

Chapter One: Introduction

WHAT IS A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN?

The *2020 Liberty Township Comprehensive Plan* is a guide for future decision-making that both reflects and promotes a shared vision for Liberty Township. The plan is based on developing forward-thinking strategies that will build upon community strengths and combat local challenges. There are four key ingredients to a well-executed comprehensive vision plan, including:

- **FACTS AND ANALYSIS:** An assessment of data collected from the existing community regarding assets, potential barriers, areas of regional influence, local and regional demographics, and market trends.
- **COMMUNITY INPUT:** Public opinions, desires, and perceptions of Liberty Township collected from residents and business owners based on feedback gathered through public meetings, surveys, and community events.
- **VISION AND GOALS:** Statements that strive to answer the question, “What does Liberty Township want to become in the future?” and provide direction toward the desired outcome.
- **RECOMMENDATIONS:** Professional guidance intended to be the township’s primary planning and development tools. This guidance will be presented in the form of policy statements and action steps.

This document will be used as a policy guide regarding community development and growth management related to land use, transportation, public utilities, and public services. At a minimum, every comprehensive plan should be a tool for land use and development, the *2020 Liberty Township Comprehensive Plan* takes this a step further by also including strategies to support any number of community initiatives including identity, communication, collaboration, and programming, because often times these softer community topics can greatly influence and support the community’s growth, development and investment decisions.

While the purpose of a comprehensive plan remains consistent across the country, the requirements can vary based on state regulations. In Ohio, townships are required to have a comprehensive plan document, but the distinct document can be included in the township's zoning ordinance or as a standalone document.

As an alternative to their own zoning resolution, a township can choose to adopt the county-wide comprehensive plan to satisfy ORC 519.02, but all local zoning may conform to that plan. For the last 14 years, Liberty Township has committed to having a standalone comprehensive plan document to support their zoning resolution and has continued to update the plan every 5-10 years.

WHAT WAS THE PURPOSE OF UPDATING THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN?

There are any number of reasons or circumstances that would result in the need for updating a comprehensive plan but a common reason is directly tied to the purpose of the plan. The main purpose of a comprehensive plan is to outline the current vision and goals of the township which is likely to evolve over a period of several years. Because of this, the plan must be periodically updated to verify the vision and goals still hold true for the current residents and business owners at that time. Additionally, unforeseen changes or opportunities may arise which calls for elements of the Comprehensive Vision Plan to be updated or reconsidered. Two examples of this can be seen currently in Liberty Township including the continued increase in population and the construction of Liberty Center's first phase of development that has occurred since the adoption of the *2013 Comprehensive Vision Plan*.

The *2013 Comprehensive Vision Plan* takes into account population data from 2010. During this time, Liberty Township's total population was at 37,259 residents. As of 2019, the estimated population revealed that Liberty Township had grown to more than 44,000¹ people, an 18 percent increase since 2010. As a result, Liberty Township is likely facing different challenges than it was during the 2013 planning process. For example, schools could be closer to reaching their maximum capacity and roadways are increasingly becoming more congested. Additionally, development pressure started to build for available land. This population increase has driven residential growth in Liberty Township. For years, residential growth in Liberty Township has outpaced other communities in the Greater Cincinnati region. The township has always been cautious of the best use of land but more recent efforts have focused on where the best opportunity for commercial development might be in order to identify the best use of land and to balance the growth for the future sustainability of the community.

Another contributing factor is the development of Liberty Center. During the 2013 planning process, Liberty Center was still a dream. It wasn't until 2015 that development started to become a reality along Liberty Way. With the construction of the first phase of Liberty Center the character of the interchange has transformed and spurred additional development interest for the surrounding area.

Just like anything else, development comes with both opportunities and challenges. In this instance, residents of Liberty Township express concerns about over-developing and losing the rural, natural character that so many love. For this reason, the *2020 Liberty Township Comprehensive Plan* strives to find the balance between strategic growth and development while also preserving the natural, rural character that contributes significantly to Liberty Township's identity.



