development. (See Map 12, Strategy 2.1) Action steps to attract new development include:

- Market the existing industrial park
- Identify appropriate incentives, as needed to attract new development

Strategy 2.2: Rezone "land-locked" residential parcels to a commercial district. While there is sufficient vacant land to accommodate nonresidential development for the foreseeable future, two areas warrant rezoning from R-2 to C-2 because they are sandwiched between existing commercial zoning and either existing higher density residential development or the SR 5/ 44 bypass highway, and are not reasonably suitable for residential development. Areas for rezoning include the following:

- Expand C-2 General Commercial zoning east of Prospect Road and south of Sandy Lake Road, in the area currently zoned R-2 adjacent to the SR 5/44 bypass. This small area is adjacent to existing C-2 zoning and is bounded by the bypass. (See Map 12, Strategy 2.2)
- Expand the C-2 Commercial zoning along Lynn Road, east of SR 44 to extend northward toward the Valley Hills mobile home park. Recommendations were made in 1997 to create/expand the allowance for nonresidential development north of Lynn Road to just below the mobile park. The Township adopted C-2 zoning in this area but limited the north boundary below Clover Drive. While this area is zoned R-3, it is undeveloped and has no access except through the existing mobile home park. The area is suitable for extension of the commercial district. (See Map 12, Strategy 2.2)

⁵ This does not include vacant land that would be difficult to develop because of wetlands, floodplain or other natural feature.

Strategy 2.3: Promote lower intensity uses at the former Wickes Lumber site located in the in the Light Industrial District just west of the railroad tracks and south of Tallmadge Road. This area has been zoned for industrial development since before 1990, largely because of its adjacency to the railroad tracks. However, now that the site is currently vacant it is appropriate for redevelopment with a lower density and use intensity. Any new development on this industrially zoned land along Tallmadge Road should be encouraged to be oriented to a new internal road rather than having industrial buildings and parking areas oriented to Tallmadge Road. (See Map 12, Strategy 2.3).

Strategy 2.4: Review the nonresidential zoning district requirements and revise as needed to minimize the impact of new nonresidential development next to existing residential areas. (See Map 12, Strategy 2.4)

- Building and parking setbacks: The current industrial building setback is 100 feet from residential and the commercial building setback is only 35 feet from residential. The existing parking setback is 40 feet in industrial zones and 20 feet in commercial zones.
- Landscaping and buffer requirements: The existing landscaping regulations require: 1) a specific number of trees and shrubs along the street between parking and the roadway, 2) landscaping within parking lots and 3) screening when abutting residential. Additional requirements could specify the number and types of trees to ensure adequate screening.

Strategy 2.5: In the future, and only if the need for additional land for economic development is demonstrated, the area currently zoned R-2 along the south side of I-76, east of SR 44 (between the C-3 Zoning and New Milford Road) and north of Reed Ditch is appropriate for additional office/industrial development (See Map 12 Strategy 2.5).

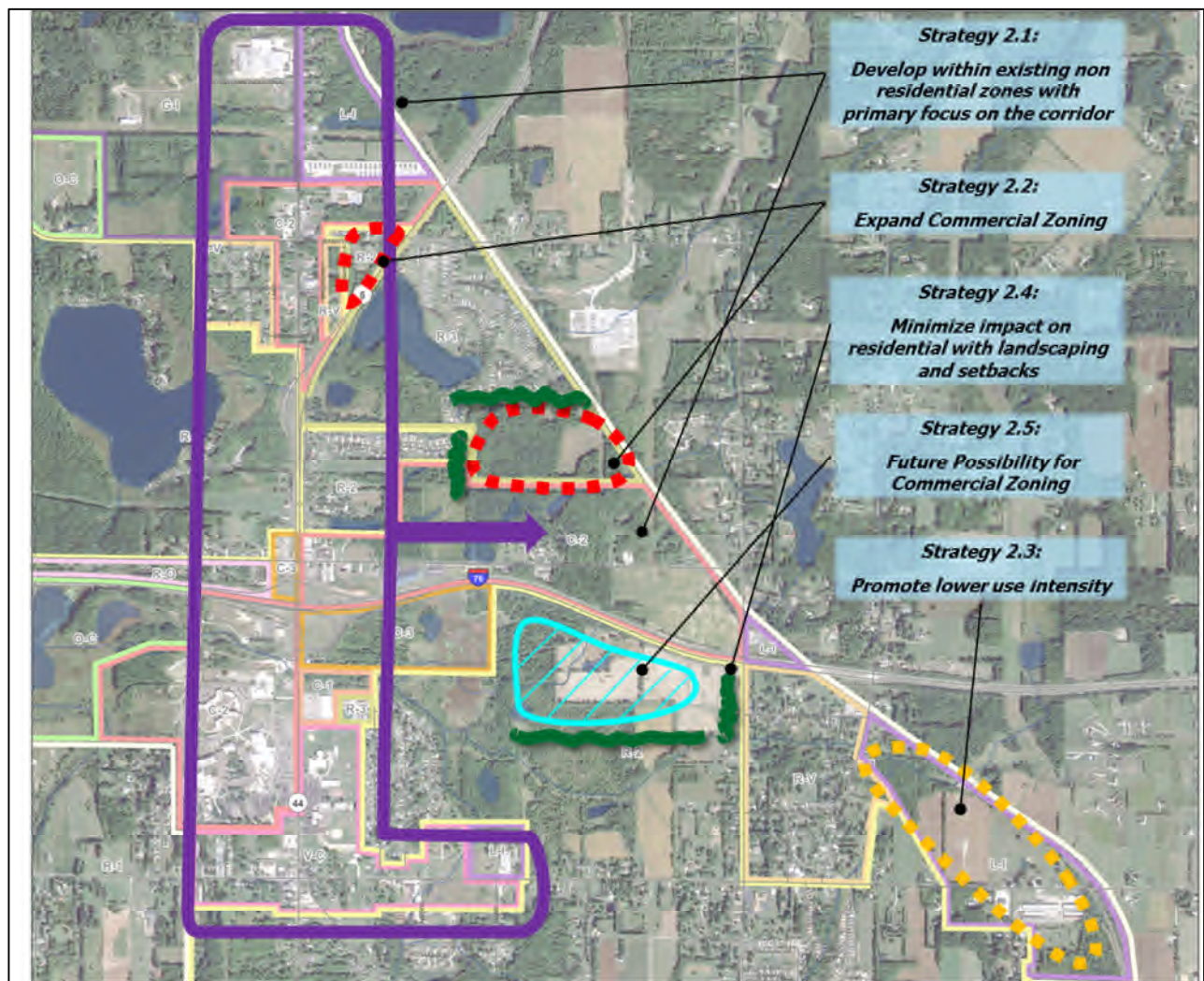
This area is zoned R-2 and has some environmental constraints, including wetlands and wooded areas which may limit the potential for development. However, being adjacent to the I-76 expressway this area would appeal to businesses that desire to take advantage of highway visibility. With current best practices in low impact development, new construction could incorporate the natural features into the development's site design and/or provide for remediation. Criteria for approving any rezoning for new nonresidential development in this area includes:

- Restrict new development to business park/light industrial uses such as offices, research and technology and limited industrial uses which are located in a campus-like setting. This type of development would be restricted to uses conducted entirely inside buildings with no, or limited, outdoor storage, as currently regulated in the L-I district.
- If this area is developed, it is important to ensure that the existing residential neighborhoods have a sufficient buffer. New development should not be permitted to connect with existing residential streets (specifically Sabin Drive).
- The two primary access points would be through the commercial properties fronting on SR 44 and from an access road from New Milford Road. The access point from New Milford Road would be close to the I-76 right-of-way, yet far enough south to allow for adequate sight lines under the expressway overpass. From New Milford Road, access to I-76 and SR 44 would be via John Smith and Lynn Roads. The remainder of the frontage along the west side of New Milford Road should be maintained for residential development.

- Secondary access could be considered along Tallmadge Road if it could be restricted to auto traffic only (no trucks) which would provide an alternative route for employees and thereby lessen the potential for congestion at the SR 44 access point.

Based on the amount of vacant nonresidential land currently available, it is anticipated that this land will continue to remain available for residential development for the foreseeable future. It is not recommended at this time to rezone this area to a non-residential district. Therefore, based on the current R-2 zoning, the Township recognizes that if this land, or any significant portion thereof, were to be developed for residential purposes the opportunity for long-term economic development would be precluded.

Map 12. **Economic Development Policies**



Strategy 2.6: Partner with NEOMED in developing suitable locations for start-up businesses that grow beyond NEOMED’s business incubator space on campus who desire to stay near the University for continued support.

3. CULTIVATE A POSITIVE COMMUNITY IMAGE

“Great communities have great design”

Urban Land Institute

Distinctive community character and quality design enhance not only the appearance but also the reputation of the community. In addition, a strong correlation exists between community character and economic vitality. Protecting and enhancing the small town and rural character of Rootstown Township helps to create an inviting environment that attracts residents and businesses. This section outlines the various aspects of the built and natural environment that can be enhanced to establish a strong reputation as a well-designed and aesthetically pleasing community.

Historically, community character develops organically over time. It is conveyed by the natural features, development patterns, and public spaces that contribute to a community’s identity including:

- Amount of open spaces and wooded areas left in their natural state,
- Residences of various sizes, scale, and density,
- Density, massing and condition of commercial buildings’ as well as their distance from the road,
- Character of local roads, and
- Signage, including business signs as well as gateway signs and other public signs.

Strategy 3.1: Foster maintenance of the Township’s small town character, particularly along the main thoroughfares by rigorously, but reasonably, enforcing the setback and landscaping requirements in the Zoning Resolution.

Strategy 3.2: Establish building and site design guidelines, and architectural guidelines in selected areas. **Continue** to work with the Portage County Regional Planning Commission in the development of guidelines and appropriate review procedures as amendments to the zoning resolution.

Strategy 3.3: Continue to promote “high quality development” for non-residential development as advocated in the 1997 Plan update. This works in tandem with the design guidelines, but it is also an overall policy initiative which requires commitment to balancing short term economic gains with long term goals. Development tends to occur incrementally with one project at a time. It is important to consider the long-term impact and keep the overall vision in mind.

Strategy 3.4: Protect historical homes and buildings that are determined to positively contribute to the character of Rootstown Township. Work with property owners to:

- Identify eligible properties for historic designation.
- Encourage the installation of historic property markers in key locations to increase awareness of the history of the Township.

