



PLAN

SENECA COUNTY ♦ COUNTY PARK DISTRICT ♦ TIFFIN ♦ FOSTORIA
FOR THE NEXT GENERATION

JUNE 2020



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In 2018, the Seneca County Commissioners and Seneca Regional Planning Commission (SRPC) in cooperation with the cities of Tiffin and Fostoria and the Seneca County Park District (SCPD) began the process of developing this planning document. Through this joint planning effort, the participating entities have successfully planned today for the needs of tomorrow. This Plan was made possible thanks to the time and effort of the dedicated members of the Steering Committee as well as the numerous residents, business owners and other stakeholders who provided input during the planning process. Many thanks also to the numerous individuals who contributed photographs to help illustrate the plan.

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CHAPTER 1: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Today, Seneca County encompasses approximately 553 square miles with roughly 55,000 residents. The county boasts a robust agricultural industry with over 1,150 farms and in the past has ranked first for wheat, second for soybeans, and fourth for corn production out of Ohio's 88 counties. Seneca County also offers residents and visitors over 1,200 acres of public parkland, one of the state's few designated Scenic Rivers, and a wide variety of recreational options.

Yet, the area also has a diverse economy, with a variety of businesses and industries, one of the area's largest healthcare providers (the Mercy Healthcare System), and two universities (Tiffin University and Heidelberg University). Moreover, with more than 2,000 new jobs and \$500 million in new investment announced since 2014, Seneca County has placed in the top ten percent of more than 530 similar sized areas in the US for economic development every year in that same period.

At the same time, local leaders representing Seneca County, the Seneca County Park District, the city of Tiffin and the city of Fostoria recognize that long-term planning is essential to ensure that all businesses flourish and residents enjoy prosperity and a high quality of life.

The Seneca County Multi-jurisdictional Comprehensive Plan sets forth a framework for the next generation. This Executive Summary provides a short overview of the Plan's vision, goals and objectives.

Overarching Vision

Our ability to achieve the best future possible for our next generation is for us all to agree on what that future looks like. By formulating a shared, overarching vision, we agree to leverage our individual resources in ways that move us in the same direction, toward the achievement of our Overarching Vision. That doesn't mean we're all doing the same thing, but that all entities are thinking more holistically about the challenges and opportunities ahead, agree on what's important to preserve and conserve, and what our long-term outcomes should be.

The **Overarching Vision** for the future of Seneca County is to be....

....A thriving, resilient and forward-thinking community;

....A leader in leveraging our assets (people, places, resources) within a balanced, sustainable framework in a manner that honors our past, strengthens our existing assets, and anticipates, plans for, and embraces the future;

....An attractive, distinctive, memorable and desirable place to call home, visit, and do business in; and

....Engaged in good stewardship of both our built and natural environment.

In addition to the **Overarching Vision**, each jurisdiction has its own Vision tailored to its specific perspective.



Tailored Vision Statements

Vision for Seneca County

To be an inclusive community that celebrates & brings to life both its rural & urban cultural heritage: fostering active lifestyles by improving access to existing natural resources for all county residents; & supporting a robust & innovative local economy that both integrates with & helps lead the regional economy.

Vision for the Seneca County Park District

To be a recognized leader & desired partner in providing life-enhancing & lifelong, nature-based outdoor experiences for all; & to build a legacy of good environmental stewardship for future generations.

Vision for Tiffin

To be a regional hub for business & industry as well as a vibrant & active place for residents, employees & visitors: providing a range of housing to meet the needs of all households; continuing to celebrate & preserve our historic & cultural resources & recognize them as economic development drivers; working cooperatively with local institutions to foster learning & advancement; & supporting the active lifestyles of residents.

Vision for Fostoria

To be a place where all residents feel safe & secure; a hub for job training & skills development; & a place where families & businesses feel good about investing. Having galvanized local leaders & engaged residents, Fostoria will continue to embrace its heritage while actively preparing for its future.

Integrated Goals

The four jurisdictional partners agree that the following six integrated goals and objectives apply to all of the jurisdictions, either directly or indirectly, and provide a structure around which the individual strategies are framed.

1. Prosperous and Resilient Economy

Ensure we are prepared to & successfully capitalize on opportunities in the local, regional, national & global economy, with an emphasis on jobs & tax revenue.

2. Attractive, Desirable, and Livable Places (Built Environment)

Ensure we have sustainable quality places for living & socializing, with a sense of place that embraces our cultural heritage.

3. Quality Community Facilities and Services

Create & foster a strong sense of community by ensuring social needs are met with equitable programs & access to a wide range of community & public facilities and services.

4. Environmental Stewardship – Valued Natural Resources

Be good stewards of our natural resources as they contribute to human & economic wellbeing, provide recreation & educational opportunities for locals & tourists, & significantly enhance the character of our community.

5. Enhanced Mobility, Accessibility, and Public Utilities

Provide modern, well-maintained infrastructure & utilities (roads, water, sewer, telecommunication, etc.) to serve current & future residents & businesses.



6. Strong Community Character and Image

Enhance & strengthen our community character & brand to establish a reputation as a great place to live, work, study & visit; instill community pride; & attract new residents, businesses & visitors.

These goals and objectives will be accomplished by effective and responsible collaboration, authentic engagement to increase participation, and accountable implementation.

Why a Unified Plan?

This collaborative planning effort resulted in a unified plan for Seneca County, the city of Tiffin, the city of Fostoria, and the Seneca County Park District. The partners in this planning effort understand the importance of collaboration and the benefits of having a joint framework with rich context for establishing sound public policy and community development strategies that address pressing and future community issues. This collaborative effort enabled all entities to work together to deal with issues that transcend each and to allow the entities to explore the role each shares in achieving the overarching vision. In addition, we know that initiatives identified through this cooperative approach and endorsed by this multi-jurisdictional plan are more likely to qualify for federal and state grants that often seek to fund projects that meet multiple objectives and/or cross municipal boundaries.



CHAPTER 2: INTRODUCTION

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This Multi-Jurisdictional Plan for Seneca County, Tiffin, Fostoria, and the Seneca County Park District is a guide for long-term decisions based on a shared vision and values. It is a blueprint for collaboration among the four partners who came together and commissioned it. And it is this partnership that makes this Plan unique among comprehensive planning processes. It is a testament to the spirit of cooperation that exists in Seneca County today.

This Plan reflects both shared goals and objectives as well as the unique strategies developed for each of the jurisdictional partners. It is a long-range vision document that establishes the foundation upon which decision makers can rely as they make policy and budget decisions about future land use, economic development, public amenities such as parks and open space preservation, capital improvements related to transportation and utilities and regulations such as zoning. The goals, objectives and strategies have been formulated with insights gained from extensive community input from thousands of people. Their concerns, aspirations and ideas have helped shape the recommendations throughout this Plan. It is meant to be flexible to accommodate change over time.

The Plan is divided into five sections:

Chapter 1 provides a short overview of the main points of the Plan.

Chapter 2 describes the planning process, highlights the public involvement efforts and summarizes previous planning efforts.

Chapter 3 highlights existing assets, describes existing conditions and trends, and summarizes issues and opportunities that need to be addressed in the coming years.

Chapter 4 includes an overall vision for the county, as well as specific vision statements for each partner, and a set of shared – integrated – long-term goals and objectives.

Chapter 5 is comprised of four separate subchapters that describe the individualized objectives and specific strategies for each partner.



The Plan Process

This multi-jurisdictional planning effort evolved from a traditional update to the 2001 Seneca County Comprehensive Plan, to a joint project with four partners: Seneca County, the cities of Tiffin and Fostoria, and the Seneca County Park District. The partners agreed to collaboratively produce one document that could guide future development for all of them. They recognized that much of the same information was pertinent to all parties and that their decisions, in large part, were interwoven and affected a larger audience than any of the individual group's constituents alone.

The planning process, spearheaded by the Seneca Regional Planning Commission, was initiated in the spring of 2018. A 17-person Steering Committee was immediately formed, with each of the partners represented on the committee.

The first phase of the project included interviews with over 50 stakeholders from around the county, representing a diverse range of viewpoints, data collection and analysis. It also included site visits and an initial assessment of the existing conditions in the county and its context. This assessment involved the compilation and synthesis of information gathered through the stakeholder interviews, a review of adopted plans, and an analysis of relevant data provided by the Regional Planning Commission and other county departments and agencies. A countywide online survey, described in more detail below, provided public comments and insights related to existing conditions, issues and aspirations. The Steering Committee reviewed the assessment during meetings throughout the autumn of 2018.

Phase II began in January 2019 with a series of three public meetings, described in more detail below, held back-to-back in Tiffin, Fostoria and Green Springs. The Steering Committee presented initial findings and received feedback on goals and pressing issues. The set of integrated goals and objectives were refined during this phase, and policy ideas

were developed from feedback received at the public meetings, Steering Committee meetings, and from the public survey.

Phase III involved finalizing the objectives and developing specific strategies for each of the partners: Seneca County (villages and townships), the Seneca County Park District, Tiffin and Fostoria. A second set of public meetings was held in November 2019. The draft of the final plan was distributed in early 2020.



Public Engagement

Public involvement and input from as many people as possible was an essential component of this planning effort to ensure the final plans addressed the varying needs throughout the county.

Online Survey

The Steering Committee conducted an online survey inviting residents, business owners and other interested people to share their opinions and concerns with the Steering Committee. The survey was posted on the Seneca Regional Planning Commission (SRPC) website. Print copies were also made accessible at the SRPC's office in downtown Tiffin. The survey was conducted from mid-August 2018 to late January 2019. A total of 1,146 people completed at least some part of the survey.

The survey was divided into six sections: Seneca County in general, city of Tiffin, city of Fostoria, Seneca County Park District's facilities, participant demographics, and an opportunity to leave email address for plan updates. Because of the length of the survey and the various components, respondents were able to complete only the parts of the survey that were relevant to them.

The survey results provided valuable information for the Steering Committee regarding the issues and goals of citizens, business owners and local employees. The survey was openly available to anyone interested in participating. Survey responses were obtained from all parts of the county; however, some of the villages and townships were more heavily represented than others. It is important to note that the results helped inform the Steering Committee's discussion and decisions, but are not considered with statistical certainty as a valid representation of community-wide opinions.

In March 2019, the consultants prepared a separate report with a summary of findings and a complete listing of the survey results, including the write-in responses categorized by topic, for the Steering Committee's use.

Public Forums

In January 2019, the Steering Committee and CT Consultants held three community forums to share the work of the committee to date and get feedback from the community. The first meeting was held on January 14 in Tiffin, the second was on January 15 in Fostoria and the third meeting was on January 16 in Green Springs. All meetings were open to the public but the three locations were chosen in order to reach people from all parts of the county. Each meeting was formatted the same, starting with a brief presentation reviewing the planning process, the county's existing conditions, issues and strengths and the plan's "first cut" visions and goals. Afterwards, attendees were divided into groups and traveled to presentation boards.

Each board addressed a different goal of the plan including: prosperous and resilient economy, attractive, desirable and livable places, quality community facilities and services, environmental stewardship, enhanced mobility, accessibility and public utilities, strong community character and image. Steering Committee members led the groups in discussion at each board asking participants to comment on ideas of how to accomplish each goal. Participants wrote their thoughts on sticky notes and placed them on the boards. Groups rotated stations every ten minutes, visiting each board over the course of about an hour.



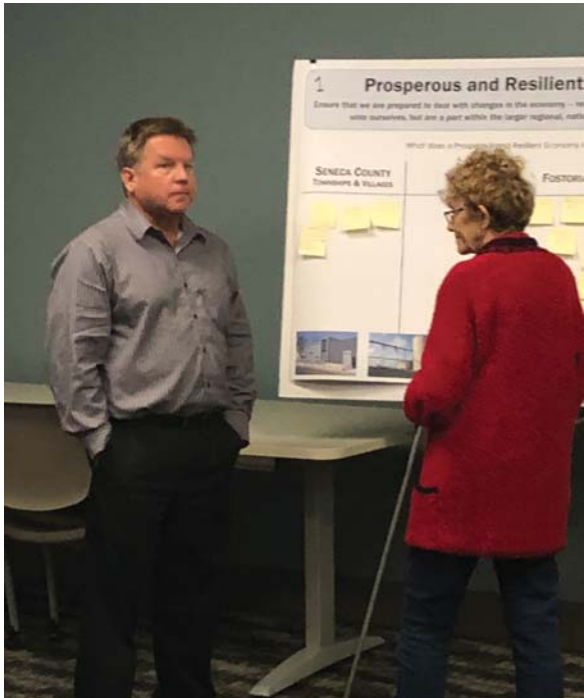


A second set of public meetings was held in Tiffin on November 20, 2019 and Fostoria on November 21, 2019. The primary purpose of the meetings was to allow community members to comment on the goals developed for each of the jurisdictional partners in the Comprehensive Planning Process: Seneca County, the cities of Fostoria and Tiffin, and the Seneca County Park District. A brief presentation described the process and data that had produced the goals. After the presentation, attendees “voted” for their top priorities as illustrated on poster boards.

Four sets of poster boards/goals corresponding to the four jurisdictional partners were set up around the room and community members were allowed to circulate freely between the four stations at their own pace. Steering committee members and consultants were on hand to answer questions about specific goals, objectives and strategies.

Community members were invited to write down their thoughts on Post-it Notes and provided the opportunity to submit their concerns via email to the Seneca Regional Planning Commission. This gave people who were not able to attend the meeting the opportunity to provide feedback. Several dozen comments and emails were received and reviewed. The Steering Committee members reviewed all the comments and emails and made refinements to the Plan goals and objectives as a result.





Planning Documents Referenced in the Seneca County Multi-Jurisdictional Plan

Prior to and during the creation of this Multi-jurisdictional plan, a number of other planning efforts were conducted by some of the partners. The goals and findings of these plans were reviewed and relevant initiatives incorporated into this plan.