HOW TO USE THE 2020 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN?

The *2020 Liberty Township Comprehensive Plan* describes strategies for MAINTAINING existing neighborhoods and community assets, GROWING the community's neighborhoods, businesses, and employment centers, EXPANDING infrastructure, public services, amenities, and programs, and MANAGING the township's needs and resources. These strategies are intended to be implemented over the course of a 10-20 year timeframe. The *2020 Liberty Township Comprehensive Plan* was created with the intention that various community partners would help facilitate the implementation. It is not just for public officials and staff members, but anyone who is interested in the future of Liberty Township. Depending on the user, this document can be used in various ways.

Residents and business owners can use this document as a policy framework and guide when making real estate decisions such as where to buy a home or where to locate a business, considering renovating properties, or looking for potential programs and incentives to help their business.

Developers or home builders in Liberty Township might use this document to understand the development policies and priorities, identify areas for development, and/ or review the current and future population, employment, and market trends.

Liberty Township staff will use the *2020 Liberty Township Comprehensive Plan* to guide land use decisions, prioritize capital improvement projects and programs, and pursue funding to assist in implementation.

Butler County staff might reference this document since they control many of the roadways and play a major role in some of the economic development districts (i.e. TIF districts) in Liberty Township. Additionally, Butler County staff could use the *2020 Liberty Township Comprehensive Plan* to inform their own planning processes. The township and county should be coordinating goals and projects to avoid unintended consequences, conflicting development patterns, and/or duplicating efforts.

This planning process has vetted the vision, goals, and recommendations by working closely with township staff and providing several public engagement opportunities for key community stakeholders and the general public. The success of this planning process and implementation depends largely on the joint efforts of public, private, and non-profit partners.



LIBERTY TOWNSHIP
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

AND



IF YOU ARE A...

**Resident or
Business Owner**

*Use this document as a policy
framework and guide when:*

Making real estate decisions such as
where to buy a home or where to locate
a business

Considering renovating properties

Looking for potential programs and
incentives to help your business

**Developer or
Home Builder**

*Use this document as a policy
framework and guide to:*

Understand the policies and priorities
related to development

Identify areas for development

Review the current and/or future
population, employment, and market
trends

**Liberty Township
Officials and Staff**

*Use this document as a policy
framework and guide to:*

Guide land use decisions

Prioritize capital improvement projects
and programs

Pursue funding to assist in the
implementation of the projects or
programs identified in this plan

**Butler County
Officials and Staff**

*Use this document as a policy
framework and guide when:*

Understanding the impacts this plan
might have on the existing TIF districts
controlled by Butler County

Undergoing county-level planning
efforts to coordinate goals and projects
with Liberty Township