4. PROMOTE PLACE MAKING in the TOWN CENTER

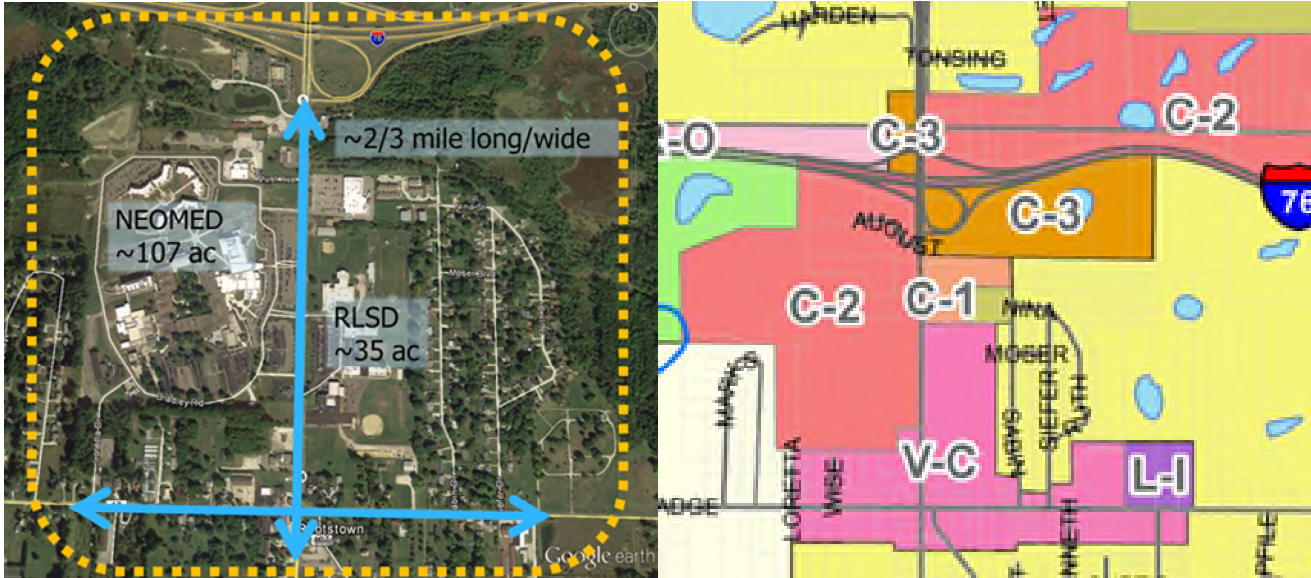
The 1997 Plan embraced the concept of a village center at the intersection of SR 44 and Tallmadge Road. This is the area where Township facilities (including the Rootstown schools campus and the historic Town Hall), NEOMED and retail stores were already concentrated in a compact environment, relative to the rest of the Township. The V-C Village Center zoning district was created as a direct outcome of the 1997 Plan. The central elements of a village, which include a mix of residential and commercial uses in a compact environment, already exist in this area to some extent, and contribute to the character of Rootstown; however more can be done to encourage and strengthen the viability and image of this area.

The presence of a well-defined and readily identifiable town center has been a key element of community life for centuries. And now, there is renewed recognition of the role a vibrant town center plays in a community’s overall sustainability. The concentration of civic activities and a mix of uses (including residential) has multiple benefits that promote greater social, economic, and environmental health: it encourages physical activity in the form of walking and biking; fosters social interaction with amenities like public open space, and provides a critical mass of consumers that helps support nearby stores and restaurants. Promoting development within the existing town center is a fiscally efficient use of infrastructure and resources. Concentration of economic development within the confines of the town center adheres to the concept of the growth area boundary and will ultimately protect the rural landscape.

Overall Primary Goals
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Promote economic development •Create a sense of place/ community focal point •Use as catalyst to foster additional quality development •Provide supporting public and private services •Encourage senior housing options

Opportunities	Constraints
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •The strength of NEOMED (both as a destination and business incubator) •Major intersection (SR 44/Tallmadge Road) •Near I-76 •The potential benefits of the JEDD •Historic buildings along Tallmadge Road 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Existing and diverse development characteristics •Multiple property owners •Level of market demand (?) •The fact that the schools may not move •SR 44 traffic




Map 13. **Town Center Area and Current Zoning**



The area included in the “Town Center” is generally a 2/3 mile long stretch of SR 44 from I-76 at the north end to the Rootstown Township Hall at the south end, and a 2/3 mile long segment of Tallmadge Road from Marks Avenue to the west and the cemetery to the east (See Map 13). This area is easily walkable from one end to another in less than 20 minutes and represents the appropriate limits of a town center.

There are a variety of zoning districts already utilized in this area, including the V-C Village Center Business for the Tallmadge Road frontage and Rootstown schools campus; C-1 Retail Business for the Giant Eagle plaza, C-2 General Commercial for NEOMED and the properties between NEOMED and I-76, and C-3 Highway Interchange for the undeveloped area north of Giant Eagle (Map 13).

Essential Elements of a Vibrant Town Center Include:

- 
 Unifying elements along the street frontage
 - Landscaping
 - Signs
 - Parking & building setbacks
 - Scale of buildings
- 
 Cohesive building and site design
 - Creates an identifiable image
 - Provides cohesiveness to the area
- 
 People friendly, walkable environment People friendly, walkable environment means:
 - Efficient and safe circulation
 - Pedestrian connectivity
 - Well-designed public spaces
 - Variety of activities

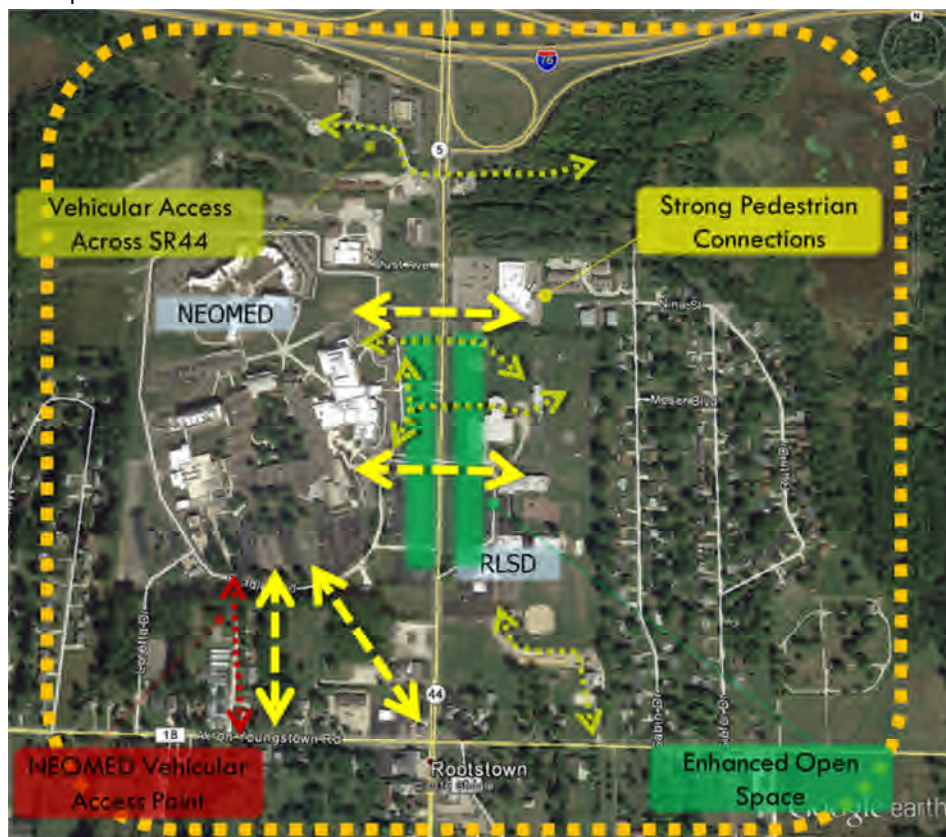
Overall strategies for achieving the Town Center goals include:

Strategy 4.1: Continue to permit and encourage a mix of uses, including residential. Encourage infill development at an appropriate density to increase the variety of activities, goods and services offered in the Town Center.

Strategy 4.2: Require development to provide unifying elements along the street frontage (SR 44 and Tallmadge Road). This is accomplished through landscaping requirements, sign regulations, parking and building setbacks, and appropriate scale of buildings. Provide enhanced open space in front of NEOMED — both sides of SR 44. Enhance with unifying signs and street furniture – in front of northern portion of NEOMED site; mirrored across the street on the school property whether the schools remain or the property is redeveloped.

Strategy 4.3: Promote a pedestrian friendly, walkable environment through efficient and safe vehicular circulation design and strong pedestrian connections. Vehicular circulation needs include: coordinated access between east & west sides of SR 44; and one major access from NEOMED to Tallmadge Road. Strong pedestrian connections include construction (or widening) of sidewalks along SR 44 and Tallmadge Road, and establishing well defined cross walks across SR 44, and providing connections from NEOMED campus to both major streets. (See Map 14)