County-Oriented Plans

2001 Seneca County Comprehensive Plan Update

The overarching vision for Seneca County expressed in the 2001 Plan was to “accommodate growth while retaining the character and inherent attractiveness so important to the citizens of the county”. The plan also emphasized three themes: Quality of Life, Balanced Growth, and Efficient Services. The following goal statements from the plan reflect these three themes:

1. Maintain and enhance the standard of living for all citizens of Seneca County.
2. Encourage growth that focuses on existing urban areas and respects the intrinsic values of the land.
3. Ensure timely and orderly development within the county by making strategic public investments in infrastructure and services.

2011 Seneca County Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy

The goals of the Seneca County Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy plan include:

1. Retain existing businesses and help them expand.
2. Attract new, diversified business activity to Seneca County.
3. Facilitate workforce employability and training.
4. Provide infrastructure to support business locations, relocations, and expansions through Seneca County.
5. Market and brand Seneca County and its communities, internally and externally.
6. Provide and atmosphere in which entrepreneurs can flourish
7. Enhance Seneca County’s quality of life for business leaders, employers, and residents.
8. Organize for maximum effectiveness in achieving successful economic development.

2016 Strategic Plan for the Seneca County Park District

The Seneca County Park District (SCPD), created in 1996, received a dedicated funding source when the first county park levy passed in 2016. The Park District’s 2016-2020 Strategic Plan, prepared by the Strategic Planning Committee, includes the following short-term and long-term goals to guide the wise allocation of resources:

1. Assure long term sustainability by building awareness and making use of a variety of marketing strategies.
2. Create an organizational infrastructure that will maintain and/or grow all aspects of the SCPD.
3. Build more coalitions/collaborations/partnerships with organizations that parallel our mission.

2016 Seneca County, city of Tiffin, and city of Fostoria Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing

This Plan identified impediments to fair housing choices in the county, as well as Tiffin and Fostoria. It includes the following recommendations:

1. Seek more affordable housing opportunities.
2. Address the needs for accessibility and reasonable accommodation of tenants’ needs, related to housing, public buildings and open spaces.
3. Increase acceptance of Section 8 vouchers.
4. Continue to provide fair housing education and training.
5. Consider establishing a homeless shelter.
6. Address predatory lending issues.
7. Continue to coordinate efforts with local housing agencies.

2017 Seneca County Transportation Improvement Plan

The Seneca County Transportation Improvement Plan Update includes four priority projects:

1. Fair Lane Extension Project in Tiffin to address economic development needs.
2. Tiffin-Fostoria Connector Project, a 3-phase project to improve access between the two cities.
3. Fostoria Loop Project, a 7-phase project to provide a transportation loop around the City.
4. Seneca County Active Transportation Plan.

The Seneca County Active Transportation Plan was completed in December, 2018, and includes a number of recommendations for the development of trails and bikeways in Seneca County.



2017 Seneca County Coordinated Public and Human Services Transportation Plan

This Plan inventoried public transportation providers throughout the county. The Plan includes the following strategies to address gaps and needs:

1. Regionalized Coordination: coordinate services in the most efficient and cost effective way.
2. Improve Customer Service: offer transportation services on weekends, holidays and evenings.
3. Improve Efficiencies and Minimize Duplication: improve efficiencies through shared training and resources; minimize redundant trips outside county by multiple providers.
4. Marketing: educate Seneca County residents on all available mobility options.
5. Communication and Coordination: keep public updated on information regarding Medicaid transportation rules.
6. Capital Needs: explore upgrades to public transportation software, develop bus shelters for deviated fixed routes, and provide vehicles, when needed, to Seneca County Board of Development Disabilities (Opportunity Center), SCAT, and other providers.

2018 Community Branding Plan and Strategy

The Plan established a brand identity to create a distinctive and differentiated position – reflected through a singular brand expression – adapted and applied to the family of organizations that represent the Tiffin-Seneca Community. Specific strategies include the following:

1. Elevate Tiffin-Seneca as a destination, home, and place of economic opportunity.
2. Appeal to enterprise companies, entrepreneurs, and existing businesses for sustainment or expansion.
3. Create a brand that can be applied to TSEP, the Chamber, Seneca County and the city of Tiffin.
4. Support community goals: economic development, residential attractions, tourism and businesses/youth retention.

2018 Seneca County Active Transportation Plan

This Plan grew out of the need to provide a safer and healthier environment for residents of Seneca County and those who choose to visit and take advantage of its active transportation routes. Recommendations focused on the needs of each jurisdiction:

1. For the county, recommendations focus on improving or creating the network of trails that connect rural communities.
2. Recommendations for Fostoria focus on extending existing trails, increasing signage, and adding shared lane markings on a number of streets.
3. Recommendations for Tiffin include adding trails or other connections to provide access to major destinations such as nature preserves and city parks, Downtown and the universities; extending existing bike trails; and providing shared lane markings along a number of local streets.

City of Tiffin Plans

2010 Strategic Downtown Planning Initiative Phase II

Tiffin's 2010 downtown plan was the second phase of a two-phased planning effort, structured according to the principles and four-point system of the Main Street program. Phase II explored detailed design and development initiatives and implementation strategies based on the recommendations from the Phase I initiative. It includes the following eight guiding principles:

1. Create "place" and destination with brand identity.
2. Market downtown's history and vitality.
3. Celebrate the riverfront.
4. Encourage pedestrian-oriented connections and connect downtown "anchors".
5. Promote context sensitive infill development.
6. Provide selective on-street parking and promote shared parking at the rear of buildings.
7. Develop appropriate regulatory environment, review process and enforcement.
8. Promote effective general maintenance.



2016 Downtown Tiffin Strategic Growth and Development Plan

The 2016 Downtown Growth and Development Plan builds on the 2010 Downtown Plan, by identifying near-term catalytic opportunities and long-term projects. The 2016 Plan includes the following elements:

1. Analysis of current market conditions and trends.
2. Redevelopment goals and initiatives including placemaking, town/gown development, and reinvestment in existing neighborhoods and housing.
3. Strategies related to infill development, rehabilitation of existing properties, improved transportation, bicycling and parking facilities, street conversion, and related zoning recommendations.
4. Targeted neighborhoods are Fort Ball, Little Italy, the Riverfront, and Downtown.

2018 Downtown Tiffin Parking Study & Garage Analysis

This Plan includes the following components:

1. Four possible sites for a future parking garage;
2. Recommendations to increase the efficiency and utilization of existing parking facilities through improved signage, lighting, valet service and parking management strategies; and
3. Recommendations to reduce vehicular traffic in downtown by promoting alternative modes, such as biking, public transit, and shuttle service between downtown, the universities and other key destinations.

2019 Tiffin Area Housing Opportunities Analysis

This Plan documented a number of current conditions that confirm Tiffin is one of the most underserved housing markets in Northwest Ohio, and that the shortage prevents prospective homeowners and renters from moving into the area. The Plan also notes the following:

1. In the next three years, a market exists for 330 to 450 new housing units in the Tiffin area (city and surrounding townships).
2. Identifies eight development sites to showcase the variety of housing options suitable for Tiffin, including downtown adaptive reuse, rental housing and urban infill housing sites; infill maintenance-free housing development; for-sale housing development; and multi-family housing sites.

2019 Tiffin Farmers' Market Plan

This Plan identified a number of recommendations to improve operations, increase the number of months the market is open, and develop programming to increase local awareness and appreciation of local food.



CHAPTER 3: SENECA COUNTY TODAY

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Planning for the future of Seneca County begins with having a good understanding of current conditions and trends, existing assets, and important issues that provide the framework for developing goals and strategies. This chapter provides highlights of topics discussed during the planning process and additional analysis of key elements that provide context for the rest of this plan. This chapter reviews population and housing characteristics; land use, roadways, and other infrastructure issues; the natural conditions of the land and how they influence uses of the land; and a variety of other economic and physical characteristics.

Overview

Today, Seneca County encompasses approximately 553 square miles with 55,000 residents. The county boasts a robust agricultural industry with over 1,150 farms and in the past has ranked first for wheat, second for soybeans, and fourth for corn production out of Ohio's 88 counties. Seneca County also offers residents and visitors over 1,200 acres of public parkland, one of the state's few designated Scenic Rivers, and a wide variety of recreational options.

While land-wise Seneca County is largely a rural, agricultural county, there are a number of diverse assets in the two cities of Tiffin (the county seat) and Fostoria, as well as six villages and a number of small, unincorporated communities. The Tiffin-Fostoria-Seneca County micropolitan area has seen a surge of economic growth in the past few years, with more than 2,000 new jobs and \$500 million in new investment since 2014. Seneca County has been recognized nationally for placing in the top 100 of the 531 micropolitan areas in the USA for economic development for eight years in a row and six times in the top ten percent. Residents are served by two area hospitals, and have access to two universities, a regional educational service center, industrial training centers, and a number of local quality public and private schools.

At the same time, there are a number of issues to be addressed in this Plan, such as continued economic growth to ensure wider benefits and combat un- and underemployment, ongoing population decline in many areas of the county, especially in regards to young adults who go away for college and never return, and concerns related to stagnant housing development.



Regional Location

Seneca County is located in northwest Ohio, approximately 40 miles southeast of Toledo, 80 miles west of the Cleveland, and about 80 miles north of Columbus. Seneca County is classified as a micropolitan area (an urban cluster of at least 10,000 people but fewer than 50,000 people) and is not considered part of a larger metropolitan area. This means that Seneca County does not have a “high degree of social and economic integration (as measured by commuting to work)” with any larger metropolitan area, the closest of which is the Toledo Metropolitan Area.

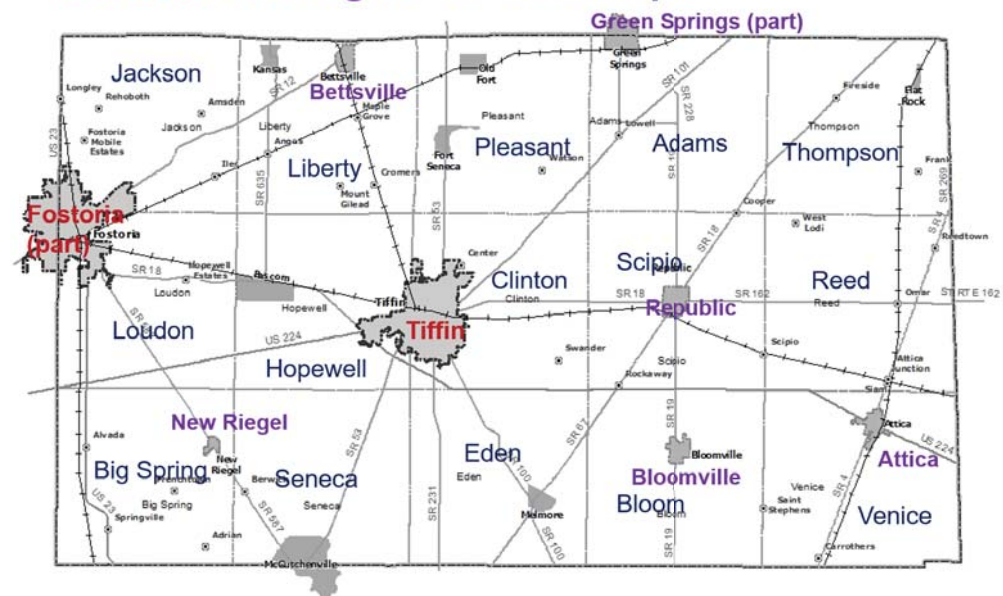
Seneca County contains two cities (though only a portion of Fostoria is in Seneca County), six villages, and fifteen townships, with the eastern portion of the county much more rural and less densely populated than the central and western portions of the county. Running through Seneca County and Tiffin is the Sandusky River, a state scenic river.



History

Seneca County's first inhabitants were the Seneca Indians who settled along the Sandusky River in what is today Tiffin. Wyandots also populated the county. Both tribes were farmers and hunters. Land grants were awarded from Connecticut in the Firelands west of Tiffin but European Americans did not begin to settle in the area until the early 1800s. During the War of 1812, Fort Ball was established in Tiffin along the Sandusky River. In 1817, the Pan Yan Inn, a stagecoach stop near the fort brought the economic stimulus, and that year, Tiffin became the first incorporated community. In 1820, the Ohio government authorized the creation of Seneca County, named after the Seneca Indian tribe. Tiffin was named the county seat in 1824.

2 Cities 6 Villages 15 Townships

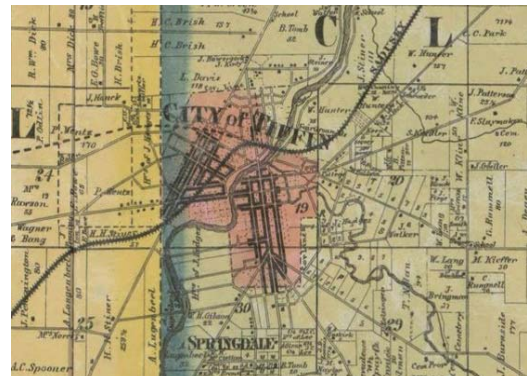
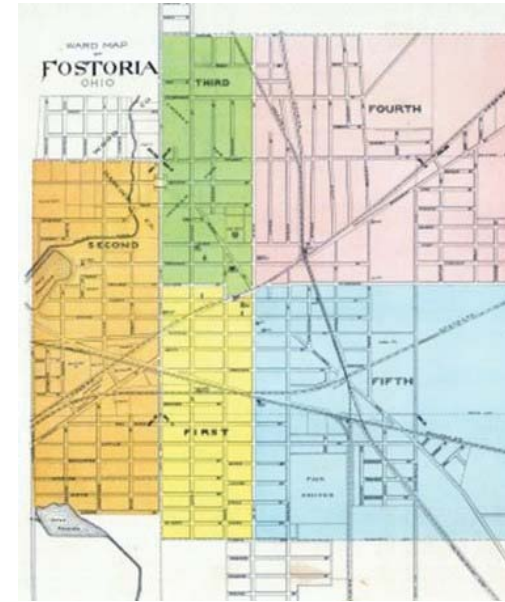


By the 1830s, migration by settlers from New York and New England was fueled by the completion of the Erie Canal, which connected the markets by the Great Lakes to the Hudson River and New York City. Attica Village and Bettsville Village were incorporated in 1833 and 1838 respectively. In 1841, the Mad River and Lake Erie Railroad connected Tiffin with Sandusky, Ohio. As Tiffin developed, Heidelberg College was founded in 1850 as the third coeducational college in the nation. By 1860, the county was well established as a primarily agricultural county and population growth slowed. By 1883, New Riegel became the last village to be incorporated in the county. However, with an abundance of railroads and the discovery of oil and natural gas in 1888, both Fostoria and Tiffin became major regional employment centers.