THE PLANNING PROCESS

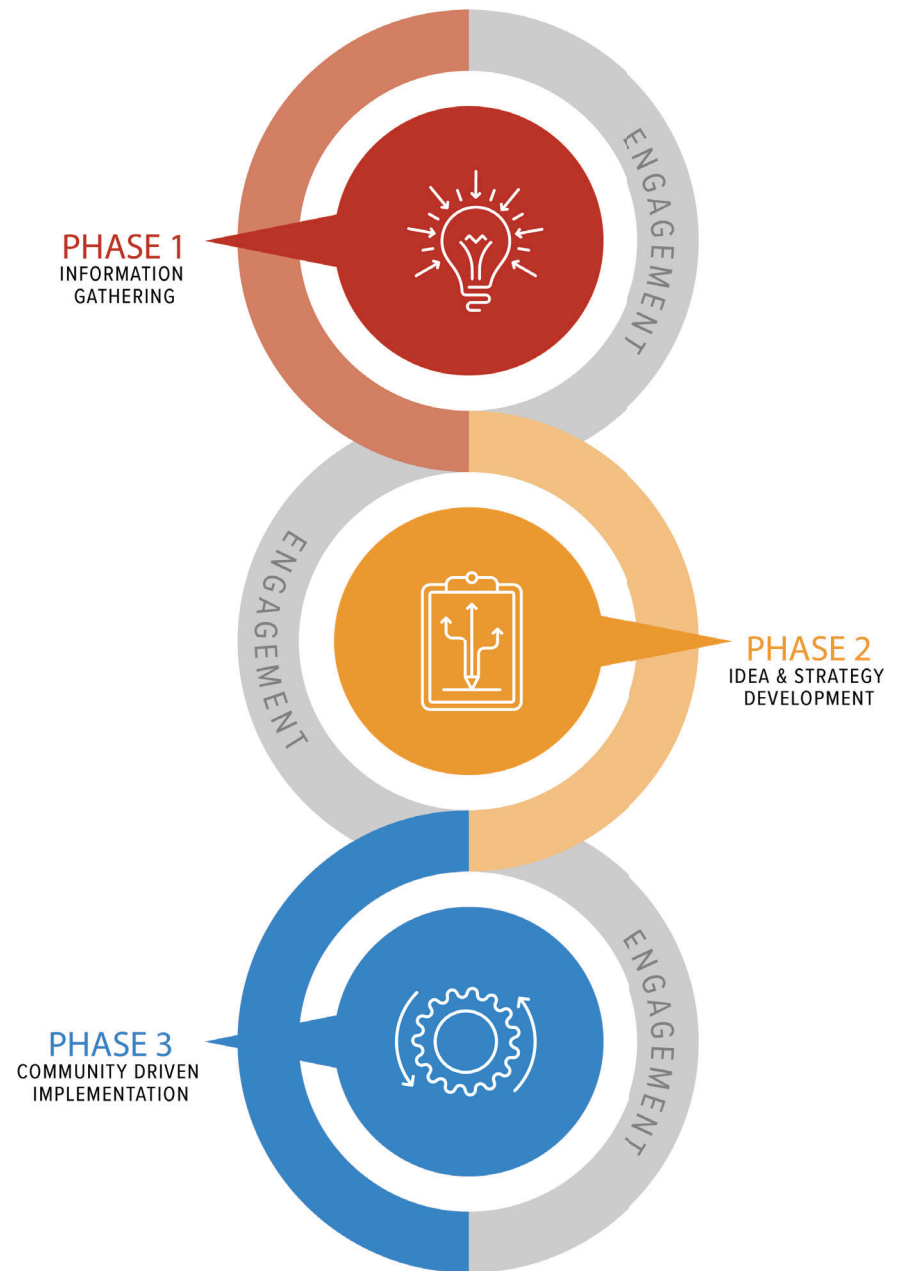
In March of 2019, Liberty Township kicked off a 18-month process to update the *2013 Comprehensive Vision Plan*. The methodology consists of three key phases of information gathering, idea sharing and strategy development. This process was designed to produce a plan for the community by assessing existing community assets and barriers, establishing a vision for the community, and developing sound strategies and tools that would enable the township to maintain their success and quality of life well into the future.

The *'Phase 1: Information Gathering Phase'* of the *2020 Liberty Township Comprehensive Plan* process focused on confirming the township's future vision, identifying the community assets that can be leveraged moving forward, and uncovering the trends and perceptions that could be opportunities or challenges to achieving community goals in the future. This phase concluded with an interim deliverable known as the *2020 Liberty Township Comprehensive Plan: Existing Conditions Report*.

The report provides an inventory of Liberty Township's existing demographic, socioeconomic and market conditions, the current public perception of the community and a summary of previous community plans and initiatives. While key conclusions from this inventory are described in Chapter 2, the full existing conditions report lives as a standalone document found in the appendix .

The *'Phase 2: Idea and Strategy Development Phase'* of the *2020 Liberty Township Comprehensive Plan* process is dedicated to dreaming and envisioning the future. The project team worked with the steering committee to draft the vision statement, specific goals, and strategic and measurable recommendations for the plan. Each of these elements began as an initial idea, then was presented to the steering committee, and evolved throughout the planning process based on ongoing public input.

The *'Phase 3: Community Driven Implementation Phase'* of the planning process is about taking recommendations to the next level by identifying specific actions and measurable action steps to empower the community leaders, residents, and broader stakeholder groups.