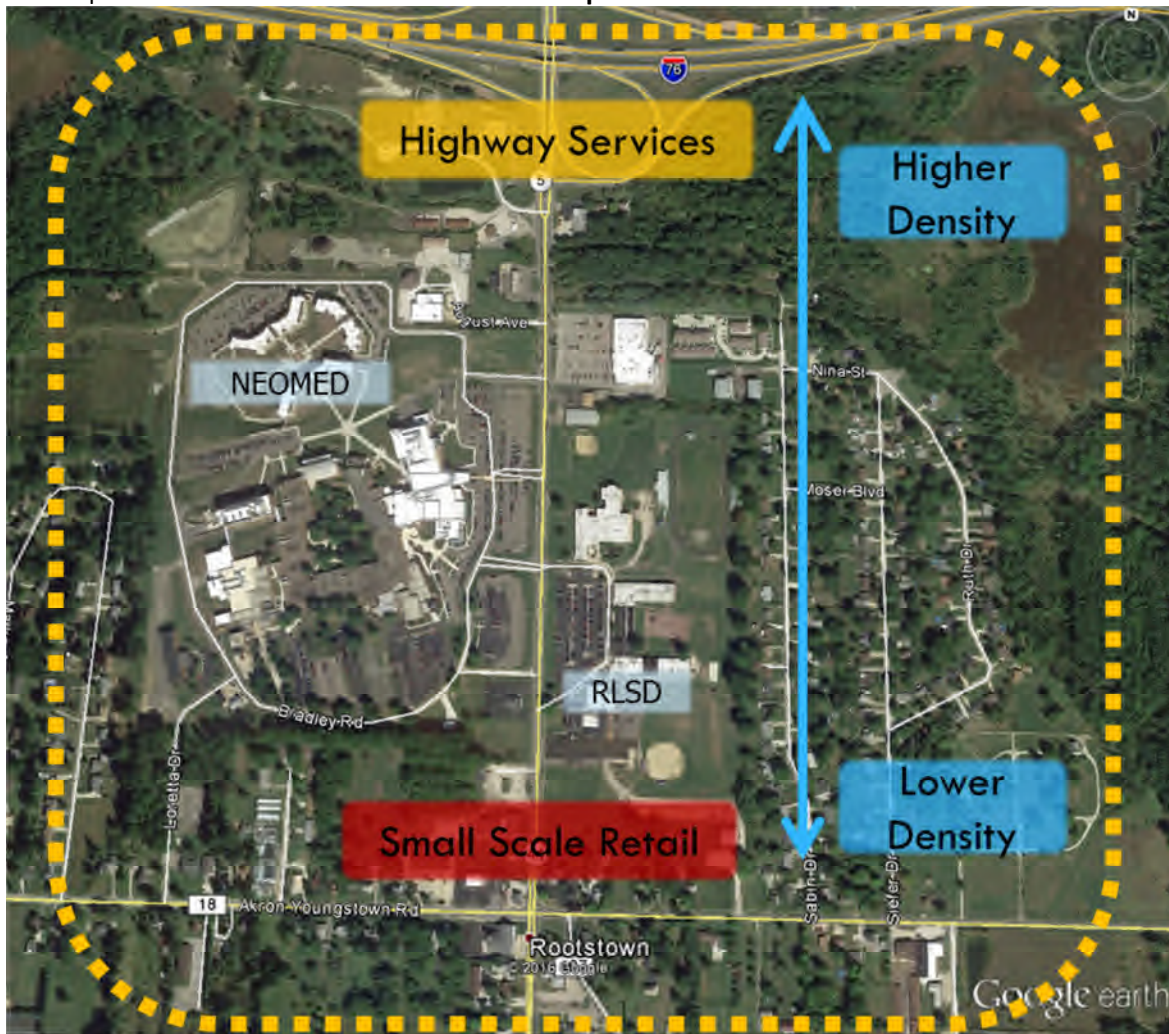
Map 14. Town Center Area Connections



Strategy 4.4: Create a well-designed public space that can be used for event programming as a way of bringing the community together and building relationships that encourage repeat visits to the Town Center. This can be provided by the Township or as part of a new private development.

Strategy 4.5: Use building density and massing to transition from: Highway services at 1-76 interchange (higher density, larger multiple story buildings at the north end); to local businesses near the SR 44/Tallmadge Road intersection (smaller scale buildings) and east along Tallmadge Road. (See Map 15)

Map 15. Town Center Area – General Principles



Strategy 4.6: The Township itself should consider establishing needed public facilities, and encouraging others as well if compatible, in this area whenever the opportunity is available. By the Township taking the lead it encourages private investment in the historic area.

Character Areas

These policies and strategies should be implemented at varying levels within delineated character areas that recognize the existing development patterns and locational characteristics. While these are five distinct areas, the overarching concept is to transition in terms of density and design from the I-76 highway south. This feathering of design will preserve the Western Reserve feel in the Town Center while merging design with the existing uses in a way that will be cohesive. The five character areas are described below and depicted on Map 16.

Character Area 1: This area includes the primary frontage of NEOMED and Rootstown Schools site along SR 44:

- Landscaping, signs, street furniture will be the dominant elements.
- Buildings may be larger and are expected to be set back from the street. This could change if NEOMED is inclined to build deck parking and add new buildings at the street.
- The building form on the east side would mirror, if possible the form on the west.

Character Area 2: This area includes the three corners of the Tallmadge Road and SR 44 intersection (northwest, northeast, southwest quadrants):

- Could be true mixed use (retail first floor, residential or offices above) with two-story buildings on assembled land;
- Buildings placed at the street with parking behind;
- Buildings designed with “smaller scale feel.”

Character Area 3: This area extends along Tallmadge Road, on both the north and south sides, between the SR 44 intersection eastward to the cemetery. This area is already developed with single-family houses, some of which have historical value.

- The dominant unifying forms will be achieved through the size and location of buildings (similar to the existing residential buildings) and maintenance of the front yards.
 - New buildings will either be small, or if larger, designed to “look small” with pitched roofs and variations in the building frontage and the roof lines in order to be compatible with the existing residential character;
 - New buildings will be placed along the street generally at the existing setback– new buildings will respect the setback of the existing buildings;
 - Parking would not be located in front of buildings, however, there may need to be some relief from the standard parking requirements (required number of spaces) in order to permit/encourage small businesses to occupy the existing buildings. A reduced number of parking spaces is generally needed because of adaptive reuse of residential buildings typically results in less efficient use of the retrofitted retail space;

- This concept is consistent with the existing Village Center Zoning, which permits the types of retail/business uses that can be conducted in a converted residence, such as offices, specialty retail and bed-and-breakfast establishments.

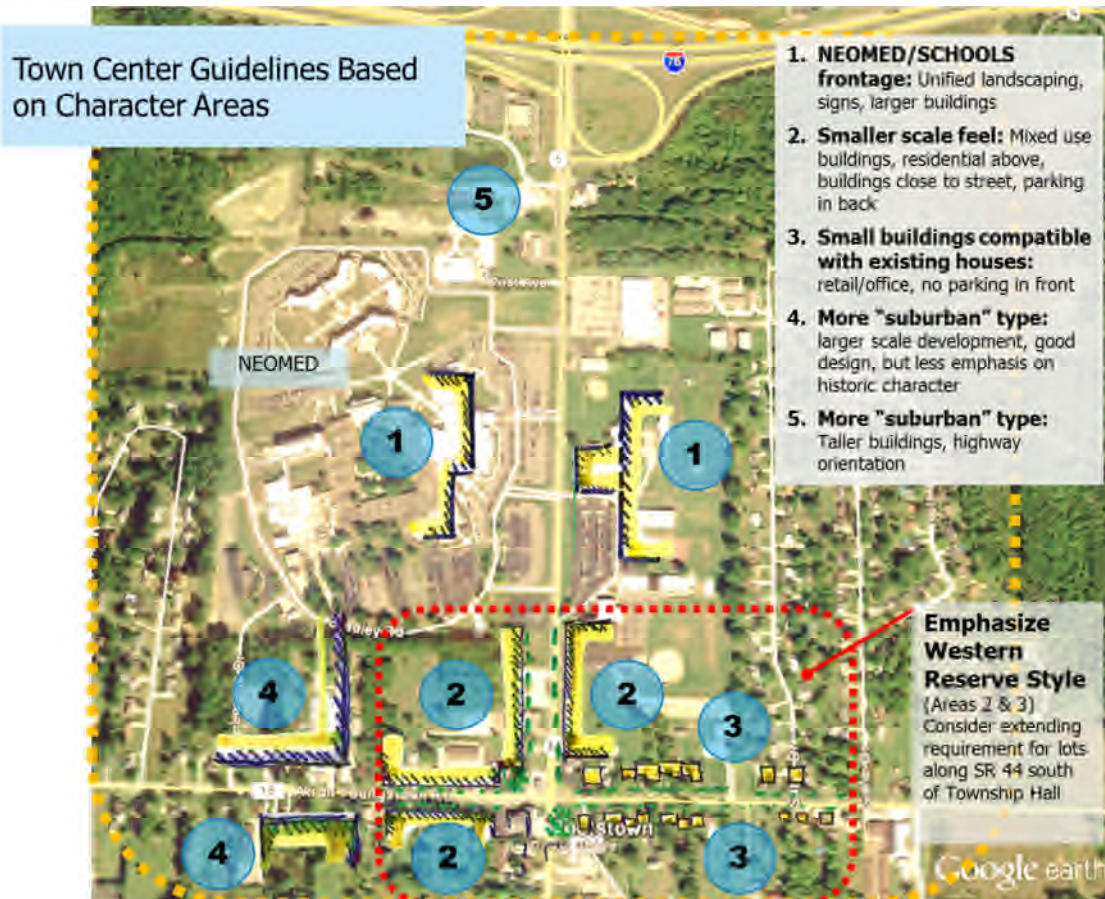
Character Area 4: This area includes the remaining frontage along Tallmadge Road: east of the cemetery (on both north and south sides of Tallmadge Road); along Tallmadge Road near the Loretta Drive intersection;

- Unified development but more “suburban type” (larger building setback, parking in front) development flexibility;
- The requirements for this area are based on the distance from core (at Tallmadge Road and SR 44, which includes existing buildings that have less (or no) historic character.

Character Area 5: This area is located north of the NEOMED and School campuses, near the I-76 overpass and serves as the gateway to the Town Center.

- This area is similar to character area 4 in many ways but with a higher stress on both highway oriented and university related uses due to its location abutting I-76 and NEOMED.
- As a gateway to the Town Center and the contemporary style of NEOMED, it is appropriate to have taller buildings.

Map 16. **Town Center Character Areas**



Use Areas

Table 3, below, is intended to convey a **general understanding of the range of uses expected** in the five Town-Center character areas. These uses would be consistent with the “form” and “development intensity” envisioned for each area recognizing that the overarching objective is to create a cohesive, walkable, mixed-use area that reflects a “sense of place” and a distinct identity. Additionally, the uses are grouped to attract similar uses to specific locations in order for categories of uses to reinforce and benefit by their proximity to each other. This is the same strategy use in a traditional shopping center that seeks a continuity of retail uses. While some uses may be appropriate in a character area they may not have been included in this listing because the size and scale of their activity is not likely to fit the size and character of the existing or expected buildings. For example, small research labs, incubator research uses, and higher education facilities could be in Areas 2 and 3 but are likely to require more space than is available within the scale of the buildings expected.

This allocation in the table illustrates the intent of the Town Center concept. However, prior to the Township considering formal zoning amendments to implement this concept this proposed use allocation should be further evaluated and refined to ensure the final regulations balance the public interest, property rights and market potential.

Table 3.

Town Center - <u>Generalized</u> Policy for Major Use Groups					
Range of Uses Permitted (with applicable conditions)	Character Areas				
	Area 1	Area 2	Area 3	Area 4	Area 5*
Residential					
Single Family			X		
Multiple family apartments				X	X
Above First Floor	X	X	X	X	X
Townhouses			X	X	X
Senior Citizen	X			X	X
Offices	X		X	X	X
Research and Laboratories	X			X	X
Higher Education	X			X	X
Retail	X	X	X	X	X
Restaurants	X	X	X	X	X
Drive-Up Window Service	X			X	X
Automotive and Highway Oriented Use				X	X
Hotels	X	X		X	X
Recreation	X	X		X	X
Note:					
* Area 5 is similar in nature to Area 4 but with a greater emphasis placed on highway oriented uses and higher education.					