Not surprising, Seneca County is rich in cultural resources and history, with a number of historic buildings that remain intact, and traditional downtown main streets in Fostoria and Tiffin, as well as Attica, Bloomville and Republic villages. Indeed, according to the Ohio Historical Society, Seneca County has a number of sites listed on the National Register, including 38 in Tiffin, two in Fostoria, one in Attica Village, one in New Riegel Village, and three in or near Flat Rock and Kansas. In addition, there are a number of archaeological sites.

Population Characteristics

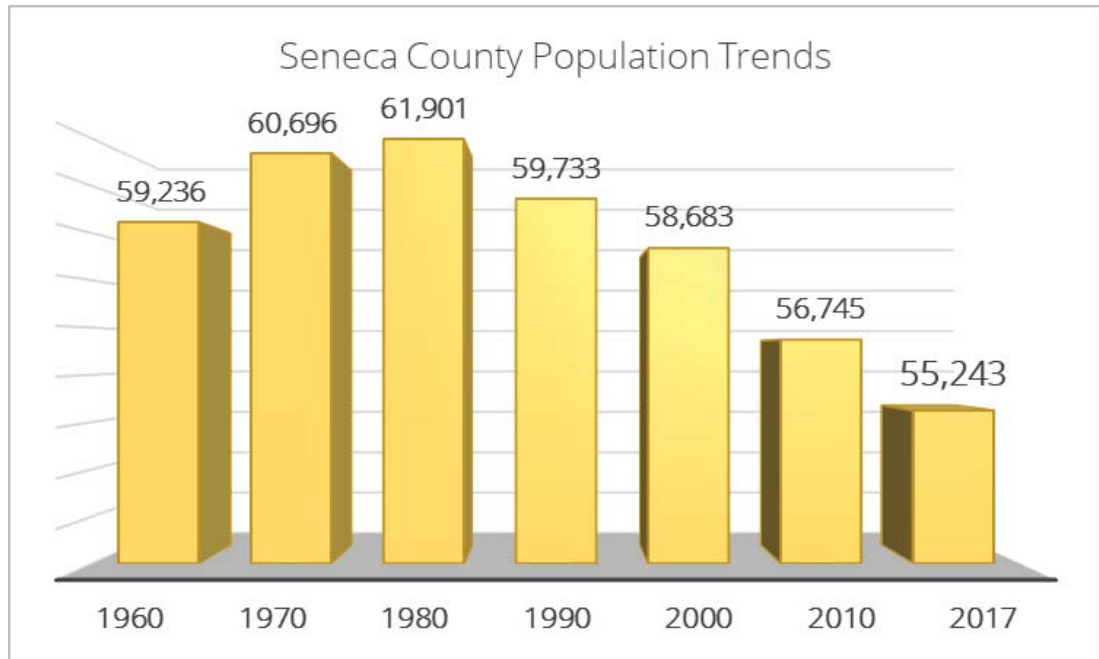
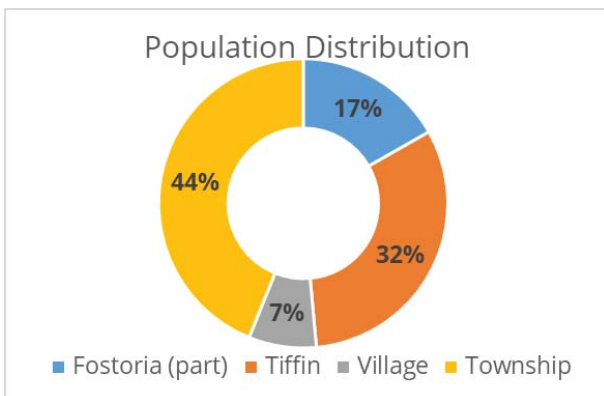
At the heart of our community are the people who choose to live here. Understanding the trends in population, households and housing growth, as well as other characteristics of the population, helps identify the need for future housing, businesses, schools, parks and other public amenities. This section explores the demographic and housing trends in Seneca County and in some cases compares differing trends within the county. Some of the data was obtained from the U.S. Decennial Census, which is a complete count of the population conducted



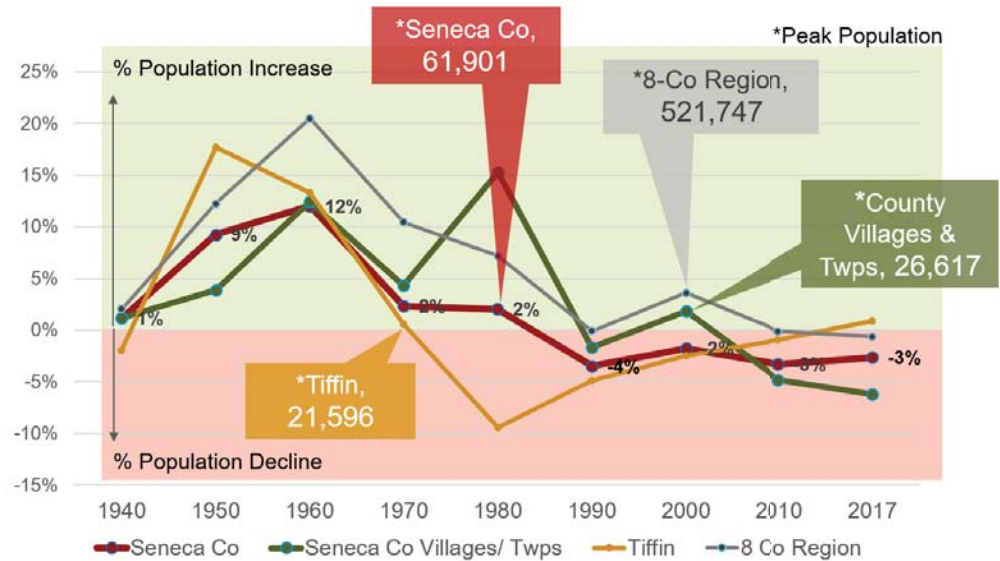
once every 10 years. Supporting data was also used from the American Community Survey (ACS), which is extrapolated data from a survey of a sampling of the population every year.

The county's population, like many other rural counties in Ohio, has been declining for a few decades. The 2017 county population estimate is 55,243; an 11% decline from peak population of 61,901 in 1980, and a 2.7% decline since 2010. This is slightly less than the 3.3% average decline in the five adjacent counties to the north, east and south. In comparison, Hancock County increased by 1.5% and Wood County by 4.2%, both of which are located to the west along the I-75 corridor.

Nearly half of county residents (49%) live in an "urban" area, either Tiffin or Fostoria, while 44% live in one of the 15 townships, and only 7% live in one of the six villages. Clinton Township, adjacent to Tiffin, is the most populous township with over 4,000 residents. In contrast, Bloom, Reed and Venice Townships (with 800 or fewer residents) in the southeast comprise the least populated areas of the county.



Population Percent Change 1940-2017

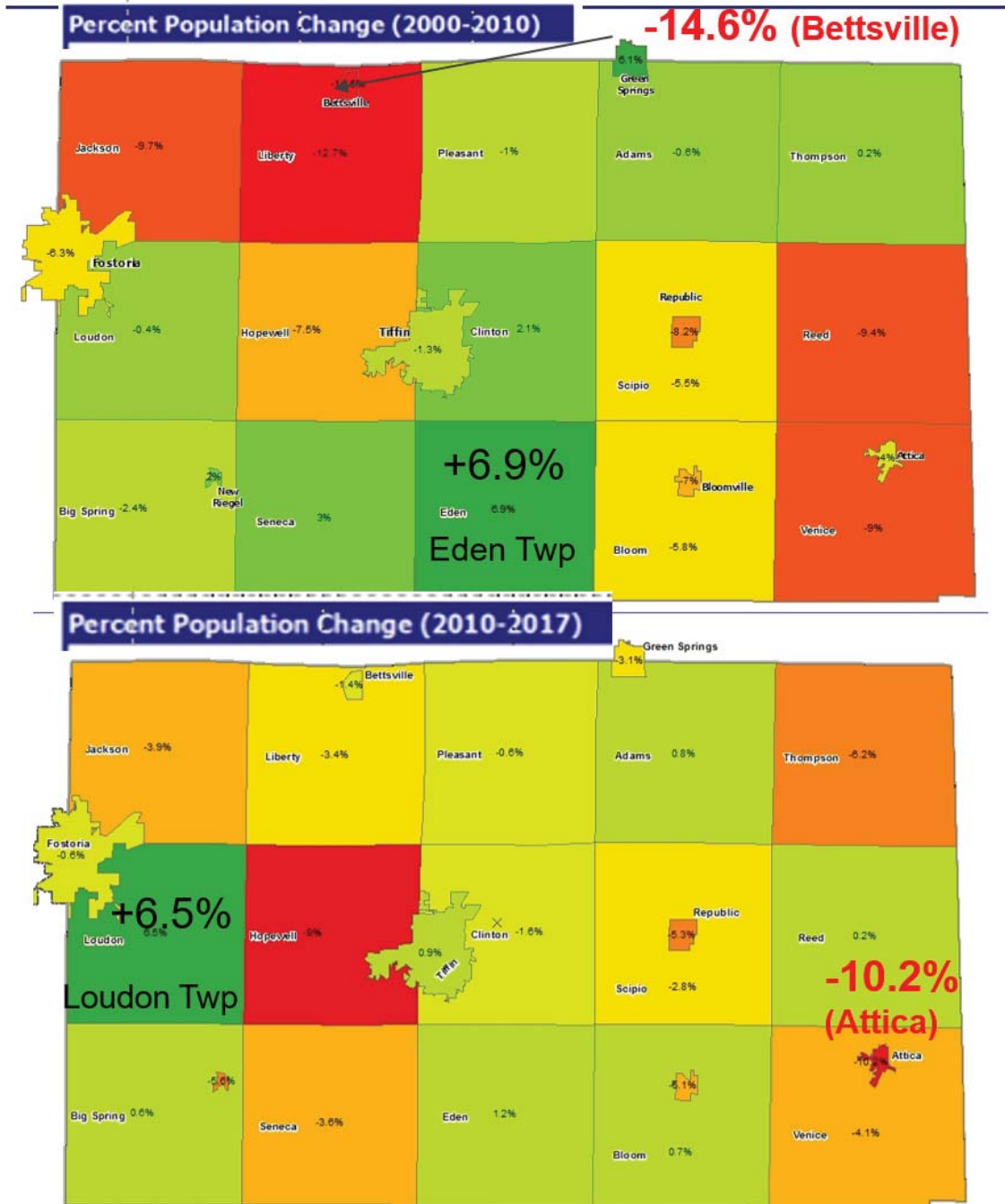


When looking more closely at population change throughout the county, there have been significant differences since 2000. Between 2000 and 2010, when the overall population of the county declined by 3.3%, the village of Bettsville in the northwest area of the county lost 14.6% of its population, while Eden Township in the south central area grew by 7%. Between 2010 and 2017, when it is estimated the county's population declined by 2.6%, there was slightly less disparity; the village of Attica lost 10% of its population, while Loudon Township adjacent to Fostoria grew by 6.5%. The city of Tiffin and five townships also experienced population growth.

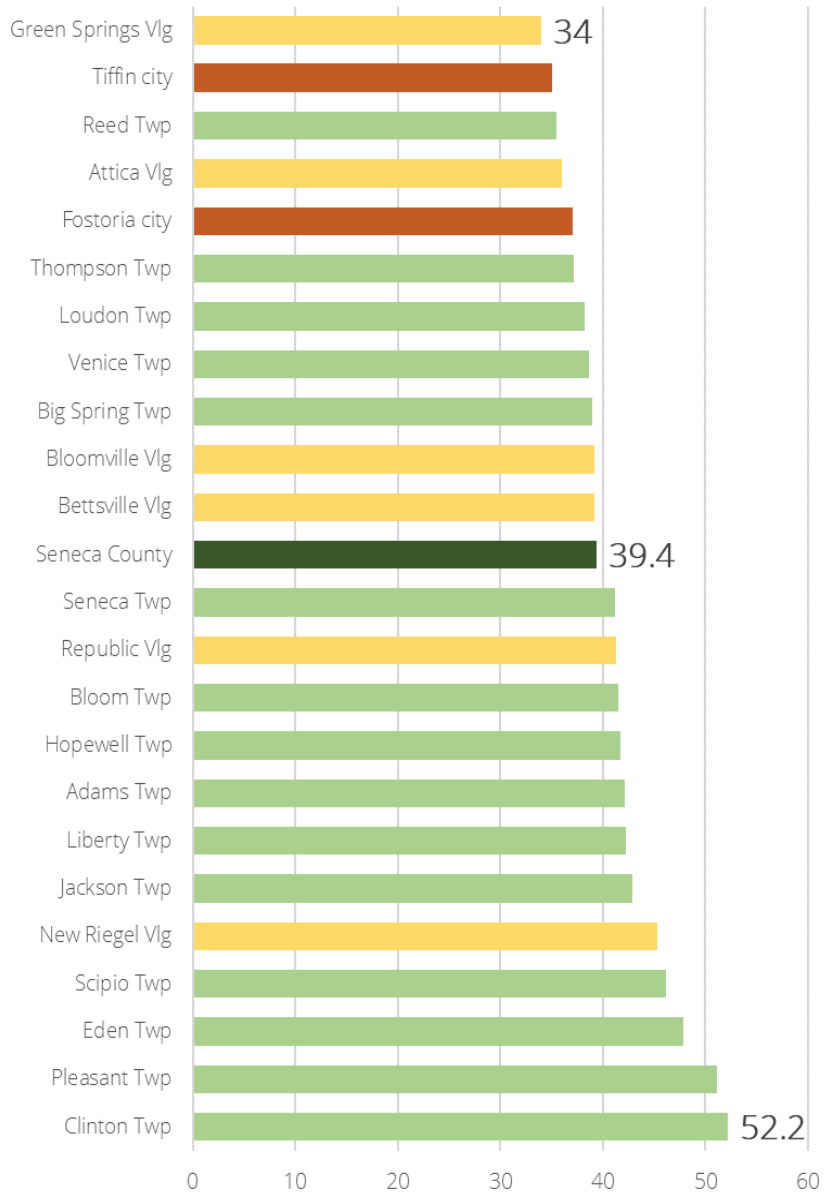
57% of survey respondents are concerned about population loss in the cities and villages.