PLAN ORGANIZATION

The *2020 Liberty Township Comprehensive Plan* is forward-thinking and aspirational. The process was intended to confirm that the 2013 vision statement was still well-received and community driven while the final document provides the means for achieving it. The document is organized into four chapters. The following statements provide a brief overview of what to expect for each chapter:

- **Chapter 1: Introduction**

Intended to orient the user to the purpose of a comprehensive plan, provide a high-level summary of the process and public engagement efforts, and highlight the key takeaways from public input that serve as the foundation of this plan.

- **Chapter 2: A Call to Action**

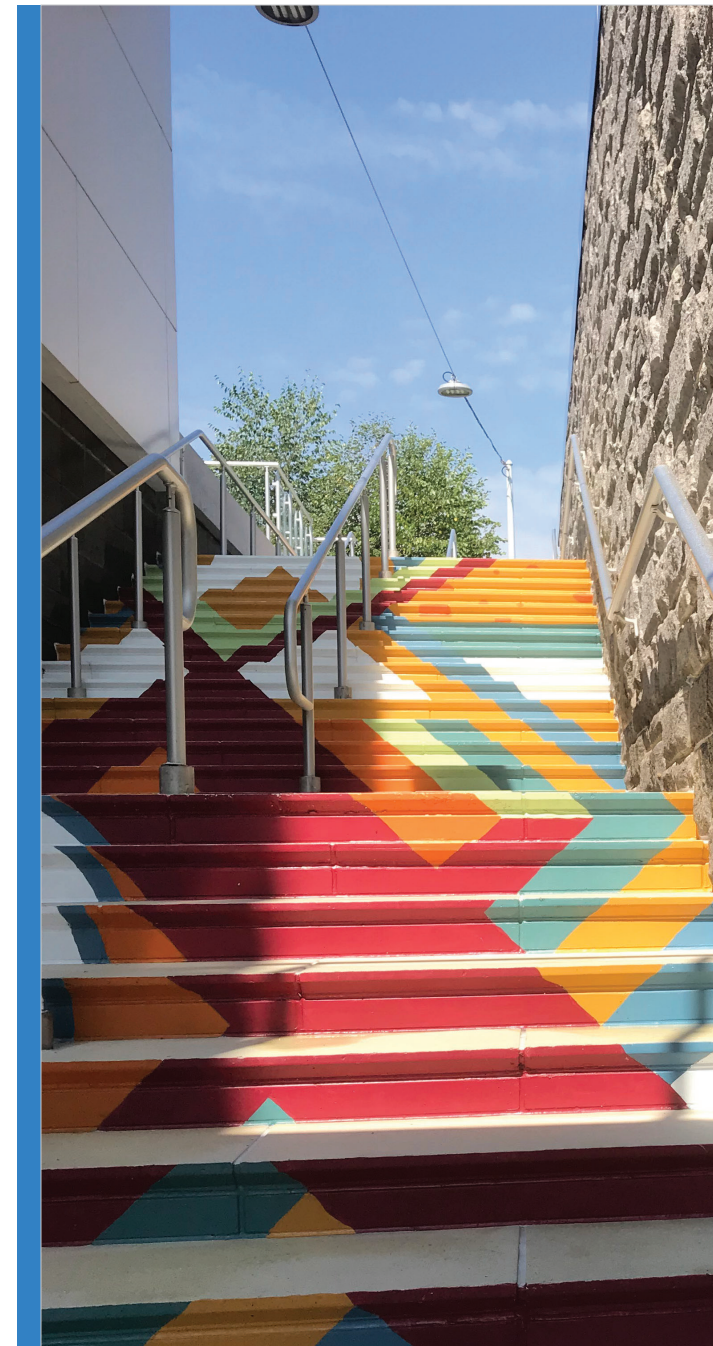
Intended to outline the strengths Liberty Township should build upon, recognize the challenges they are, or will be, facing, and provide a plan for crafting the future. This chapter is home to Liberty Township's goals, policy statements, and action steps. These elements are organized into four key themes including MAINTAIN, GROW, EXPAND, and MANAGE.