5. *PRESERVE RURAL AREA and NATURAL RESOURCES*

The corollary policy to managed economic development in the development area is to maximize the preservation of the existing rural or semi-rural character of the remainder of the Township -- to the extent possible. Measures that encourage the continuation of farming and the preservation of open space and natural areas and which alleviate pressure for development will be vigorously pursued in a manner which balances the collective public's interest with the rights of individual property owners. Therefore, policies include both regulatory measures as well as optional provisions that serve as incentives for rural preservation and conservation of natural areas.

The strategies for maximizing the preservation of open space outside the Growth Area and protecting natural resources throughout the Township in order to preserve rural character are outlined below.

Policy: Carefully evaluate any rezoning request to increase density outside of the growth area boundary. Likewise, utility line extensions outside of the growth area boundary, should also be carefully evaluated for the long-term impacts. For example, rezoning land outside the growth boundary from R-1 to R-2 will most likely lead to the extension of water and sanitary sewer lines to service the smaller lot subdivision, which can then lead to additional rezoning requests and more small lot subdivisions.

Policy: Encourage Conservation Design for Planned Residential Developments. If new low-density (R-1) development is proposed, encourage planned residential developments that embrace conservation subdivision design. Recent residential subdivision development in the R-1 district shows that some homeowners are willing to purchase a lot with a septic system in a subdivision. Through the use of the planned residential development regulations, the Township can implement what is known as "Conservation Design". Conservation Design requires a high percentage of open space, typically 40% or more (compared to the Township's current regulations that require only 35% open space in PRDs in the R-1 District).

Not only does this type of development provide open space but grouping houses closer together results in shorter streets, less infrastructure and less impervious surfaces, all of which help to reduce storm water runoff and flooding as well as utility construction and maintenance costs. Furthermore, studies have shown that these projects have higher property values because the open space is protected and the homeowner does not need to worry that it will be developed in the near future.

The current Planned Residential Development regulations specify that grouping the houses closer together does not allow for more units in a development, instead grouping is encouraged as a way to preserve larger undisturbed areas. In many respects, the current clustering/grouping provisions in the Planned Residential Development for R-1 and O-C districts can be considered conservation development regulations

- Consider increasing the required open space for PRDs in the R-1 district from 35% to 40%.
- Eliminate the allowance for attached dwelling units in PRDs in the R-1 district to ensure that new developments in the R-1 district maintain a lower-density character. Currently the zoning code

allows for a maximum of 4 attached units to be permitted in a PRD in the R-1 district and 6 in a PRD in an R-2 or V-R Village Residential district.

- Reevaluate the zoning approval process for PRDs. The ORC allows the Board of Trustees to regulate planned unit developments differently than otherwise required for standard development, recognizing that planned residential developments are a flexible zoning mechanism that relies on the approval of a development plan, and that many PRD regulations include a list of discretionary approval factors. Recent amendments to the Rootstown Planned Residential Development regulations have changed the approval process to a conditional use, which requires the development proposal to go to the Board of Zoning Appeals.

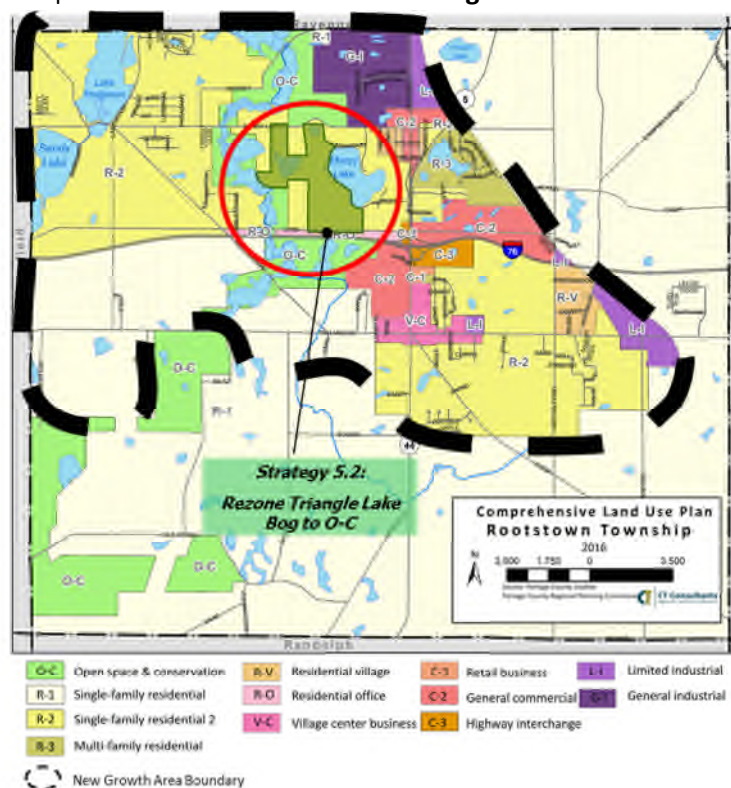
Strategy 5.1: Require new development to incorporate natural areas into their site design.

- Adopt Riparian/ Wetland Setbacks as part of the Township zoning resolution. According to a survey conducted by the Chagrin River Watershed Partners in 2013 of communities that have adopted riparian and wetland setback regulations, only five communities in Portage County have these types of regulations (Aurora, Streetsboro, Brimfield Township, Franklin Township, and Mantua Township). These could either be adopted as part of the Township's zoning regulations or as part of the Portage County Subdivision Regulations, which is the tactic that Summit and Lake Counties have taken.
- Tree Preservation. Adopt regulations that require developers to retain a certain number of existing trees in residential developments. Such regulations would ensure that large wooded areas are protected during the development of residential, commercial, and industrial areas. These policies and provisions will promote the preservation of the Township's natural character. A tree preservation ordinance could include the following provisions based on the Township's priorities:
 - Encourage the preservation of trees in areas covered by 20 or more contiguous acres of forest (unless the trees are of poor quality and/or are young trees). Large wooded areas (20 or more acres) typically provide a greater diversity of wildlife habitat, while narrow wooded areas between larger woodlands can provide corridors to allow for wildlife movement.
 - Prohibit the wholesale clearing of wooded parcels and require that a certain portion of existing trees be preserved. The regulations should be flexible enough so that the development potential of parcels is not reduced.
 - Require the protection of trees during construction.
- Promote low impact development, green building techniques and energy conservation/ alternative energy. Low-impact development (LID) is a site design approach that seeks to integrate functional design with pollution prevention measures to compensate for land development impacts on the environment.
 - Ensure that local regulations do not prohibit or create obstacles for the use of LID site planning such as the use of swales, cisterns, green roofs, pervious surface pavement, or solar panels (especially in commercial and industrial areas).

- Encourage new development to employ green building practices that minimize consumption of resources, employ recycled building materials, and promote quality living and working environments.
- Encourage green storm water and graywater management options to retain and reuse stormwater and reduce surface runoff.

Strategy 5.2: O-C District Rezoning. Expand the O-C Open Space Conservation District to create a continuous connection along the creeks/streams on the west side of the Township if it can be documented that there are existing areas that have the same natural features as the other O-C areas. This would form a natural boundary for the growth area and limit future extension of the utility lines. All open space areas that are currently owned by a public entity should be rezoned to the O-C Conservation District. This includes the Triangle Lake Bog Area, see Map 17.

Map 17. Recommended O-C Rezoning



Strategy 5.3: Cultivate economic development strategies that leverage local natural resource assets such as Breakneck Creek, the Triangle Lake Bog and West Branch State Park to create outdoor recreational destinations as well as raise awareness of important natural assets. Some communities have recognized that conserving natural resources for outdoor recreation and tourism can help build a stronger, more diverse economy.

- Promote the area along Breakneck Creek for compatible outdoor activities.
- Improve access and awareness of natural and outdoor recreation assets through a multi-pronged approach that includes creating a network of trails, improving facilities for bicycling, and protecting scenic and ecologically valuable land.

Strategy 5.4: Encourage and promote private donations of land and establishment of conservation easements. Begin a conservation easement campaign that educates and encourages large lot owners to place the unused portions of their properties into a conservation easement to be held by the Portage Park District, Portage Soil and Water Conservation District or the Western Reserve Land Conservancy. In some cases this underdeveloped land provides productive storm water management and water quality services that are beneficial to the Township and the watershed.

- Encourage residents to coordinate with the Portage Park District, Western Reserve Land Conservancy (WRLC) or Portage Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD) to donate land or restrict further development through a conservation easement. Depending on the situation, the property owner may receive a tax deduction for the donated value:
 - First priority should be given to coordinating with the Portage Park District for land donation. The Park District is the Township's preferred entity for land donation in order to utilize the land for both active and passive recreational purposes.
 - Encourage land donations to the Township, which could include deed restrictions that require the land to be preserved. Honor the donating party by naming the property for the person. Township will need money to maintain land that is donated.
 - Establish a mechanism where land can be placed in a trust while a person is still alive, ownership is transferred but the person can continue to live on the property until death.
 - Conservation easement - landowners can contact WRLC or SWCD to grant a permanent conservation easement for the preservation of open space on the land. As of January 2016, WRLC has reported 2 easements in Rootstown.
- Consider community purchase of property, perhaps through a tax that would set aside money in a trust fund. There may be federal and state grant programs that provide funding for the preservation of open space and natural resources. Additional research should be done to identify potential funding sources.

Strategy 5.5: Support and encourage farming. This will primarily be achieved by maintaining affordable land prices for farmers interested in purchasing or leasing land for the purposes of increasing farm operations. Additional action is needed to help reduce the pressure on farmers to sell land to developers for residential development.

- Promote and encourage farmers to take advantage of the programs provided by the state's Office of Farmland Preservation. The state of Ohio created the office of farmland preservation in 2002 in order to develop and provide tools to farmers who want to preserve their land for future generations. The programs to protect farmland include:
 - Clean Ohio Local Agricultural Easement Purchase Program (LAEPP). This program provides funding to farmland owners for placing an agricultural easement on their property, which will guarantee the land remains in agriculture. All easement transactions are recorded on the property deed and transfer with the land to successive owners. There are 14 Clean Ohio Agricultural Easement Purchase sites in Portage County, totaling 1,100 acres (out of the 45,576 acres in the program for all of Ohio).
 - Ohio Agricultural Easement Donation Program (AEDP). The donation program provides landowners the opportunity to donate the easement rights on viable farmland to the department, which assures the land remains in agricultural use forever. In this program, easement transactions are permanent, are recorded on the property deed and transfer with the land to successive owners. There are been no donations made yet by farmers in Portage County.