According to state law, villages are incorporated areas with fewer than 5,000 residents. Villages in Seneca County range in size from 269 residents (New Riegel) to 1,018 residents (Attica). With such a small population base, it is difficult for village governments to maintain public amenities such as parks and sidewalks.

Seneca County's population, like much of the U.S., is getting older. Between 2000 and 2016, the median age of residents in Seneca County increased from 36.3 to 39.5 years, which is similar to Ohio's 39.2. Yet, when looking at the differences in the median age of residents in the cities, villages and township, there is an 18-year spread: the median age in Green Springs is 34, while in Clinton Township it is 52.2.



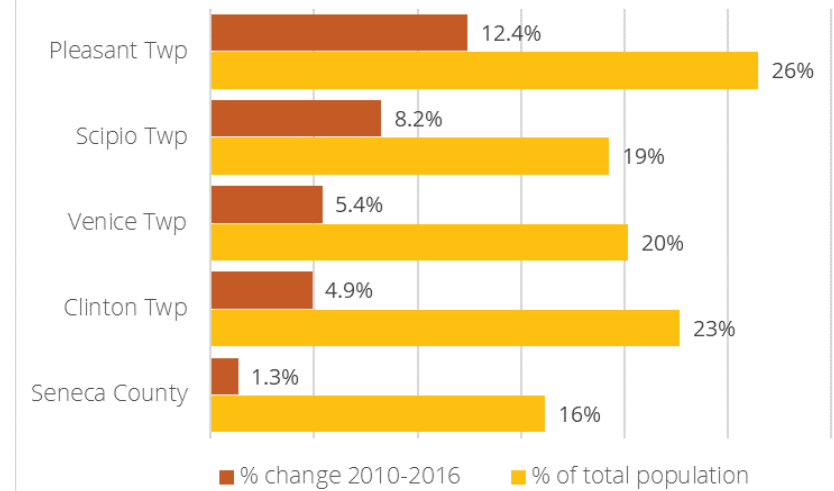
Median Age, Seneca County Communities



The age of a community's population is a key factor in understanding the housing and social programming needs of residents.

While the percentage of the population in the county that is 65 years and older increased only slightly between 2010 and 2016 (from 15% to 16%), four townships experienced significant increases (5% or more), with Pleasant Township experiencing the largest increase (12%) and having the highest percentage of older adults (26%) 65 years and older. Nationally, the percentage of the population that is 65 years and older is expected to continue to increase as people live longer and birth rates remain stagnant. Increases in the number and percentage of seniors, especially if they age in place, will lead to an increased need for support services.

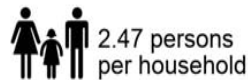
Highest Increase in Percentage of Population 65 years and Older



The city of Tiffin, because of the number of Heidelberg and Tiffin University students who live in the city, has the second youngest median age (35.1) and the highest proportion of Millennials (23.5%), compared to 18.5% for the county. In contrast, the village of Green Springs has the highest proportion of children and youth residents, with more than 36% of residents under age 20. Thompson Township, Big Spring Township and Fostoria have the 2nd, 3rd and 4th highest percentages of residents under age 20 (33.5%, 32.9% and 30.4% respectively) compared to the county average of 26.1%.

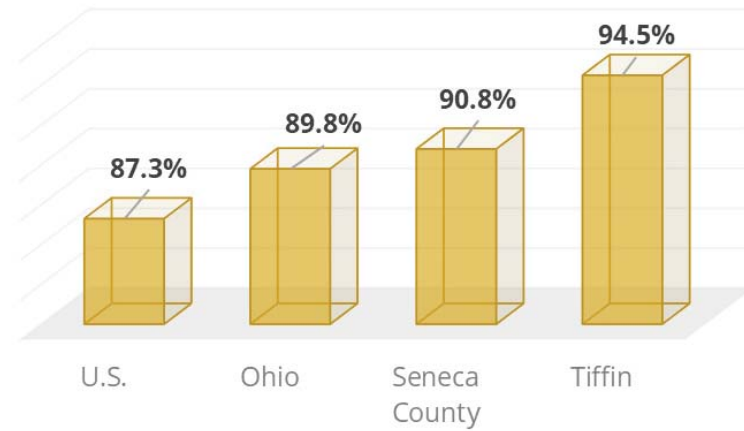
Another important consideration when evaluating the housing and neighborhood climate are trends in the number and types of households, which are closely tied to overall population and age. The U.S. Census defines a household as any person or group of people living together in a residence regardless of relationship. A family is a type of household where two or more people (one of whom is the householder) are related by birth, marriage, or adoption and residing in the same housing unit. A household may consist of a person living alone or of multiple related and/or unrelated individuals living together. Household characteristics can provide a more complete picture of community.

Household size continues to get smaller. In 2016, there were an estimated 21,349 households in the county, and an average household size of 2.47 people, which is slightly smaller than in 2010, when the average household size was 2.49. This is a result of a decrease in the number of families with children (1,671 fewer than in 2000), and an increase in the number of people living alone (from 26% to 27%). In addition, approximately 40% of all households have someone who is 65 years or older. Tiffin and Fostoria have lower percentages of family households (59% and 60% respectively), and higher percentages of persons living along (34% and 31%). Changing household size and makeup have implications for the types of housing needed in the county.

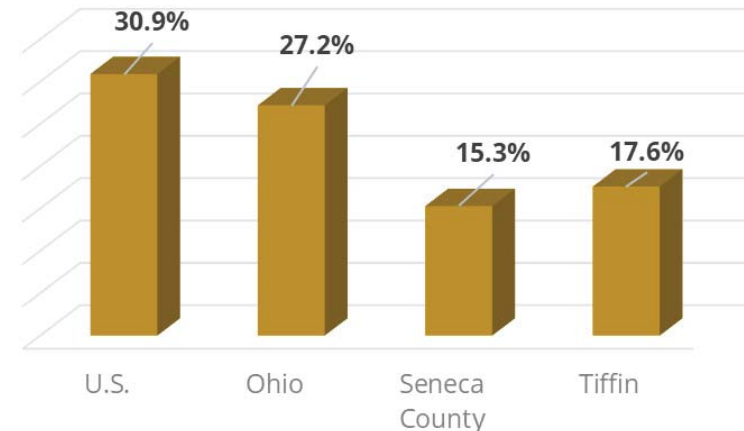


As the population characteristics in the county have changed, so too have the educational levels of the residents over the age of 25. Of particular importance are the differences between the county, the state and the nation's levels of high school graduates and college educated. The percentage of the county's population with a high school diploma

HS graduate or higher (age 25 and up)



Bachelor's degree or higher (age 25 and up)

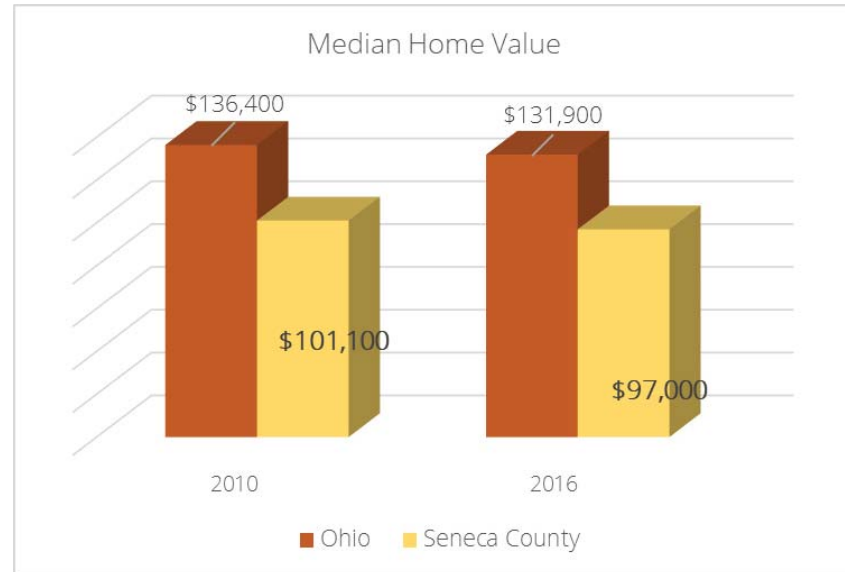
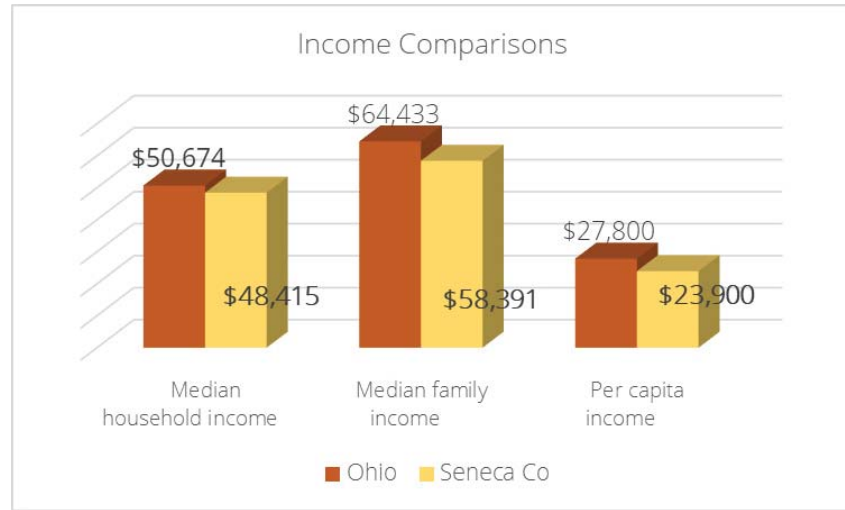


is higher than both the state's and the nation's, and has increased by 3.3 percentage points since 2010. This indicates that the local schools are performing well. In contrast, both Tiffin's and Seneca county's percentage of population with at least a Bachelor's degree are considerably less than the state's and the nation's. In addition, the County's percentage has actually decreased from 16.1% in 2010 to 15.3% in 2016. This is consistent with concerns that once local high school graduates go away for college they do not return, and it is difficult to attract and retain professionals to the county.

Household Income and Home Values

According to various economic indicators, Seneca County continues to lag behind Ohio. Between 2010 and 2016, the county's median household income and per capita income grew at higher rates than the state (14% and 11.5% respectively compared to the state's growth rates of 7% and 10.7%), yet the county's incomes continue to be lower than the state. At the same time, there is considerable variation throughout the county, with typically lower incomes in the cities and villages (ranging between 61% and 116% of the county) and higher incomes in the townships (ranging from 93% to 147% of the county).

The median value of homes in the county is \$97,000, roughly 26% lower than for the state, and 4% lower than 2010. Yet, similar to incomes, there is a wide range of house values throughout the county, with typically lower values in the cities and villages (ranging between \$58,000 and \$89,300) and higher values in the townships (ranging between \$79,800 to \$154,800).



Housing Trends and Characteristics

As noted in the population trends, the county's population peaked in 1980, yet from a housing growth standpoint, the number of housing units continues to increase, though at a very slow rate. Approximately 247 residential building permits were issued in the county between 2011 and 2018. At the same time, the total number of housing units is estimated to have increased by only 50 units (0.2%) to 24,172, reflecting the number of housing units that have been demolished in the aftermath of the 2008 housing crisis.

When looking at Seneca County's housing growth in comparison with the surrounding counties, Hancock County, with 1,192 new units and Wood County, with 693 new units, had the highest percentage increases, 3.6% and 1.3% respectively since 2010. Ohio's growth rate during this same period was 1.4%.

As might be expected in a rural community, Seneca County's housing stock is comprised primarily of single-family detached homes (78%), with roughly 10% multifamily (3-4 units in a building and apartments), 5% mobile homes, and very few attached units (2%). However, there is considerable variation in housing diversity in Tiffin and Fostoria (which together have nearly half of all housing in the county), compared to the villages and townships.

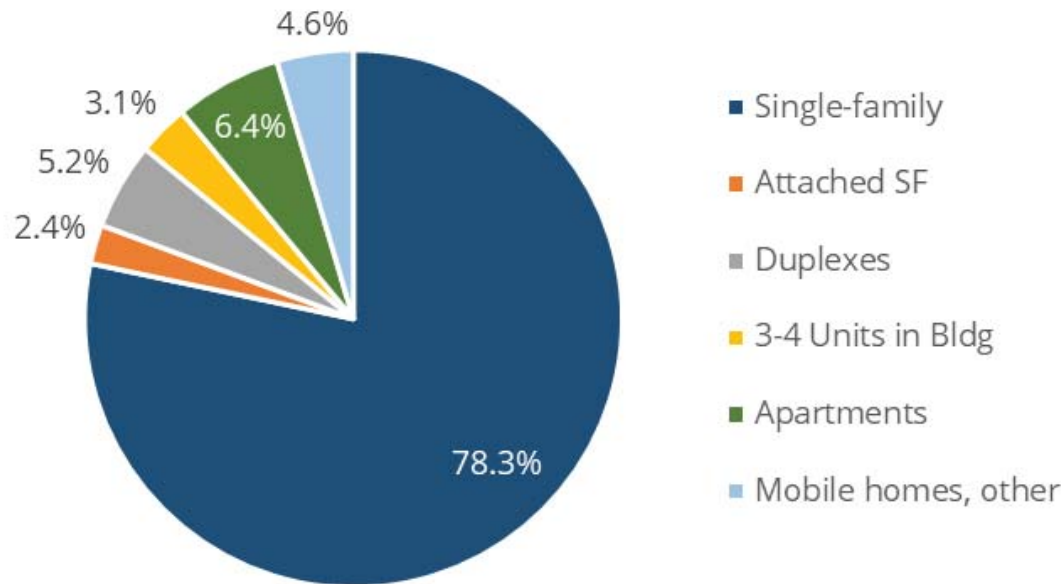
+247 Units
Residential building permits issued 2011-2018



58% of survey respondents are concerned about lack of housing for young families in the county.