- **Chapter 3: Growth and Conservation Framework**

Intended to build upon the goals and policy objectives in Chapter 2 by outlining a series of focused strategies related to future land use and transportation, and special planning districts.

- **Chapter 4: Next Steps**

Intended to provide a deeper-dive into specifics, this chapter identifies several critical path strategies that are essential in achieving the township's vision and goals.



PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

The Liberty Township comprehensive planning process included an extensive communications and engagement strategy for public participation. In addition to a project website and social media channels, this strategy encompasses a variety of engagement efforts including a project steering committee, planning ambassador program, stakeholder interviews, public open house meetings, community events, and online community surveys. The primary goal for public engagement was to hear from a broad cross section of the township which meant reaching as many residents, business owners, and stakeholders as possible. The project team was able to measure the success of the public engagement efforts by carrying around a Live, Work, and Play dot location map to each in-person event and asking people to identify where they lived on the community surveys. The location points were compiled to generate the Public Engagement Dot Distribution Map. This map illustrates that people from all four quadrants of the Liberty Township and nearly every neighborhood participated in the planning process. One thing to note is that participants that worked outside of the Liberty Township, such as Cincinnati or Dayton, were asked to place their dot on the highway to the north or south depending on the location.

Engagement Opportunities

Over the course of the 12-month planning process, the project team offered various ways for the community to get involved and weigh in on the future of the community. Select members of the community were invited to participate as a steering committee member or planning ambassador. Selected by the Liberty Township Trustees and staff, nearly 20 individuals from a variety of backgrounds including township officials, residential developers, private design consultants, economic development committee members, zoning commission members, county engineers and local business owners made up the steering committee. This group met a total of 5 times throughout the process.

The planning ambassadors served as liaisons between the project steering committee and the broader Liberty Township community. Nearly 60 individuals ranging from elected and appointed officials to local HOA representatives and community residents were invited to participate in the planning ambassadors program, which gathered three times throughout the process.

Additionally, nearly 90 stakeholders were invited to participate in conversations around specific areas of interest. These key stakeholders were individuals who represent a wide array of community interests including major employers, developers, community organizations, and township leaders.