6. ENHANCE COMMUNITY AMENITIES

“The best property in a community ought to be in the public realm.”

Joseph P. Riley Jr., longtime mayor of Charleston, SC

Many times people move to the country for the rural life, but often bring with them the desire for community facilities that are similar to what is typically found in a city. Community facilities and amenities often provide social benefits that lead to a better quality of life and can contribute to a stronger sense of place. By improving quality of life features, the Township can create places that provide a competitive advantage in attracting new residents and businesses.

Strategy 6.1: Provide a multi-functional community center that can accommodate the needs of residents. Investigate the possibility of connecting a community center to the Township Hall.

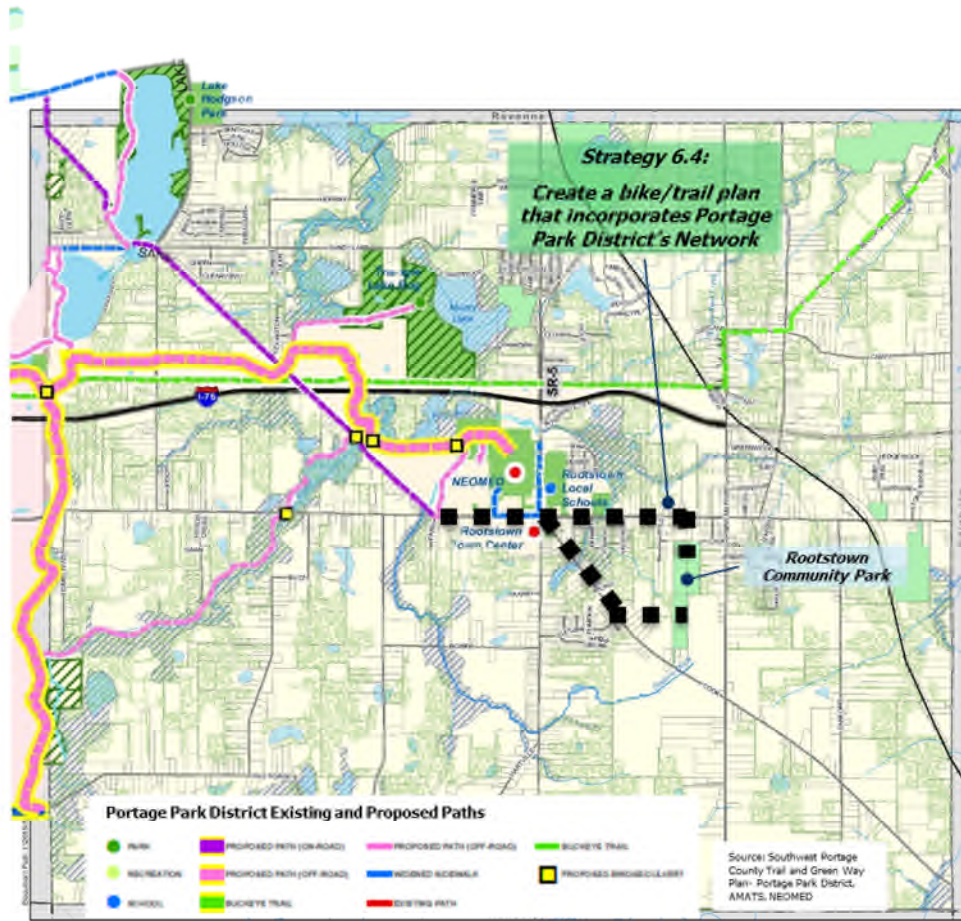
Strategy 6.2: Develop a strategy to provide sidewalks in denser residential neighborhoods and in the Town Center. This will include creating an inventory of existing subdivisions to identify where sidewalks do and do not exist currently, and identifying a funding mechanism.

Strategy 6.3: Continue to develop the Community Park property to provide the types of amenities desired by residents, keeping in mind that as use of the park grows because of such improvements, more parking and better access to the park will be needed. The Park Commission is in the process of working on a park master plan. The plan should prioritize the improvements, and include an installation schedule and funding plan.

Strategy 6.4: Create a well-connected Hike/Bike trail network in the Township that provides connections to the major community facilities and the Town Center.

- Prepare a Bike/Trails Plan that builds on the Portage Park District’s proposed and planned trails. The Portage Park District in partnership with Akron Metropolitan Area Transportation Study (AMATS) and NEOMED, has formulated a “Southwest Portage County Trail and Greenway Plan” (Environmental Design Group, December 2014). The intention is to create regional spine routes that can be further enhanced with local connections to major destinations including the NEOMED campus. They have designated a path with connections to the University as a Priority Off-Road Path. Portions of the proposed bike lanes are located in Rootstown, but do not connect with the Township Park.
- Develop additional bike paths or bike lanes to provide greater internal access for the Township. Map 18 indicates suggested connections. (See page 51 for bike facility options.)
 - Provide connections to the County Bikeway Plan from various locations in the Township.
 - Provide connections to the center of the Township (to the schools, NEOMED, and shopping) in a manner that protects the riders from the traffic along SR 44 and Tallmadge Road. The most likely paths therefore should not be located in the right-of-way of these two major streets. The priority will be to get a bike path and lane to the Township Park along Tallmadge Road.

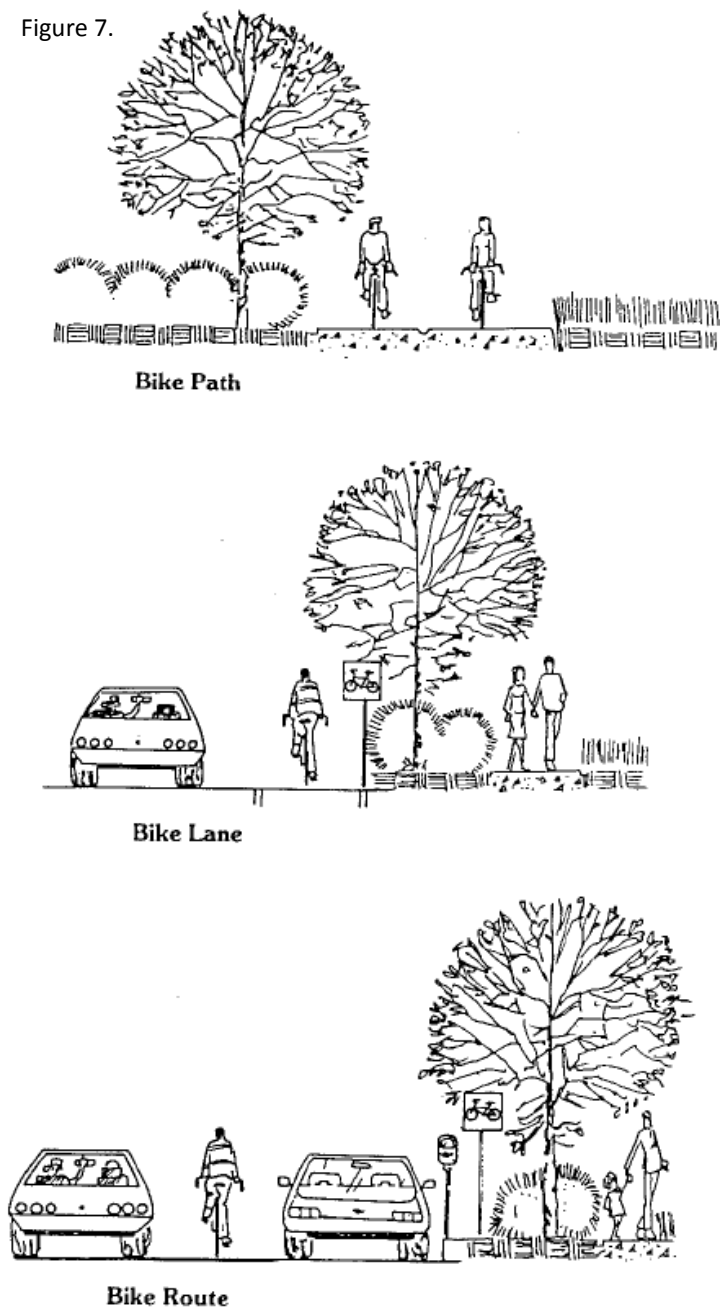
Map 18. Potential Bike Connections



Secure easements for bike paths from Planned Residential Developments. As development occurs, efforts should be made to encourage the creation of PRDs with open space provided in areas that help to create the bikeway connections.

- Utilize current Buckeye Trail, potential for Old Street Car Line.

Figure 7.



BIKEWAY FACILITIES. The three types of bikeway facilities include the following. (See Illustrations of these bikeway classifications.)

Bike paths are facilities designed for bicycles, and pedestrian use and physically separated from motor vehicle traffic. Because they protect bicyclists from traffic, except at locations where a highway must be crossed, bike paths are the safest type of bikeway. Since an independent bike path requires a long strip of available land, they are often constructed along abandoned rail lines, utility corridors, canal banks and tow paths, within parks and through land deeded to the public through subdivision regulations. Construction and land acquisition make bike paths the most expensive bikeways.

Bike Lanes use existing or proposed roadways but are separated from traffic by painted lines. A bike lane is less safe than a bike path because it increases the incidence of bicycle/motor vehicle interaction at intersections, driveways and with nearby parked cars. It is recommended that bike lanes be one directional on each side of the street.

Bike routes utilize existing streets and roads and no separation of motor vehicle and bicycle traffic is provided. Signs indicating the course of the bike route are used to alert motorists of potential bicycle travel. Bike routes are the least costly to develop and also provide the least safety for the cyclist. This type of bike way is not recommended unless traffic volumes and speeds are relatively low and the roadway is sufficiently wide to accommodate bicycles.

7. MAINTAIN HOUSING CHOICES

Strategy 7.1: Ensure that the existing housing stock and neighborhoods are well maintained and retain their value. The quality of the Township’s housing stock plays a large role in retaining and attracting new residents.

- Continue to invest and encourage private investment in neighborhoods.
 - Promote use of the County’s housing rehab programs to encourage homeowners to stay up-to-date on regular maintenance and needed housing repairs.
 - Identify any additional programs and funding to support maintenance and renovation of existing residential structures.
- Ensure that any new development is carefully designed and constructed to be compatible with the existing neighborhood to avoid compromising the quality of life of existing residents. Make sure that whenever new development abuts existing residential that sufficient landscaping is provided to adequately buffer the existing homes.
- Enhance the enforcement of property maintenance requirements so that homes and neighborhoods retain their value. Consider the benefits and costs of establishing a property maintenance program that could include systematic property inspections. There are a number of townships in Ohio (both small and large) that have adopted property maintenance codes, including Sugar Creek Township in Greene County and Howland Township in Trumbull County.