- 2019 Seneca County Community Survey

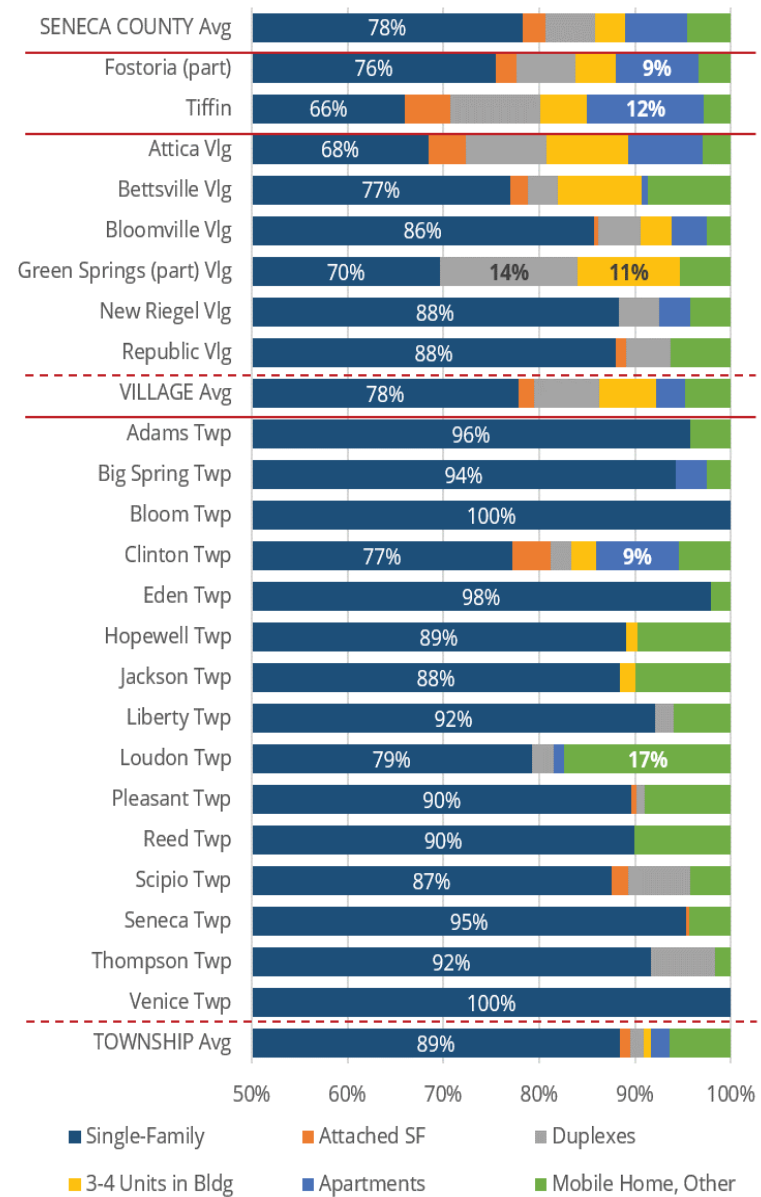
Seneca Co Housing Unit Types



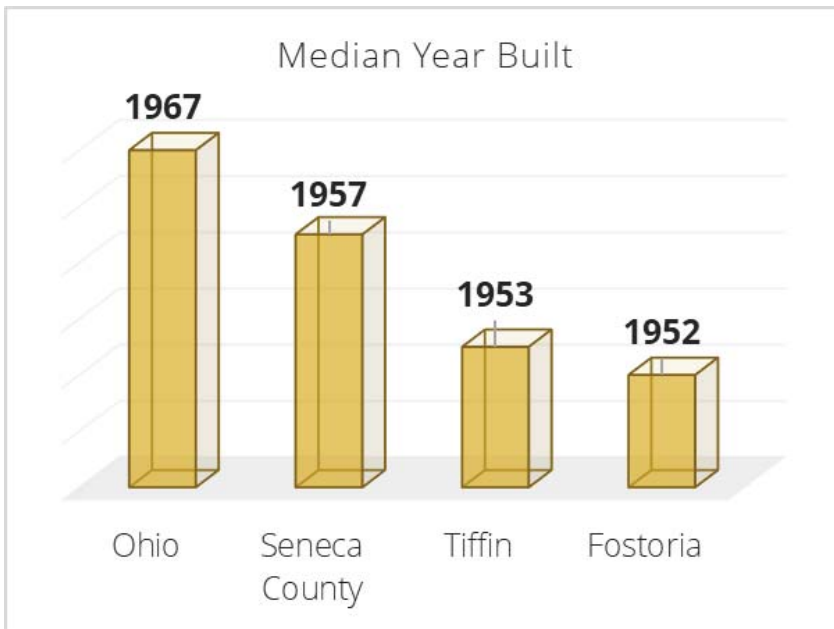
Both cities and half of the villages (Attica, Bettsville and Green Springs) have lower percentages of single-family detached housing units than the county average. In contrast, single-family homes comprise 89% of units in the townships, though Clinton Township (adjacent to Tiffin) and Loudon Township (adjacent to Fostoria) are closer to the county average. Tiffin has the highest percentage of apartment units (12%), and 94% of the apartments are found in just three locations: Tiffin (926), Fostoria (363), and Clinton Township (167).

Across the county, 72% of the occupied housing units are owner-occupied, which is slightly lower compared to 74% in 2010. Not surprisingly, the areas with the lowest rates of owner-occupancy are in the urbanized areas where there is a greater variety of housing types.

Diversity of Housing Type by Jurisdiction



Despite continued housing construction each decade, the majority of housing units in the county are over 60 years old. Older homes, depending on the quality of construction, often require periodic major investments in replacing roofs, heating and cooling systems, even when regular maintenance is conducted. In addition, older homes often require substantial remodeling to meet contemporary buyers' needs, such as modern kitchens, updated bathrooms, and larger closets.



“The lack of modern housing is a quality of life and economic issue that negatively impacts the growth of the labor pool and spending power at local businesses.”

- 2019 Housing Opportunities Analysis, Tiffin

The 2019 Housing Opportunities Analysis prepared for Tiffin, notes that the Tiffin area has a housing shortage. The report surveyed 18 apartment properties totaling 811 units within Tiffin's primary market area. These properties overall have a 99.8% occupancy level, with waiting lists reported at 15 of the 18 properties, clearly indicating the local apartment market is constrained as demand is exceeding supply. The analysis reported that overall occupancy rates are extremely high among all ages and types of rental housing in the Tiffin primary housing market area.

There is a growing need for more housing options throughout Seneca County. As more people live longer, there is increased interest in low-maintenance housing including apartments, and as more people live alone and younger generations have smaller families, there is a growing need for more variety in smaller housing units. Indeed, during the planning process, area realtors noted that people moving to the area for new employment often have difficulty finding suitable housing and end up moving to a neighboring county.

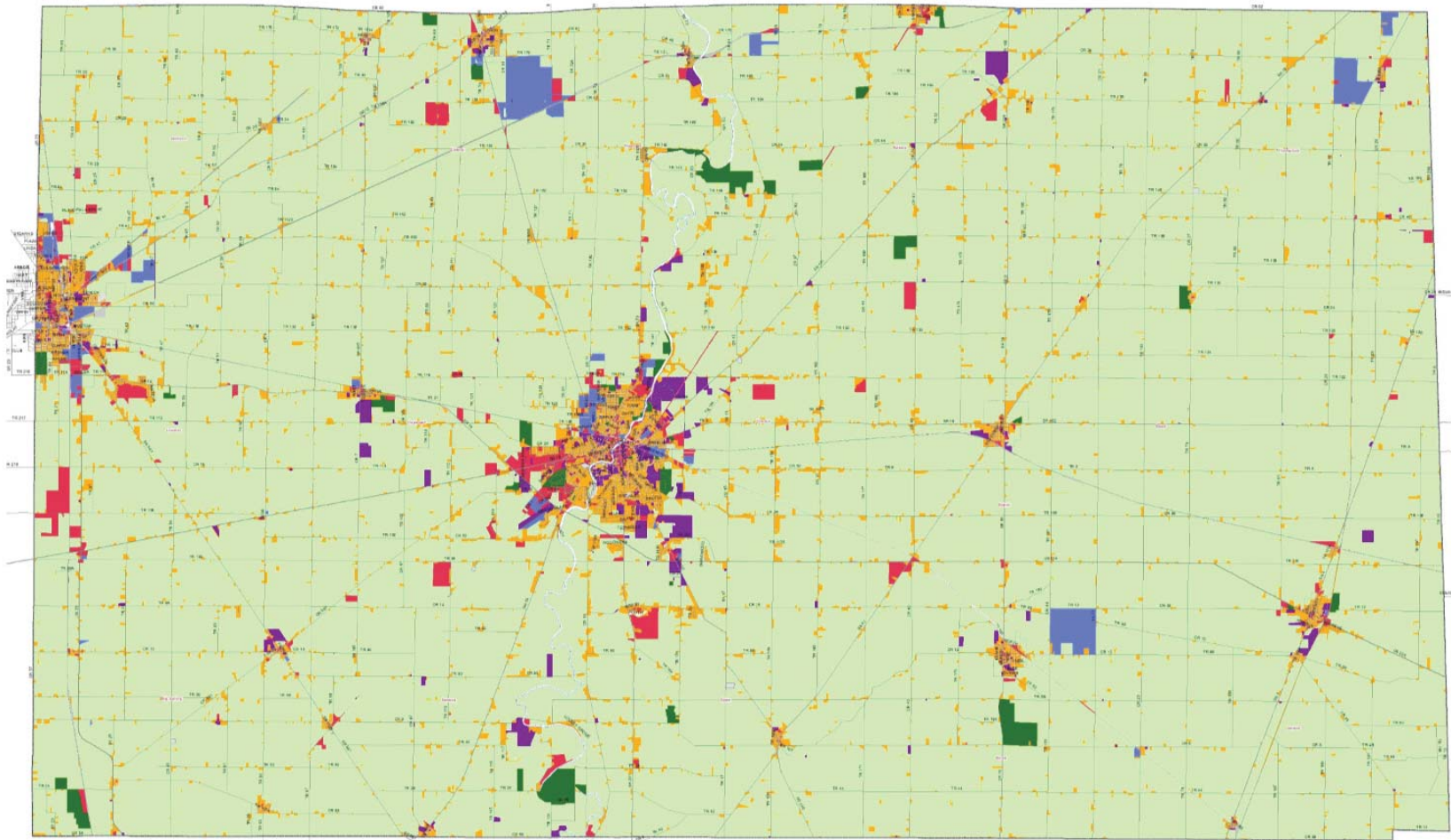
Top five housing needs in Tiffin:

- More affordable housing
 - Home, roof, window repair programs/grants
 - Incentives to attract builders & residents to Tiffin
 - New, improved apartments, townhomes & condominiums
 - New single-family homes
- 2019 Seneca County Community Survey

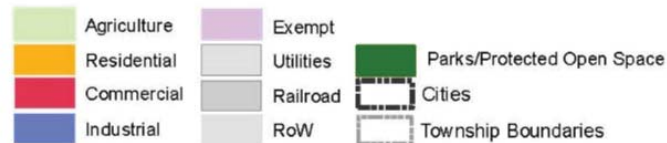


Land Use

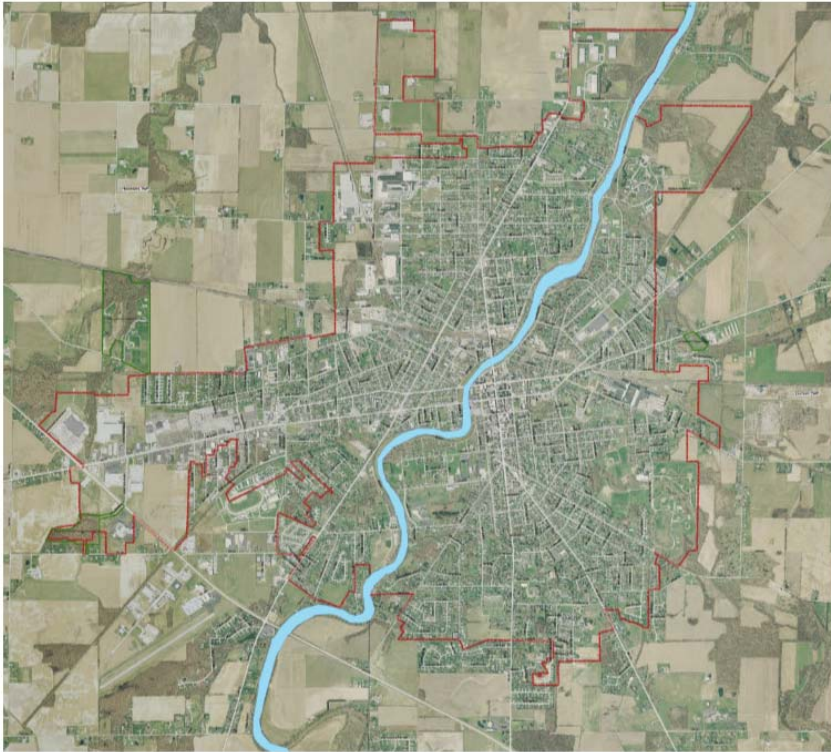
From its earliest days of settlement in the 1800s, Seneca County has historically been a farming community. Agriculture and large expanses of open spaces dominate much of the landscape. Indeed, over 90% of the county's total land area is listed as agricultural use by the Seneca County Auditor's office, and the U.S. Census Bureau considers 92% of the county rural. In contrast, approximately 5% of the county is devoted to residential uses while only 2% is used for commercial and industrial uses, and the remainder is devoted to utilities and public/exempt uses such as government, parks and schools.