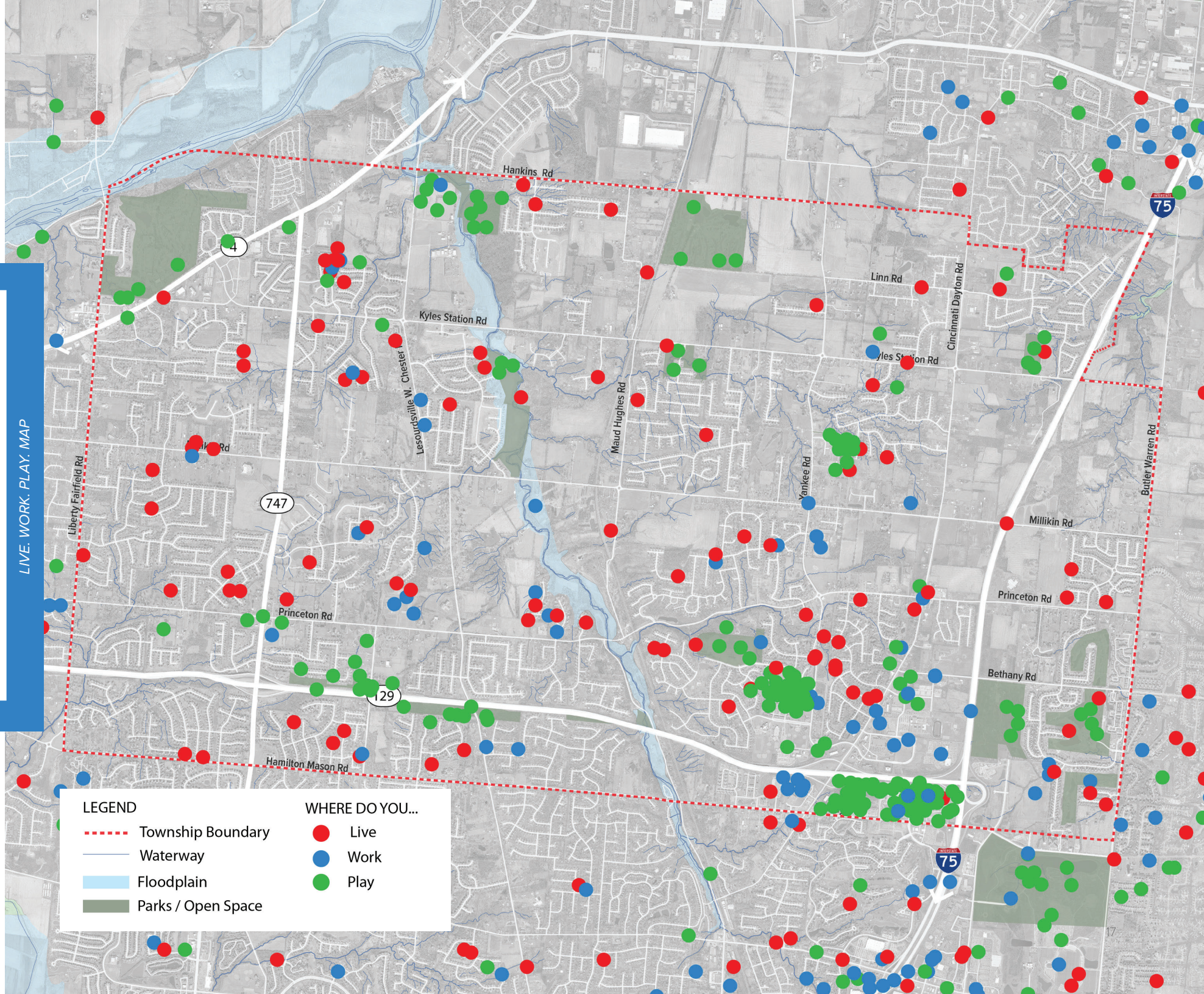
LIVE. WORK. PLAY. MAP

LEGEND

-  Township Boundary
-  Waterway
-  Floodplain
-  Parks / Open Space

WHERE DO YOU...

-  Live
-  Work
-  Play



Through several stakeholder meetings, and follow-up phone interviews, the project team facilitated several group discussions focusing on the following topics:

- Housing, Real Estate and Neighborhoods
- Commercial Development
- Community Organizations and Special Interest Groups
- Business Owner Needs
- Public Infrastructure
- Public Serving Infrastructure Education, Economic and Workforce Development
- Adjacent Communities
- Elected and Appointed Officials

The general public was provided 5 different formal opportunities for engagement. The first two opportunities occurred in April of 2019 with a public open house and an online survey which focused on existing conditions and community assets and challenges. The second round of engagement opportunities occurred in February of 2020. These input opportunities were geared towards the draft plan goals, priorities, and future land use and transportation.

The fifth opportunity was the public reveal of the completed *2020 Liberty Township Comprehensive Plan*. During this public meeting, the project team presented an overview of the planning process and final document.

Additionally, township officials and staff assisted in attending community events to offer the public informal opportunities for engagement including the Back to School Block Party at Liberty Center, and the Liberty Township Fall Festival which is a highly attended annual township event. The project team did assist in the facilitation of the Liberty Township Business Breakfast on October 24, 2019. Nearly 425 business owners were invited to participate. An interactive presentation was given related to the planning process and business owners were asked to weigh-in about development and workforce challenges specific to their business.