HOUSING OPTIONS

To fully understand the terminology and densities referred to in this Section – particularly “housing choices” and “density” the following table represents the current zones and densities and those recommended to be added pursuant to this Plan.

Table 4. Summary of Housing Options – Existing and Proposed

	Minimum Lot Size/ Dev Size	Minimum Lot Width	Unit Types Permitted		Max Density (Units per acre)
			P	C	
Existing					
O-C	5.0 ac.	300	SF		
R-1	1.5 ac	150	SF		
R-2	13,000 sf 0.3 ac.	80	SF		2.5
VC Village Center	13,000 sf 0.3 ac.	80	SF	TF, Units on 2 nd floor of comm bldg	SF at 2.5
R-V Residential Village	7,000 sq. ft.	60	SF	TF	6
R-3 Multi-family	3,630 sq. ft.	150	MF		12
Proposed					
Townhouse			Townhouse		4-5
Senior housing			Independent apartments, townhouses, attached SF		10-12
Assisted Living			Congregate care		25-35 beds
Nursing Care			Congregate care		25-35 beds
Mixed Use Residential on Second Floor			Apartments above retail		None, based on max height of building

SF – Single-Family Dwellings
TF – Twp-Family Dwellings

MF – Multi-Family Buildings

Strategy 7.2: Ensure a wide range of housing types that are affordable to different income levels and are attractive to different demographic groups and their preferred life-styles. A mix of different housing types (e.g., rental and for sale, large and small) can accommodate people in different life phases, from starting out in the workforce to raising a family to retiring.

- Allow greater flexibility in housing types in older residential areas to allow for economically feasible redevelopment. Townhouses could be appropriate for the Sabin and Siefer Drive neighborhood as a way of encouraging redevelopment. Currently, the lots along these streets are between 12,000 square feet and 17,000 square feet, with lot widths between 80 to 90 feet and lot depths between 150 feet and 200 feet deep. Rear yards that back up to the school site average about 70 feet deep.

If schools move, this neighborhood may be less attractive for families. As an alternative, medium density – attached residential units could be developed in a manner that is compatible with the existing single-family homes. New regulations could limit the number of units that could be attached. This policy could apply as well to the Marks Avenue subdivision to the west of NEOMED, but that neighborhood is not immediately adjacent to the heart of the town center and higher density may not be warranted. Allow greater flexibility in housing types by:

- Amending the R-2 to allow townhouses, and/or
 - Creating a new Cluster/Townhouse District
- Amend the Village Center district to expand the variety of housing types permitted in the Town Center district (see Table 3 and Table 5). Certain forms of non-single-family housing are appropriate in the town center, including:
 - Residential units above retail in multi-story buildings, in existing buildings and new construction
 - Senior citizen housing, which could include multi-family building types to provide housing that is near supporting services such as medical, retail, social services and recreation opportunities.
 - Attached townhouses in limited areas of the town center

Strategy 7.3: Encourage new residential development to preserve open space/natural features regardless of where it is located in the Township. Planned residential developments, which provide the same number of dwelling units as a standard subdivision, but group them closer together, has many compelling environmental and fiscal advantages, like reducing infrastructure costs and making it cheaper to provide community services (e.g., police and fire protection) while also limiting loss and fragmentation of natural areas (and consequently wildlife habitat). (See also strategies under Rural Preservation.)

Strategy 7.4: Develop appropriate zoning regulations for older communities located around Muzzy Lake and Sandy Lake. The houses were built initially as summer cottages and are not on individual lots or on a public road. Instead, the developments are on large parcels owned by an LLC, similar to a condominium project. An analysis of the various lake communities reveals that there are four individual parcels recognized by the County Auditor's office: each is at least 10 acres in size, with at least 38% of the land area devoted to woodland, and an overall density ranging from 0.4 units per acre to 1.2 units per acre. The Township is currently working with a consultant to work out the details on appropriate regulations that would guide future development and additions in these communities.

Strategy 7.5: Address noise issues related to the rail road tracks. Continue to work with residents on getting the segment of the tracks that traverses approximately 2.25 miles north of I-76 designated as a quiet zone. Approximately 60 trains pass through the corridor daily and it is one of the busiest in the state. Explore options for public funding which may be available. At this time, moving forward with this issue is cost prohibitive. Therefore unless funding can be secured this initiative remains a long-term strategy.

8. SUSTAIN TOWNSHIP SERVICES

Population growth and economic development often create the need for new or expanded public infrastructure and community services. Yet, even without growth, infrastructure and services must be maintained often at increasing costs, thanks to inflation and changes in laws (e.g. increased health care costs for public employees).

Strategy 8.1: Invest public and private funds in existing places. Adopt a “fix-it-first” approach to infrastructure spending in order to help existing places thrive. A fix-it-first approach means that the Township will prioritize public funding to repair, restore, and conduct preventive maintenance on existing infrastructure, including buildings and roads, before building new infrastructure. This approach can encourage and attract development in areas that are already served by existing infrastructure, saving on future maintenance costs.

Strategy 8.2: Confine roadway improvements to the growth area. Recognizing that improved roadways often encourage development, major road improvements should be confined to the growth area while traffic management techniques should be employed as necessary outside the growth area. The specific policy recommendations include:

- Promote widened roads, as needed, to promote the economic development objectives primarily for the business park/light industrial areas. Roads likely to require widening to meet those objectives include the following:
 - SR 44 between I-76 and Tallmadge Road
 - Prospect Street north of the S.R. 5/44 junction
 - Lynn Road between SR 44 and New Milford

As new development occurs within the growth area, the traffic volumes on these streets will increase and have an impact on the surrounding land uses. More detailed studies will need to be conducted to determine the extent of the improvements required.

- Throughout the Township, improvements should be limited to minor intersection improvements (such as the addition of left and right turning lanes) as volumes increase, making such improvements necessary. Consider deceleration lanes for new major subdivisions. Work with the Portage County Engineer’s office on their subdivision regulations.
- Pursue assistance from the County Engineer and the local ODOT District Office to evaluate conditions and implement improvements on county and state roads.
- Consider developing an access management plan for the SR 44 corridor to manage new curb cuts and driveways that may be proposed as development occurs.

Strategy 8.3: Formulate a Complete Streets policy and adopt a resolution committing the Township to following the policy. Complete Streets are designed and operated to enable safe access for all users so

that pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, and transit users of all ages and abilities are able to safely move about the community. A complete street is designed to balance the safety and convenience of everyone using the road. In Rootstown Township, a “complete” street will have different features based on where they are located. For example, rural roads surrounded by agricultural use may be “complete” by simply providing wide shoulders to allow safe bicycling and walking and providing connections to regional trail and public transportation networks.

Developing a formal policy with specific design guidelines can be helpful in influencing the final outcome of roadway improvements that are designed and constructed by the County or others.

Strategy 8.4: Work with AMATS and Portage County to implement the recommendations of the Ravenna to Rootstown study (R2R Corridor). In 2012, Ravenna received a Connecting Communities Planning Grant to focus on the Old SR 44 corridor from SR 14 south to Tallmadge Road to advance transportation planning in this corridor. The goals of the project were to:

- Increase transit accessibility and emphasize multi-modal transportation;
- Support ongoing and future economic development that will contribute to a vibrant community, and;
- Offers solutions for transportation issues in the corridor.

Two of the focus areas were in Rootstown Township: NEOMED and the SR 44/SR 5 Junction. The issues addressed for these two areas included pedestrian safety, walkability and bicycle connectivity/accommodation. The recommendations for these two areas include:

- **NEOMED.** According to ODOT 2013 traffic counts, the SR 44 segment between Tallmadge Road and I-76 has an average daily traffic count of 16,300 vehicles (including 740 trucks). This is an increase from 14,480 vehicles in 2010. SR 44 is a three lane section along this roadway segment. Turn lanes and signals for two access points were recently installed to improve access to the NEOMED Campus. In the past, ODOT had discussed widening the road to five lanes in this section, however, there are no plans for the foreseeable future.. With the introduction of student housing and plans to increase and improve walkability in the Town Center Area, accommodations for pedestrian and bicycle traffic should be incorporated into any designs for future improvements to SR 44 in this area. The study recommended three different options to improve safety for pedestrians: install refuge islands, at grade crossings or a pedestrian bridge. Refuge islands are not a preferred option.
- **SR 44/SR 5 Junction.** The interchange between SR 44 and South Prospect Street (County Road 74) consists of a northbound free flowing entrance ramp and southbound free flowing exit ramp. Pedestrians and cyclists use this interchange area along both State SR 44 and as it transitions to South Prospect Street (County Road 74). As is the issue with most free flowing interchanges and intersections, the absence of vehicle queues and delineated paths and crossings can create safety conflicts for pedestrians and conflicts both along the facility and at

the intersecting crossing locations. When crossing free-flow ramps, pedestrians and bicyclists face challenges related to unyielding motorists, high motor vehicle speeds, limited visibility, and the absence of bicycle or pedestrian facilities. Bicyclists additionally face challenges related to unclear path of travel.

Recommendations for this segment include:

- Stripe high-visibility crosswalks at pedestrian/bicyclist intersections at the ramps in order to improve pedestrian / bicyclist visibility
- Stripe on- and off-ramps to clarify the right of way so that through-moving bicyclists do not need to weave across turning motorists, but instead can travel straight.
- Install a painted or raised buffer where bicyclists travel between moving vehicles for more than 200 feet to clarify the right of way.
- Install pedestrian warning signage, yield lines, and pedestrian-actuated beacons at all uncontrolled crossings to improve visibility and awareness of pedestrians and cyclists.
- Provide bicycle lanes to the left of dedicated right-turn lanes.

Strategy 8.5: Evaluate and determine if, and where, public transportation (bus) may be possible and most beneficial. Partner with NEOMED and Portage Area Regional Transit Authority (PARTA).

Strategy 8.6: Continue to support local Fire Department and County Sheriff to ensure that Township residents and property owners continue to have quality safety services. As development increases in the Town Center, the Township should monitor safety concerns that may arise to identify the need for service increases.

Strategy 8.7: Bring older residential neighborhoods up to contemporary standards. Within the Township there are a number of residential subdivisions that were not built to standards that are now imposed on new subdivisions. These older areas have remedial needs that should be addressed by the Township. For example, the lack of an adequate storm water management program for the Lakewood Estates subdivision has caused serious flooding problems for residents who abut the subdivision along Sandy Lake and Herriff Roads. Besides drainage, other issues include failing septic systems and obsolete pump stations. If nothing is done to remedy the deficiencies in the older areas, the disparity between new development and old will become more acute. Therefore, the Township should embark on a program to systematically undertake measures to correct the deficiencies. New economic development will help generate the tax revenue needed to fund these remedial programs.