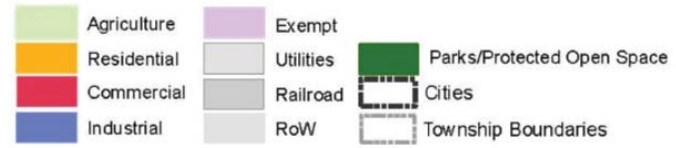
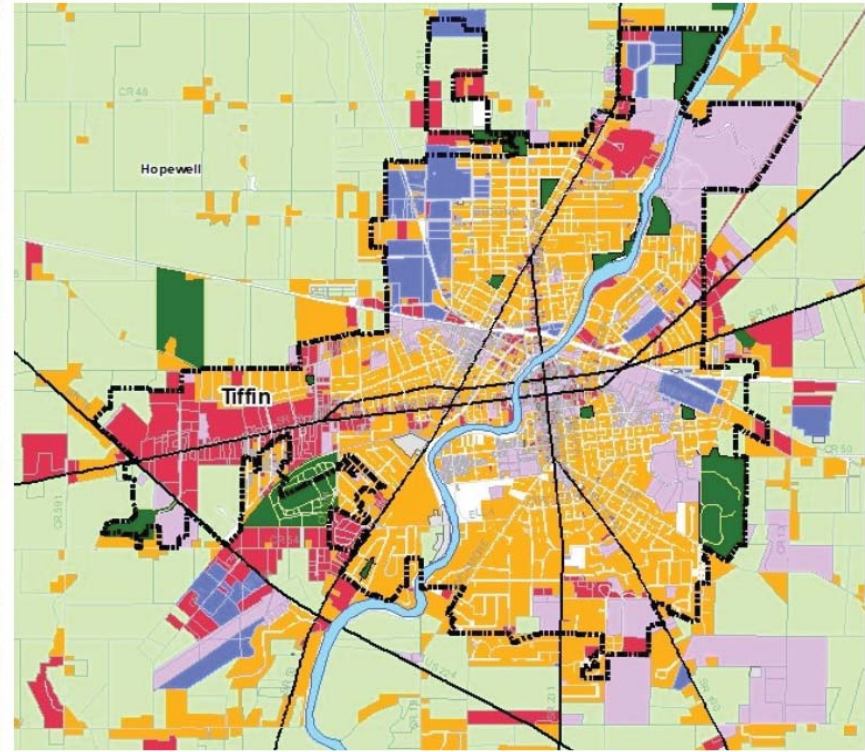
Seneca County Land Use

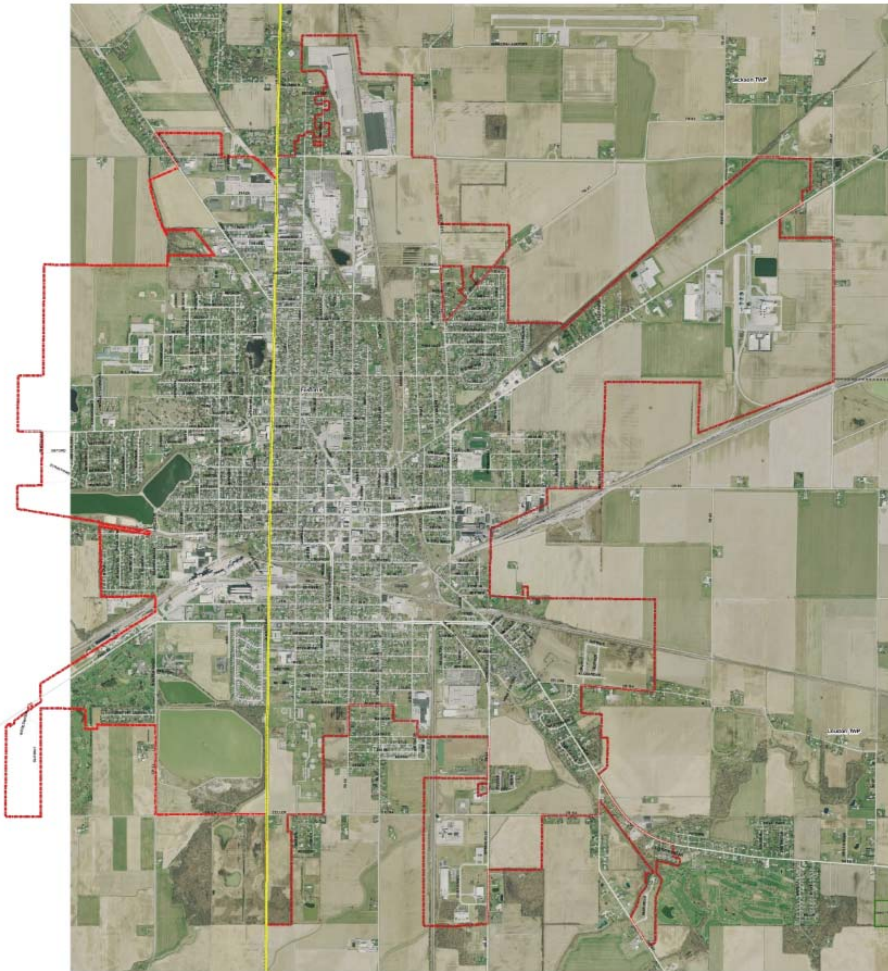


In comparison, Tiffin, Fostoria and the smaller villages are dominated by residential uses. The land use maps for the county and each city highlight the distinctions.

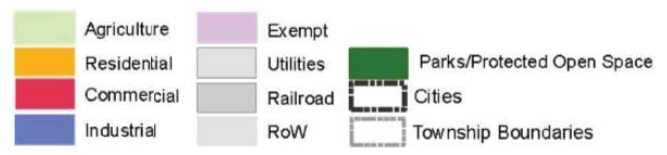
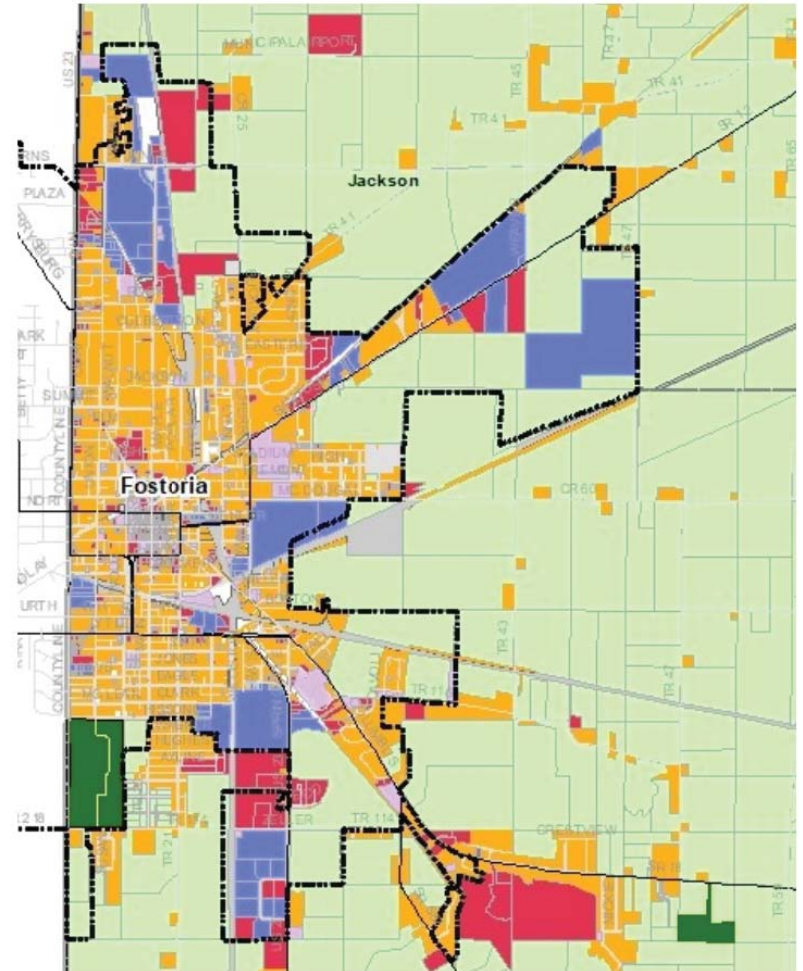


Tiffin Aerial and Existing Land Use





Fostoria Aerial and Existing Land Use



Tax Base

Seneca County's total tax base, by dollar value, is approximately 56% residential, 32% agricultural land, 9% commercial and 3% industrial & mineral. By comparison, Tiffin and Fostoria (Seneca Co portion only) have much higher commercial and industrial tax bases, 20% and 5% respectively for Tiffin and 18% and 14% respectively for Fostoria.

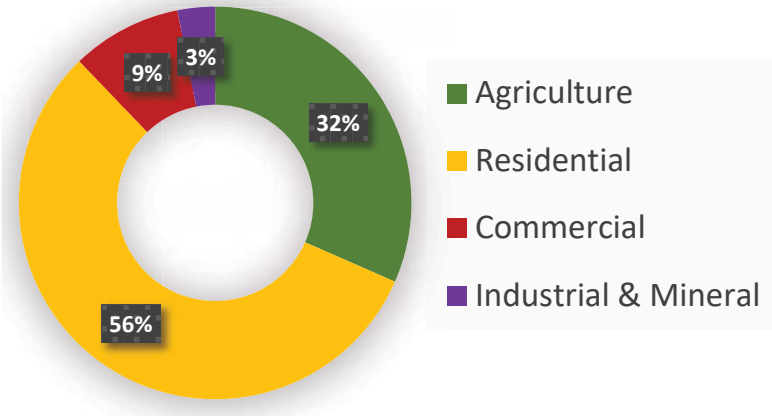
Zoning

Typically, local zoning regulations (code provisions and zoning district map) are the primary tools used to guide/regulate future development. Zoning regulations dictate how much and what type of development can occur, and the zoning map indicates the areas of the community where each of the districts is applied. These regulations in turn affect the location, kind, and amount of potential growth and development. Zoning provides numerous benefits and can be a powerful tool to improve the aesthetics of a community, protect the environment, and enhance the overall quality of life.

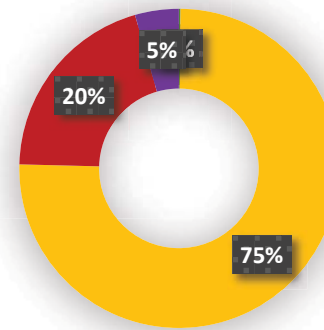
In Seneca County, Tiffin and Fostoria have adopted and regularly administer their zoning regulations. In addition, three villages (Attica, Bloomville and Green Springs) and seven townships (Adams Twp, Clinton Twp, Eden Twp, Hopewell Twp, Jackson Twp, Pleasant Twp and Scipio Twp) have adopted zoning regulations. The zoning regulations vary from having only a few districts (such as Attica Village which has only four districts) to numerous districts (such as Clinton Township which has over 20 districts).

Real Property Valuation by Use Category, 2017

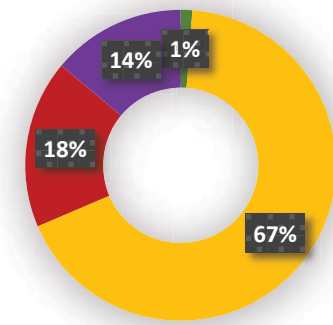
Seneca County

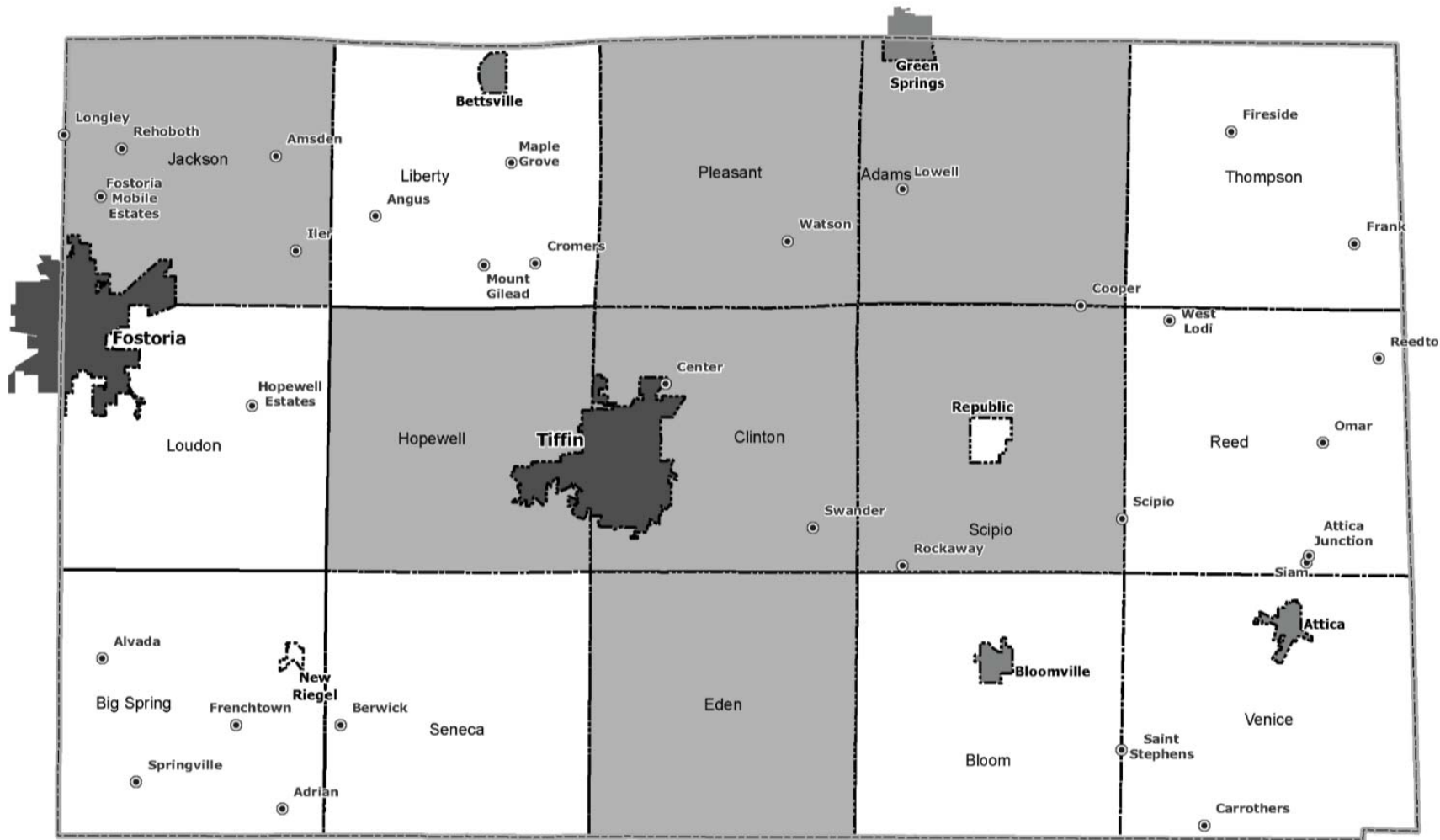


Tiffin



Fostoria (Seneca Co)