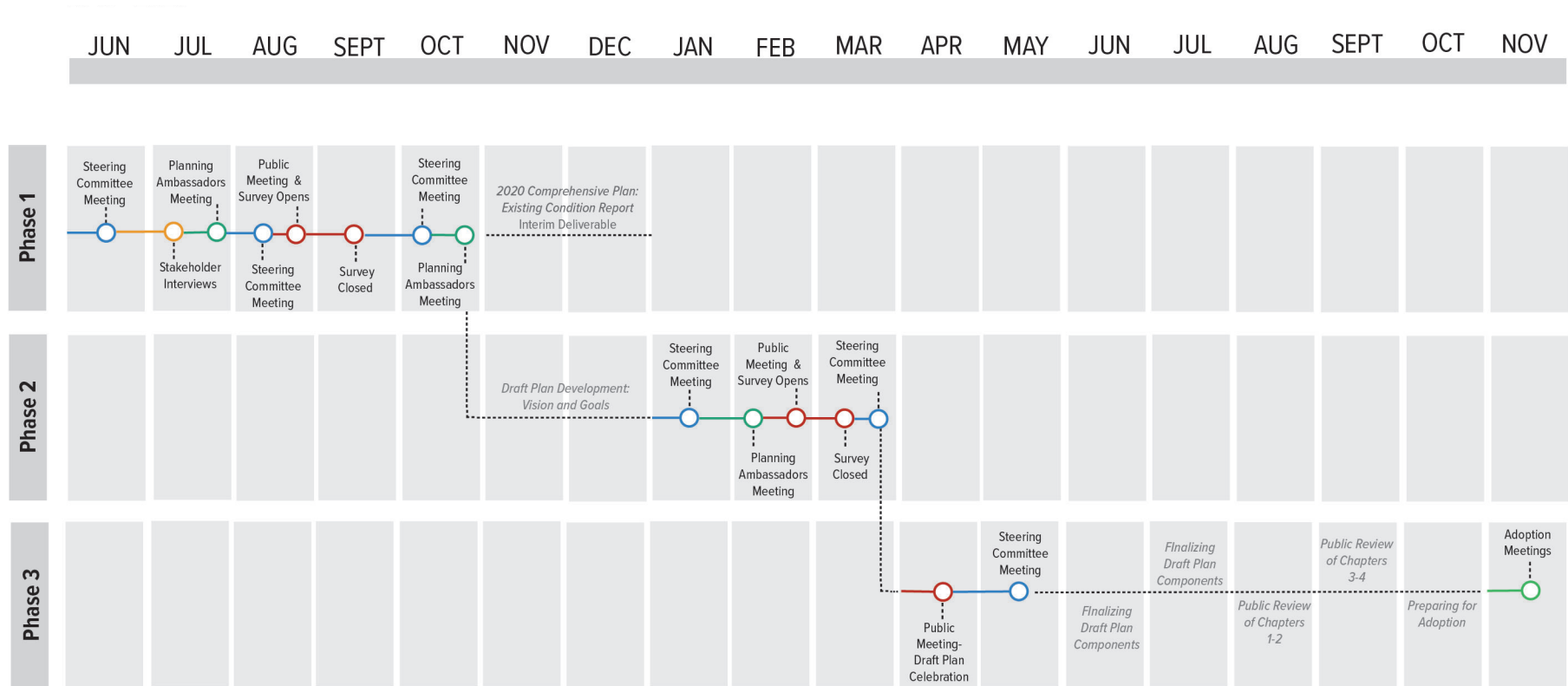
The interactive presentation allowed the project team to gather real-time results for each of the discussion questions. Nearly 50 people participated during the presentation. The project team followed up with business owners that weren't able to attend with online survey. Through this nearly 20 business owners were able to provide input.

A more detailed summary of the public engagement efforts can be found in the *2020 Liberty Township Comprehensive Plan: Existing Conditions Report*. In an effort to summarize the process, the project timeline illustrates the various engagement activities that occurred during each month of the process.