- Assess and identify infrastructure upgrades that may be needed in the older subdivisions.
- Prepare a capital improvement plan.

CHAPTER 5.

OUR ACTION PLAN

“Any way you look at it, implementation is key to fruitful plans and projects.”

The success of this Comprehensive Land Use Plan Update rests upon the Township’s commitment to abide by the policies and carry out the strategies recommended to achieve the goals. In order to be a useful guide, the strategies must be practicable with specific actionable items.

This chapter includes action items that are the responsibility of the Township either as the lead agency or in partnership with other entities. They are organized in the same order as the discussion of the goals and policies.

The action steps generally fall into three categories:

Regulatory Control: Zoning is the most important tool the Township has to implement the land use policies in the plan. During the course of this planning process, a number of zoning items were discussed. This chapter identifies potential new zoning districts and suggested modifications to existing regulations that will help ensure that policies are implemented as anticipated. A list of suggested zoning text amendments are in Table 6 below. These suggestions are intended to serve as a guide for further investigation as a more detailed evaluation will be required by the Township. Implementation of zoning changes is governed by the ORC and the Township’s Zoning Resolution.

Administrative Actions, Including Programs and Funding for Improvements: Some of the following strategies do not include adopting or modifying laws, but rather establishing or redirecting Township administrative efforts. Some of the items require additional studies that go beyond the scope of a comprehensive planning process. These studies are identified for future consideration.

Partnerships and Collaboration: The Township is responsible for a large share of the implementation strategies. However, in this age of public budget constraints, many actions will require the coordinated efforts of individuals and organizations representing the public, private, and civic sectors. According to the Urban Land Institute, public/private partnerships are “the most effective means to intervene in an uncertain market”.⁶ From an economic development perspective, partnerships share the financial risks between public and private entities. While the use of public funds in private development is nearly always controversial, the research indicates that communities that invest in strategic projects receive returns in jobs and recurring tax revenues. The most important positive impact public/private partnerships can have is catalyzing more development, which leads to even higher tax revenues.

⁶ Reaching for the Future: Creative Finance for Smaller Communities. Urban Land Institute, Washington, DC, (2016).

1. Maintain Balance

This plan continues to advance the growth area boundary concept that steers development to certain areas of the Township so that the other areas of the Township remain rural. In order to achieve this goal, certain areas should be rezoned.

- 1.1. Rezone the area south of I-76 within the Growth Area Boundary from the R-1 to the R-2 District to correspond to the prevailing residential zoning, see Map 7.
- 1.2. Rezone the residential parcels along Sandy Lake Road from O-C to R-2.

2. Foster Economic Development

To the extent reasonable, Rootstown will take the necessary steps to maximize the potential to attract its “fair-share” of the economic development demand that could be attracted to the southeast portion of the northeast Ohio region. This requires building on the Township’s many assets (the interchange location, the I-76 corridor) and the unique asset of NEOMED – from many perspectives:

- 2.1. Rezone the two locations identified in Map 8 from R-2 Residential to C-2 Business District.
- 2.2. Develop a comprehensive economic development strategy.
- 2.3. Secure the administrative capacity to manage the multi-faceted elements of a comprehensive economic development strategy.
- 2.4. Build and sustain relationships with other supporting economic development entities, such as the Portage Development Board (PDB) in order to leverage existing resources.
- 2.5. Identify and eliminate, to the extent practicable, any impediments to investment, such as but not limited to: zoning, lack of infrastructure, review and approval procedures (e.g. length of time for approvals).
- 2.6. To this end the Township will be regularly in contact with existing businesses to fully understand their needs and any impediments to expansion that may exist.
- 2.7. Market the potential advantages of locating in Rootstown and the support that the Township will provide, including adding more information to the Township’s website.
- 2.8. Develop a portfolio of financial incentives and policies for their use. This includes conducting research to identify appropriate business retention/attraction incentive programs such as tax abatement, and tax increment financing (TIF). According to the Portage Development Board, there are already areas within the Township that are designated as an enterprise zone and a community reinvestment area (CRA).
- 2.9. Consider expansion of the CRA to include the entire SR 44 corridor and enable commercial and residential property owners to take advantage of the incentives.
- 2.10. Utilize tax increment financing (TIF) to help fund needed infrastructure improvements in the SR 44 corridor.
- 2.11. Designate/develop suitable locations for NEOMED’s start-up businesses that allow them to move from the university’s incubator space to a nearby location.

3. Cultivate a Positive Community Image

It is important that Rootstown have a sense of place and a unique, identifiable image which is characterized by well-maintained properties and a cohesive development appearance. Action steps to cultivate, maintain and reinforce community character include:

- 3.1. Complete the building and site design guidelines that are currently in the process of being developed.
- 3.2. Revise the zoning approval process to incorporate new design review procedures that are a companion to new design guidelines.
- 3.3. Evaluate the current landscaping regulations in the zoning resolution and ensure uniform enforcement of the landscaping requirements at the time development plans are approved by the Township. This also includes follow-up monitoring to ensure landscaping is maintained and re-planting occurs should the plant material die.
- 3.4. Inventory older buildings to identify their potential for historic designation and document how they enhance the overall character of Rootstown.
- 3.5. Investigate the installation of historic property markers in key locations to increase awareness of the history of the Township.

4. Promote Placemaking in the Town Center

Achieving the town center objectives requires a long-term public and private partnership since many of the existing conditions are contrary to the vision set forth in this Plan for the Town Center area - i.e. uses, building location and design characteristics, fragmented ownership. Therefore, private sector interest and partnerships with the Township are essential to achieve the public interest objectives. Yet, private sector interest is hindered in the Town Center area for a number of reasons, there are a number of smaller individually-owned parcels that need to be assembled for a suitable development site; redevelopment is more costly (than development on vacant land); the existing market is not strong enough alone to overcome these cost differentials; and there is limited confidence that if an initial investment is made more will follow to substantially achieve the long-term objectives. Therefore, it is imperative for the Township to make significant progress in changing the climate and making the area more attractive for private investment. To this end the Township will:

- 4.1. Develop a “blueprint” that outlines the Township’s short and long term participation to achieve the Town Center objectives.
- 4.2. Implement some short term steps (i.e., signs, entry graphics, streetscape improvements, detailed access management plan), that demonstrate a commitment to the Town Center concept.
- 4.3. Create a set of new zoning regulations that: recognize the five character areas identified in this Plan; allows for the mix of uses outlined in Table 5 below; and includes development standards and design guidelines (including uses, building massing, height, density, etc.) that implement the Town Center concept. Additional research is required to determine the best zoning mechanism to appropriately promote and regulate the desired development outlined for each Character Area: a new campus-type district, a mix of revised and new districts, and/or the use of any overlay district. In any case, it is

important to incorporate flexibility into the regulations and recognize that the rules may need to adapt to evolving market conditions and other dynamic aspects of development projects.

Use Categories	Character Areas					Existing Zoning	
	Area 1	Area 2	Area 3	Area 4 ¹	Area 5 ¹	V-C	C-2
	C-2/V-C ²	V-C ²	V-C ²	V-C ²	C-2 ²		
Residential – Single Family			X			X	
Residential – Two Family						X*	
Residential – Multiple family				X	X		
Residential - Above First Floor	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Residential – Townhouses			X	X	X		
Residential – Senior Citizen	X			X	X		X*
Administrative, Professional and Medical Offices	X		X	X	X	X	X
Administrative, Professional and Medical Offices - Above the first floor	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Research Laboratories	X			X	X		
Research and Laboratories - above the first floor	X	X		X	X		
Higher Education	X			X	X		
Retail/Service – in enclosed buildings	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Retail/Service – w/ outdoor storage				X	X		X*
Restaurants	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Drive-Up Window Service	X			X	X		X*
Automotive Sales and Services				X	X		X
Hotels	X	X		X	X		X
Bed and Breakfast			X			X	
Public/Private Recreation – Indoor	X	X		X	X		X*
Private Recreation – Outdoor				X	X		X*
Public Recreation – Outdoor	X			X	X		X*

Blank cell indicates the use is not permitted in that particular district
¹ Difference between Area 4 and Area 5 is the allowance for larger, taller buildings oriented to the highway
² Existing zoning for Character Area
 * Permitted as a conditional use

- 4.4. Create a public gathering space that is large enough to host community events. The zoning regulations could require a certain amount of public open space as part of a larger development, or the Township could purchase property in the Town Center for public use.

5. Preserve Rural Area and Natural Resources

Based on the land use assessment, more than 50% of the land in the township is either undeveloped or agricultural land. In addition, wooded areas, wetlands and streams are found throughout the township. While preservation of the rural character/rural area is targeted outside the growth area boundary, natural, conservation/preservation of natural resources can occur in both within and outside the growth area. Action steps to preserve the rural area and natural resources include:

- 5.1. Review and revise the existing PRD regulations as needed to ensure any new planned residential development, especially one in the R-1 or O-C district, meets the intent of the regulations (e.g. preserves significant natural areas), the adopted plan clearly becomes the regulating document for future

development, and the Township retains the review authority to deny PRD proposals that do not meet the intent of the regulations.

- 5.2. Revise the zoning resolution to incorporate riparian/ wetland setbacks.
- 5.3. Revise the zoning resolution to add tree preservation regulations so that new development cannot clear cut a development site without approval of the Zoning Commission.
- 5.4. Rezone open space areas that are owned by a public entity (such as the Triangle Lake Bog) to the O-C district.
- 5.5. Gather information about low-impact development, green building and energy efficiency best practices and make available to zoning and building applicants as a way of promoting them.
- 5.6. Improve access to public natural areas and outdoor recreation facilities in the Township as a way of raising awareness of these natural resource areas.
- 5.7. Promote outdoor recreation businesses in strategic locations, especially along Breakneck Creek.
- 5.8. Encourage property owners to consider conservation easements as a way of limiting future development and preserving the rural character.
- 5.9. Pursue grant money to purchase important natural areas.
- 5.10. Encourage farmers to participate in state programs to preserve farmland, even though they may own/manage only a small portion of the undeveloped land.

6. Enhance Community Amenities

As the population of Rootstown has grown, residents who moved here from more urban locations have brought with them a desire for the types of community amenities typically offered by cities. Parks and other community facilities are important community amenities that can also provide essential economic and public health benefits. Action steps to enhance local community amenities include:

- 6.1. Create a multi-functional community center, ideally located in the Town Center area.
- 6.2. Install sidewalks in residential neighborhoods, based on an inventory of the subdivisions that documents the level of public infrastructure improvements needed (see also 8.6).
- 6.3. Complete the Community Park master plan (based on the results of the survey), and a schedule for making the identified improvements.
- 6.4. Once the master plan is complete, develop the Community Park according to the schedule, as funding permits.
- 6.5. Create a bike/trail plan that identifies the locations for bike lanes, paths, trails, etc., prioritizes the construction and identifies funding sources and partners.
- 6.6. Install bike/trails according to the plan, as funding permits.