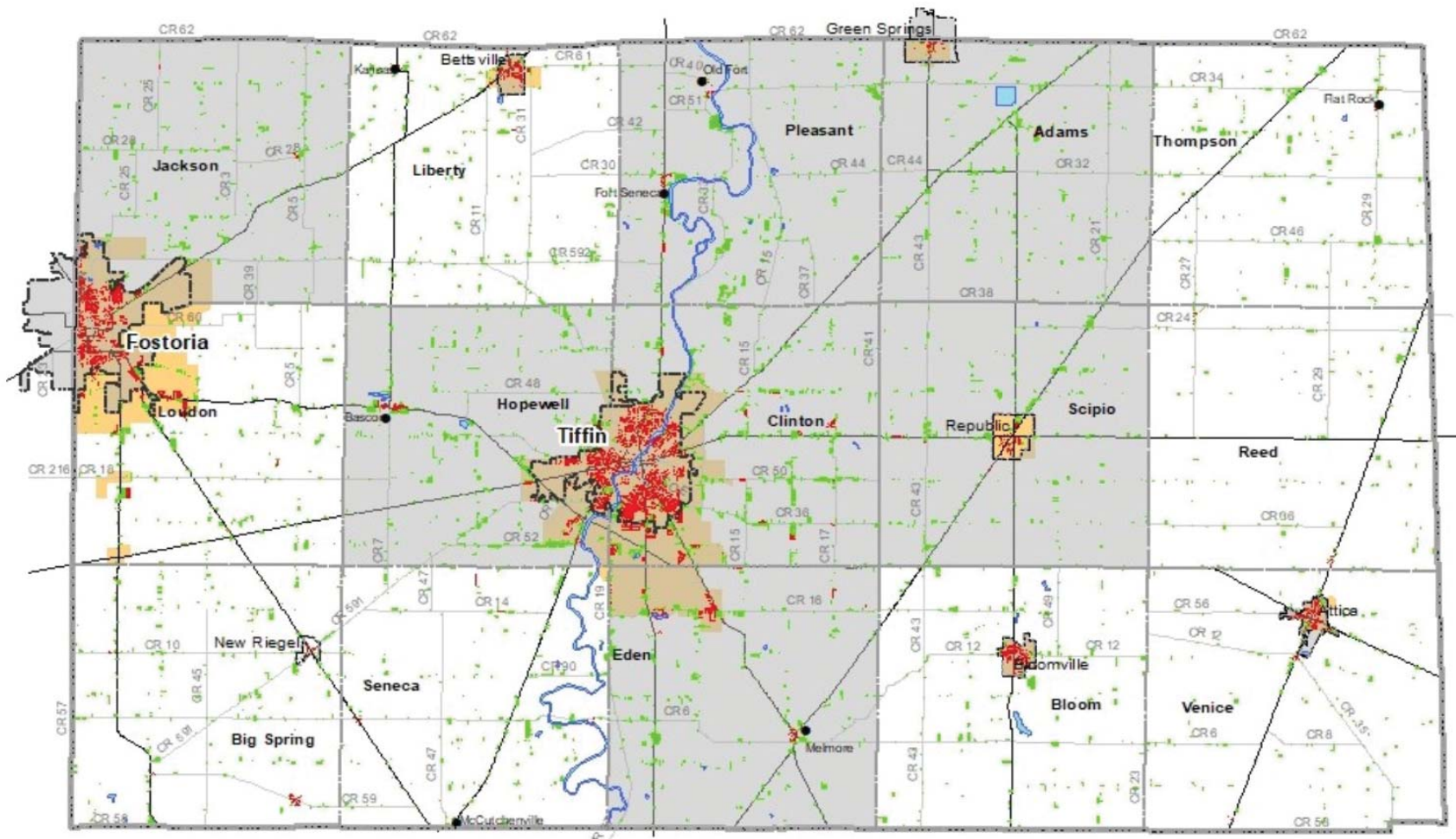


Jurisdictions with Local Zoning



Residential Development

Residential growth has historically been developed on smaller platted lots concentrated in Tiffin, Fostoria, incorporated villages and within the Urban Service Areas in townships adjacent to Tiffin and Fostoria. Residential development in townships outside the Urban Service Areas has generally occurred on unplatted lots considered “frontage development” along the county and township roads and must rely on on-site septic systems and well water, which require larger lots.



Single-Family Houses—Platted vs UnPlatted Lots

Land Use (Tax Records)

- 1F dwelling - Platted lot
- 1F dwelling - Unplatted 0 to 30 acres
- Urban Service Areas (2001)

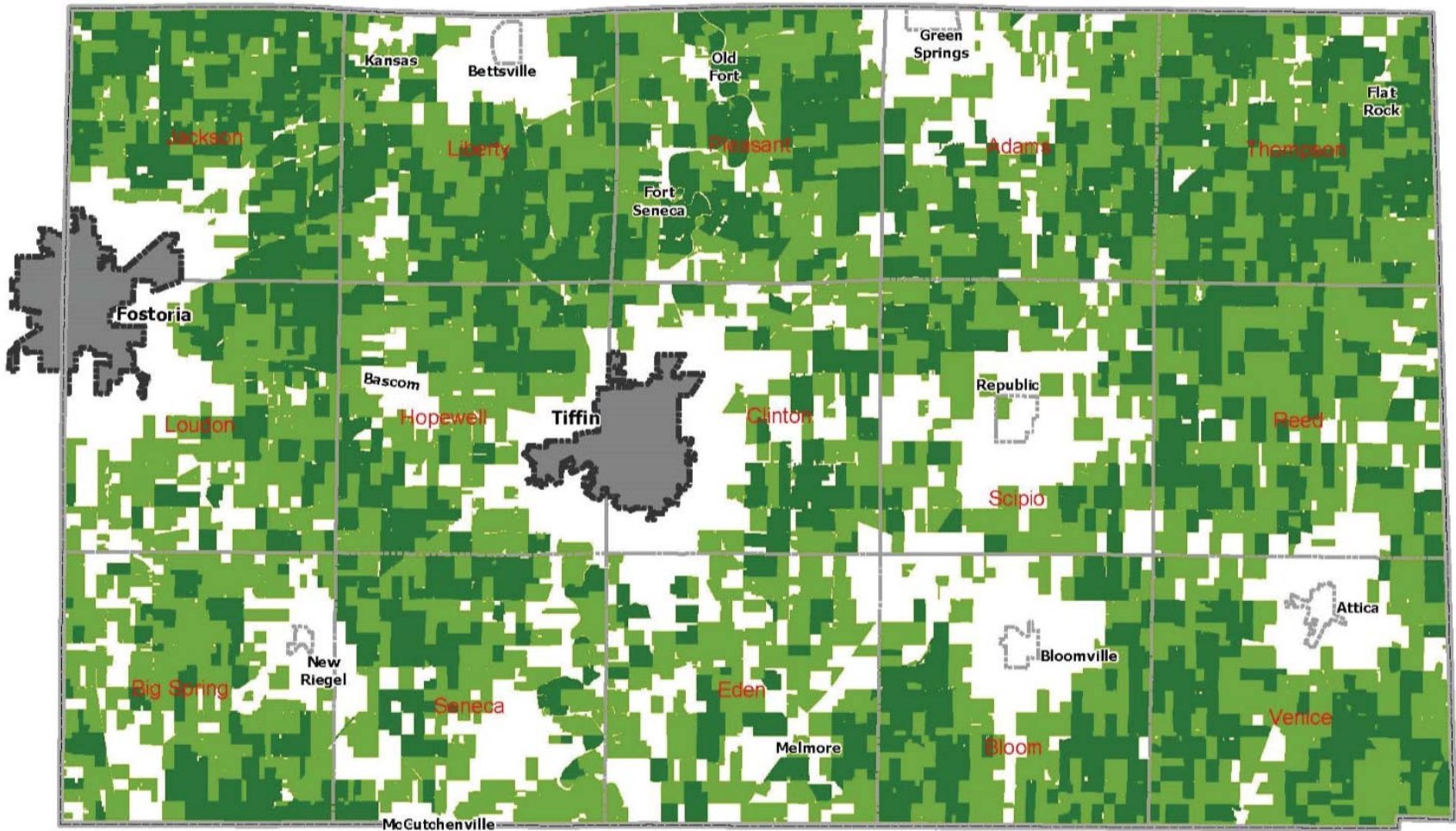
Zoned Areas

- Cities
- Villages
- Township Boundaries



Farmland

Seneca County is one of Ohio's leading farm counties. According to the US Census of Agriculture (compiled every five years), there were 1,156 farms on 266,896 acres devoted to farmland in Seneca County in 2017. Seneca County is an agriculturally rich community because of the type of soils present, which are predominately classified as prime farmland suitable for cultivation.



Prime Farmland

Land Evaluation & Site Assessment (LESA)
 Areas preferred for Farmland Preservation - 2010

Land Use Classifications 2010 (LESA)

- Ag I: Top 30%
- Ag II: Middle 40%



The amount of land being farmed has been decreasing since 1997, when nearly 298,000 acres were in production (except for a spike in acres in 2012). The number of farms in the county had been decreasing by an average of 14 annually between 1997 and 2012, but then increased by 4% between 2012 and 2017. The average size of a farm in 2017 was 231 acres, while the median was 80 acres. Both the average and median size of farms has decreased since 2012, from 261 acres and 111 acres respectively. Net cash farm income of operators has also declined since 2012, from an average of \$47,063 per farm to \$33,101 per farm in 2017.

Over 311,700 acres in Seneca County participate in the Current Agricultural Use Valuation (CAUV) program. This program provides a substantial reduction in the valuation of land that is exclusively dedicated to agricultural production, which results in lower property taxes. These properties have a total market value of \$1,506 million, which is reduced by the program to a CAUV value of \$665 million.

In Ohio, like the national trend, the average age of producers increased from 54.6 years in 2012 to 55.8 in 2017 because of the declining number of beginning and young farmers. This makes it difficult for older farmers to plan for retirement, especially those with no heirs to take over the farm, and it increases the pressure to sell to developers, large corporate farms, investment firms, and oil and gas companies.

In recent years, agritourism has gained popularity as a way to extend the season, increase diversification and boost farming income for operators. According to recent USDA census data, spending at Ohio farms for agritourism and recreation has increased approximately 64% since 2007. Agritourism consists of farmers and agriculture-based enterprises opening attractions to the general public in an effort to educate, entertain, and increase revenues. Activities like pumpkin patches, corn mazes, hay rides, and winery and wine-tasting tours all fall under agritourism.

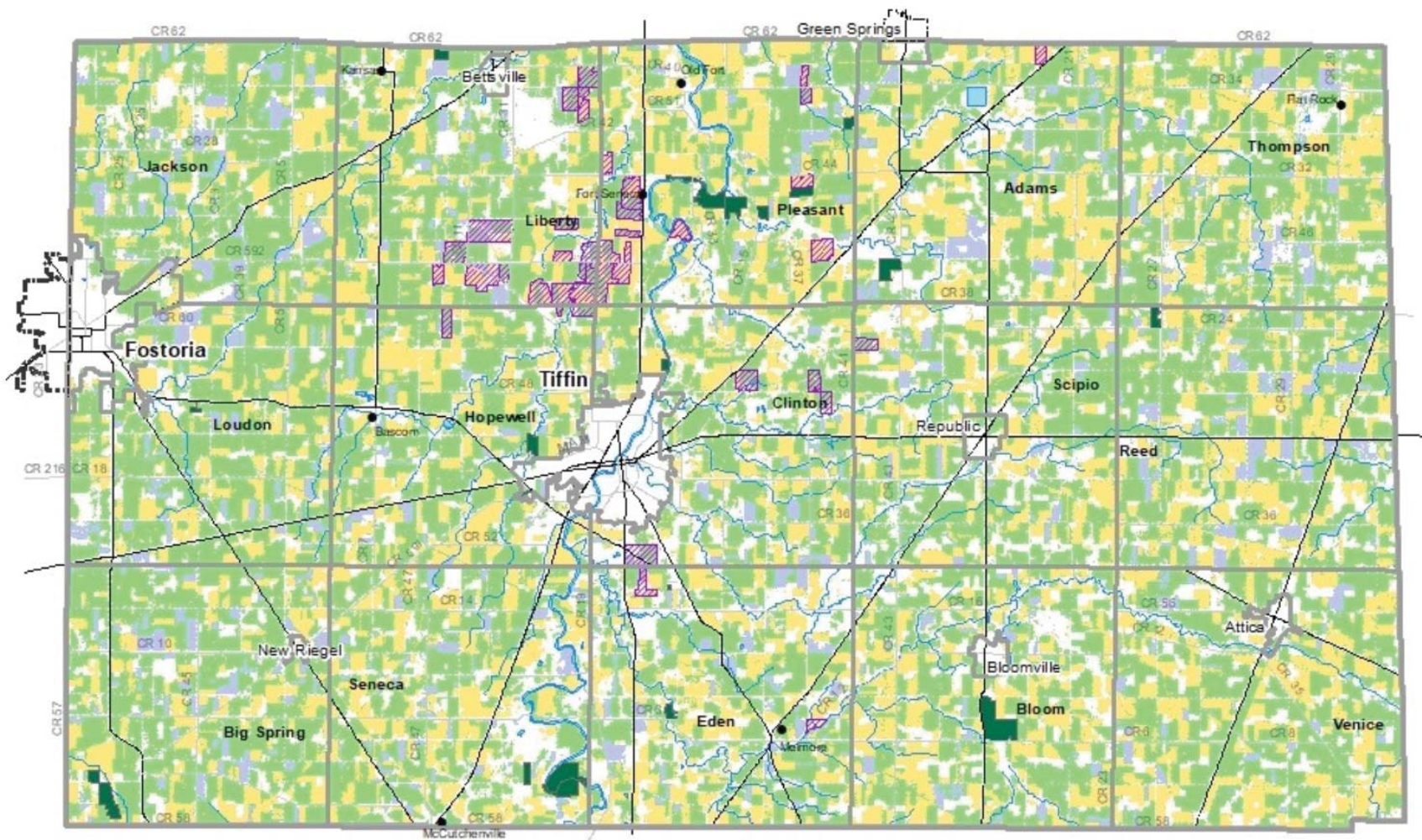
Although agricultural heritage is an important component of Seneca County's culture and economy, there is little agricultural-based tourism in Seneca County.