PLANNING PROCESS TIMELINE

Public Engagement Opportunities

2019-2020



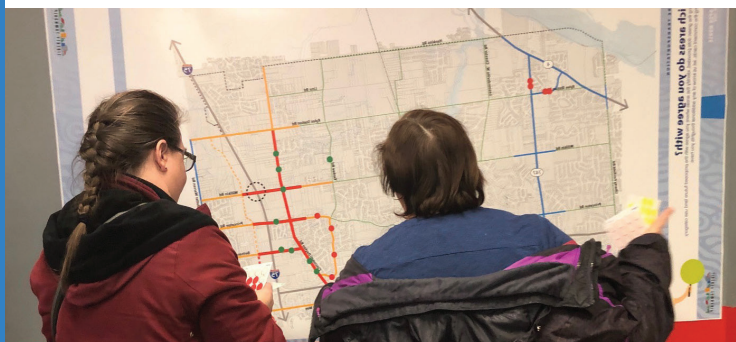
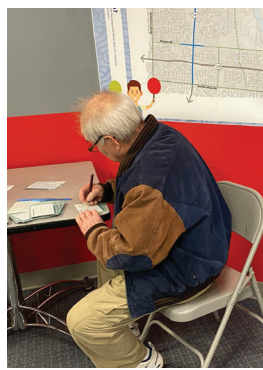
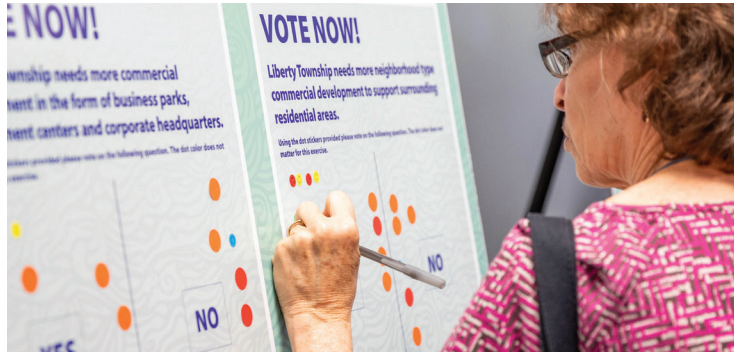
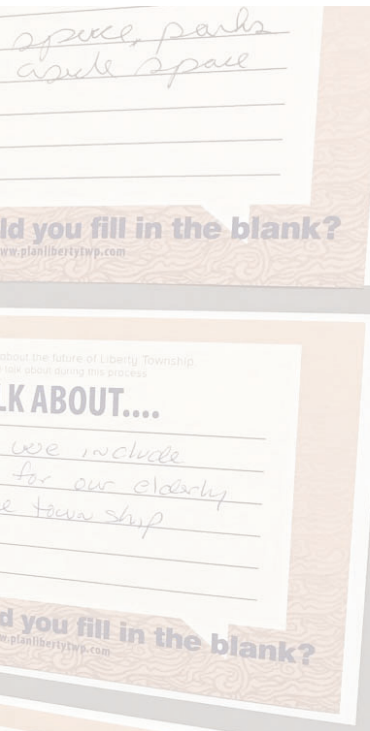
The plan was formally approved by the Board of Trustees on December 15, 2020.

Key Takeaways

Liberty Township is home to engaged, passionate residents that provided the project team essential information for completing the *2020 Liberty Township Comprehensive Plan*. Countless dot stickers, post-it notes, postcards, and online comments were gathered throughout the planning process that were used to ensure that the community's interests are reflected within the plan and that the recommendations will be supported during the plan's adoption and implementation. Through the various public engagement opportunities, a series of key takeaways were developed.

- Residents are starting to understand that development diversity is important for the fiscal well-being of Liberty Township.
- Residents are in favor of development in strategic locations.
- Residents feel the township could benefit from more single-family homes and senior housing options but are not in favor of apartments.
- Residents are generally accepting of most types of employment centers.
- Residents will welcome a wide variety of entertainment development types.
- Residents want more tourism development, with the exception of fast food and chain restaurants.
- Residents have not expressed a strong desire for regional transit.
- Residents feel that Liberty Township could improve access and capacity of roadways.
- Residents have a strong desire to improve connectivity through sidewalks, trails, and bicycle lanes.
- Residents find commuter services to be important for senior residents but generally not in favor of commuter routes.





Public Meeting Participation