7. Maintain Housing Choice

Many of the residential zoning recommendations incorporated in the 1997 Plan update were implemented as part of the subsequent 2001 comprehensive Zoning Resolution update. Nevertheless, this Plan update has identified some additional residential zoning amendments that should be considered:

- 7.1. Promote and participate in the county's housing programs that are targeted to improving the housing stock for low-income persons.
- 7.2. Consider an exterior property inspection program that would institute a systematic program to monitor properties, both buildings and site conditions, on a regular basis. Consistent enforcement will ensure that properties are maintained. Property inspection programs and maintenance codes have been shown to be effective in helping neighborhoods retain the value.
- 7.3. Amend R-2 district to add flexibility for building townhouses or cluster housing in older single-family neighborhoods as a redevelopment tool.
- 7.4. As an alternative, create a new Cluster Housing/Townhouse District at approximately 4-5 dwelling units per acre that could be applied on vacant land or to encourage investment in infill locations near the Town Center area, such as along Sabin and Siefer Drives.
- 7.5. Establish regulations (either a new district or as part of an existing district) that permit Senior Housing and Assisted Living. Age-restricted developments for older individuals are permitted under the "Housing for Older Persons" exemption of the Fair Housing Act. An over 55 community generally has the restriction that at least one of the residents in the home or condo must be age 55 or older. This means that a couple must have at least one resident over the age of 55 in order to be eligible to live and take part in the community offerings. These communities may be developments that offer a complete array of services and amenities. The law also allows senior communities to be solely occupied by persons 62 years of age or older
- 7.6. Continue to work with the lake community corporations and property owners to develop and finalize zoning regulations that will govern future building on the properties.
- 7.7. Continue to pursue a Quiet Zone designation along the rail line. Investigate potential grant funding to help defray the cost. For example, The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) at the Department of Transportation (DOT) through its Railroad Safety Infrastructure Improvement Grants has in the past provided funds for projects related to quiet zones.

8. Sustain Township Services

A viable transportation system and well-maintained public infrastructure are key components to attracting development to the Township. Action steps to ensure the current services are sustained and improved where necessary include:

- 8.1. Work with ODOT to improve the SR 44 corridor.

- 8.2. Work with ODOT and the Portage County Engineer on making improvements to intersections as warranted.
- 8.3. Create an access management plan for the SR 44 corridor.
- 8.4. Establish a Complete Streets policy. A Complete Streets approach to roadway design and improvements provides a more effective and balanced transportation system. Studies show that residents of small towns are more likely to be hurt or killed on vehicle related incidences than resident in urban areas.⁷ Creating safe walking, bicycling, and public transportation options for rural residents builds a more livable, accessible community for people of all ages, abilities, and income levels.
- 8.5. Increase transit accessibility.
- 8.6. Identify infrastructure upgrades needed for older subdivisions.
- 8.7. Create a Capital Improvement Plan to address needed public improvements.

⁷ National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. (2008). *Traffic Safety Facts: Rural/Urban Comparison*. Retrieved from: <http://www-nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/Pubs/810812.pdf>

Priority Implementation

This section prioritizes the action steps in one of four ways according to when the action should be undertaken:

- On-going – an action that is currently underway and should be continued, or a new action that once started should remain ongoing.
- Short-term – an action that should be pursued in the next 12 months (This does not necessarily mean that the action will be completed in the short term)
- Mid-term – an action that should be pursued in the next two to three.
- Long-term – an action that should be pursued in the three or more years from now.

Action Steps	< 1- Year	2-3 Years	3+ Years	On- going	Responsible Entity/Partners(s)	Comments
1. Maintain Balance						
1.1. Within the GA, rezone parcels from R-1 to R-2	X				ZC, BOT	
1.2. Within the GA, rezone specific lots along Sandy Lake Road from O-C to R-2	X				ZC, BOT	
2. Foster Economic Development						
2.1. Within the GA, rezone two areas from R-2 to C-2	X				ZC, BOT	
2.2. Develop comprehensive economic development strategy (CEDS)		X			BOT	
2.3. Increase capacity to carry out CEDS		X			BOT	
2.4. Build up relationships with ED support agencies				X	BOT, PDB	
2.5. Identify and eliminate barriers to ED		X			BOT	
2.6. Meet regularly with local businesses		X		X	Admin	
2.7. Develop a marketing campaign		X		X	Admin	
2.8. Develop portfolio of financial incentives		X			Admin	
2.9. Expand CRA		X			BOT	
2.10. Use TIF in strategic locations			X		BOT	
2.11. Designate/develop suitable locations for NEOMED’s start-up businesses	X				ZC, BOT, NEOMED	
3. Cultivate a Positive Community Image						
3.1. Complete and adopt design guidelines	X				ZC, BOT, PCRPC	
3.2. Revise zoning to include a design review process	X				ZC, BOT	
3.3. Enforce landscaping requirements	X			X	ZC	
3.4. Create an inventory of historic properties		X			Admin	
3.5. Install historic markers where appropriate			X		BOT	
4. Promote Placemaking in the Town Center						
4.1. Develop “blueprint” outlining Township’s participation in Town Center improvements	X				BOT	
4.2. Install “quick win” public improvements	X				BOT	
4.3. Develop and adopt comprehensive zoning regulations for the Town Center	X				ZC, BOT	
4.4. Create a public gathering space		X			BOT, Dev	

Admin - Township Administration
 BOT - Board of Township Trustees
 Dev - Developer
 ED - Economic Development
 GA - Growth Area

ODOT - Ohio Department of Transportation
 Rootstown Parks Commission
 PCE - Portage County Engineer
 PCRPC - Portage Regional Planning Comm

PDB - Portage Development Board
 PPD - Portage Parks District
 RLSD - Rootstown Local School District
 ZC - Zoning Commission

Table 6. Priority Implementation Measures						
Action Steps	< 1- Year	2-3 Years	3+ Years	On- going	Responsible Entity/Partners(s)	Comments
5. Preserve Rural Area and Natural Resources						
5.1. Evaluate the PRD standards and review procedures		X			ZC, BOT	
5.2. Adopt riparian and wetland setbacks	X				ZC, BOT	
5.3. Adopt tree preservation regulations	X				ZC, BOT	
5.4. Rezone publicly-owned open space to the O-C district	X				ZC, BOT	
5.5. Make information about low-impact development, etc available to applicants	X			X	Admin	
5.6. Improve access to recreation facilities in Township			X		BOT, PPD	
5.7. Promote outdoor recreation businesses in strategic locations		X		X	Admin	
5.8. Promote use of conservation easements	X			X	Admin	
5.9. Pursue grants to purchase important natural areas			X	X	BOT	
5.10. Encourage farmers to participate in state programs to preserve farmland	X			X	Admin	
6. Enhance Community Amenities						
6.1. Create a multi-functional community center		X			BOT	
6.2. Develop an inventory of existing sidewalks and install sidewalks in residential neighborhoods			X		BOT	
6.3. Complete the Rootstown Park master plan	X				PC	
6.4. Develop the Rootstown Park		X			BOT	
6.5. Create a bike/trail plan		X			BOT, PPD	
6.6. Install bike/trails according to the plan			X		BOT, PPD	
7. Maintain Housing Choice						
7.1. Promote & participate in county's housing programs for low-income residents	X			X	BOT, PCRPC	
7.2. Explore benefits and costs of adopting a property maintenance code			X		BOT	
7.3. Amend R-2 district to add redevelopment flexibility	X				ZC, BOT	
7.4. Create new Cluster/Townhouse District	X				ZC, BOT	
7.5. Create regulations to permit Senior Housing development	X				ZC, BOT	
7.6. Finalize & adopt regulations for "lake communities"	X				ZC, BOT	
7.7. Continue to pursue a Quiet Zone designation along the rail line			X		BOT	
8. Sustain Township Services						
8.1. Work with ODOT on the SR 44 Corridor	X			X	BOT, ODOT	
8.2. Make intersection improvements		X		X	BOT, ODOT, PCE	
8.3. Create an access management plan		X			BOT, PCRPC, PCE	
8.4. Establish a Complete Streets policy		X			BOT, PCRPC, PCE	
8.5. Increase transit accessibility		X		X	BOT, NEOMED, PARTA	
8.6. Identify infrastructure upgrades needed for older subdivisions		X			Admin	
8.7. Create a Capital Improvement Plan to address needed public improvements		X		X	BOT	

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APPENDIX

JEDD Fact Sheet

Background Data (Previously distributed at an earlier CAC meeting, not Included with this Draft)

Summary of Interviews (Previously distributed at an earlier CAC meeting, not Included with this Draft)

1997 Plan Matrix (Previously distributed at an earlier CAC meeting, not Included with this Draft)

JEDD Fact Sheet*

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Joint Economic Development District (JEDD)

- A JEDD is designed to encourage cooperation among local communities to enhance development opportunities, mutually benefitting the economic vitality of each area.
- A township and its municipal partner may enter into a JEDD contract to facilitate economic development, to create or preserve jobs and employment opportunities, and to improve the economic welfare of residents in the area.
- Townships are generally not permitted to collect income tax. The JEDD, however, provides the ability for a Township to diversify its revenues in the form of income taxes within specified geographic boundaries.
- Collection of an income tax from only those employed in the JEDD District offers township officials a new funding source that will provide services to township residents.
- Income tax can only be assessed on those who work within the JEDD boundaries and on corporate earnings generated within the JEDD boundaries. Income tax cannot be assessed and collected from township residents, unless they work inside the JEDD boundaries.
- A JEDD allows townships to be just as competitive as municipalities when attracting businesses that achieve their development goals.
- Income tax revenue generated by the JEDD is shared with municipal partners based upon percentages negotiated in the JEDD Agreement.
- The JEDD Agreement can also establish the duration of the JEDD Agreement – for example, the West Chester Township/ City of Fairfield /City of Springdale JEDD Agreement will be in effect for 40 years with three 5-year renewal options, for a total of 55 years.
- The establishment of a JEDD requires the creation of a Board of Directors to govern the District. The Board is to be comprised of three members; one representing the township, one representing the municipality and one member mutually agreed upon by the township and its municipal partner.

*Excerpts from OSU Extension FactSheet (CDFS-1560-07) Joint Economic Development Districts