Historic family farms are an important link to Seneca County's agricultural history. Since 2002, 38 farms in Seneca County have been certified as Century Farms as part of the Ohio Historic Family Farms program. This program recognizes farms that have been owned by the same family for at least 100 consecutive years, and is intended to help farmers preserve their historic documents and encourage them to pass their historic farms on to future generations.

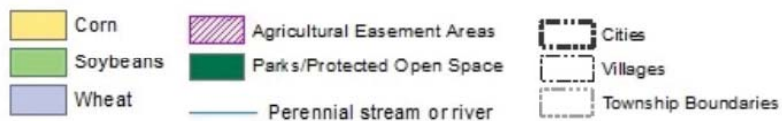
According to the Black Swamp Conservancy, just over 4,600 acres had been protected in Seneca County as of 2018 (Black Swamp Conservancy 2019 Annual Report). Most landowners who work with the Black Swamp Conservancy protect their land with a perpetual land conservation agreement known as a conservation easement. The landowner agrees to restrict the use of the land in order to protect its conservation value. In the case of an agricultural land conservation agreement, most non-agricultural activities are prohibited to protect the productivity of the soils and the land's water resources. A land conservation agreement on woodlands, wetlands, meadows or streamside land prohibits residential and commercial development and usually limits construction to structures necessary for a nature preserve.

Ohio Family Farm ReGeneration Act establishes a tax credit for owners of agricultural assets, which grants an income and franchise tax credit to any person who sells or rents agricultural assets to a beginning farmer. Creating incentives for landowners to sell or rent to beginning farmers will create more opportunity for the next generation, and reward retiring farmers who keep their land in agricultural production.





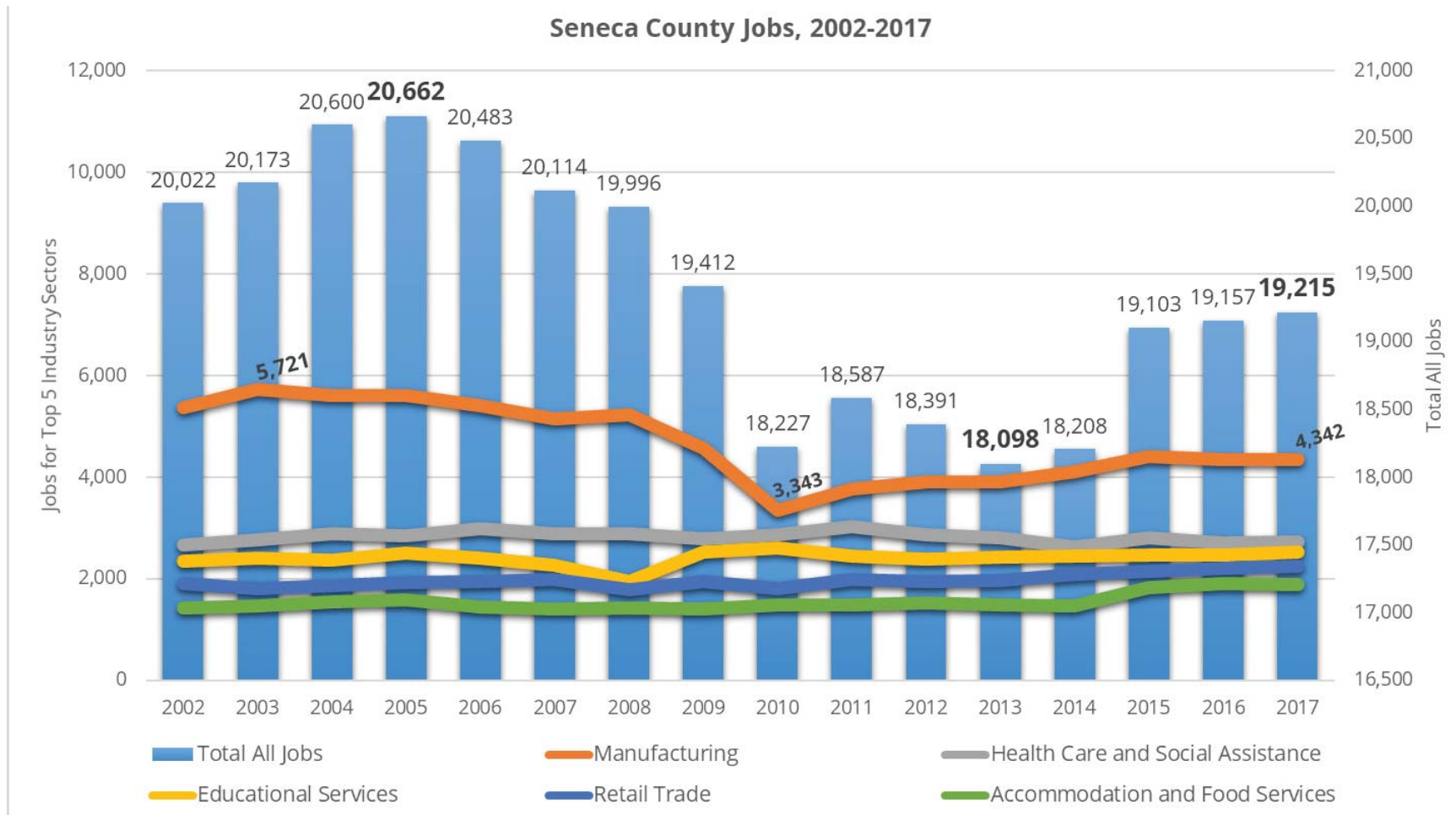
Cropland, Agricultural Easement Areas and Protected Open Space Areas



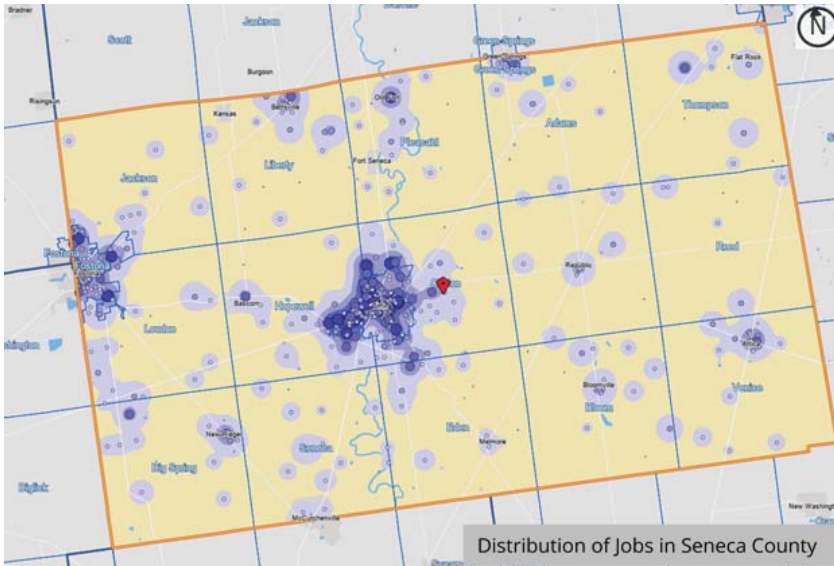
Economic Diversity and Employment

In addition to Seneca County's rich history as a farming community, manufacturing has played a key role in both Tiffin's and Fostoria's growth. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the county's natural gas deposits led to a booming glass-making industry. Numerous manufacturing operations were established, and most businesses produced items or provided services for farmers living in the surrounding countryside.

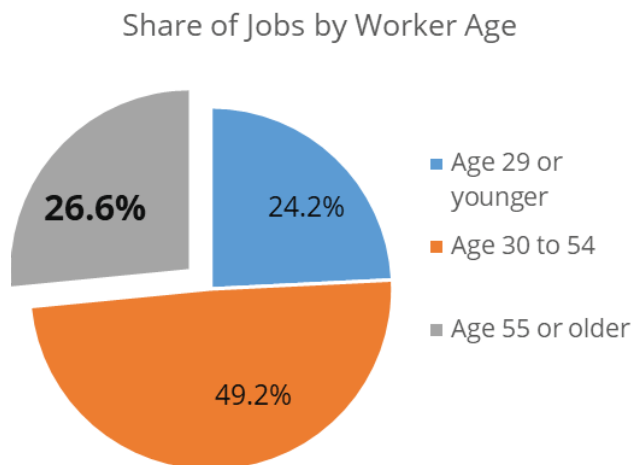
There were approximately 19,215 jobs in the county in 2017. At 23% of all jobs, the manufacturing sector continues to provide the highest percentage of jobs in the county, though both the number and share of total jobs has declined from 5,721 jobs (28% of total jobs) in 2003. Since the 2008 recession, there has been significant economic growth, and the number of jobs in the county is beginning to approach pre-recession levels. The top five industry sectors in the county (Manufacturing, Health Care & Social Assistance, Educational Services, Retail Trade and Accommodation & Food Services), provide 72% of all of the jobs in the county, and have contributed to the recent growth in jobs.



Tiffin businesses provide the majority of jobs in the county (55%) including 62% of manufacturing jobs, 73% of educational service jobs and 68% of accommodation & food services jobs, while 16% of all jobs are located in Fostoria, and 29% are in the villages and townships.



The workforce is getting older and there is a high percentage of employees nearing retirement age. Over 25% of jobs in the county are

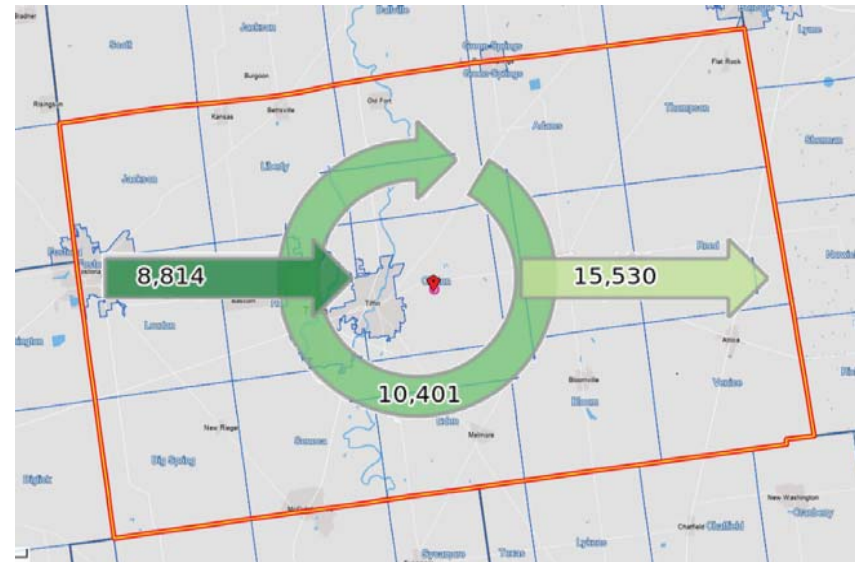


held by employees age 55 and older, which is a significant increase compared to 2002, when persons in this age group held less than 15% of jobs.

While overall, wages are about 35% below the U.S. average, the cost of living for Seneca County residents (at 76.1) is much lower than the U.S. average (100) as well.

Over 15,500 residents (60% of those employed) commute to jobs outside the county, and 10,400 (46%) of the jobs in the county are held by residents. This creates a situation where many Seneca County residents are dependent on the success of surrounding counties for their economic well-being. This high level of out-commuting lowers the daytime population in the county thereby lowering the demand for daytime retail and restaurants.

Quality education and non-traditional postgraduate training opportunities are key to creating an educated workforce with relevant skills that attract employers. Seneca County has a number of institutions that provide education and training, including Heidelberg University, Tiffin University, Sentinel Career Center, the Fostoria Learning Center, and nearby Terra State Community College.



Retail Sales

There are an estimated 330 retail trade and food & drink establishments in Seneca County, with annual sales of approximately \$419 million. Yet, residents spend a portion of their disposable income outside the county, referred to as sales “leakage”. Retail sales “leakage” compares the potential total value of sales within the county (based on population and income) to actual sales volume. An estimated 37% of potential sales in Seneca “leak” out to other communities, resulting in an estimated \$247 million in retail sales that potentially could have been made in the county (ESRI 2018 data).

Purchases most often made outside of Seneca County included 83% of sales at Clothing Stores, 77% of sales at Miscellaneous Retailers (such as florists, gift stores, and office supply) and 70% of sales at Furniture Stores.

RETAIL SALES LEAKAGE

37% OF ALL POTENTIAL RETAIL SALES IN SENECA COUNTY
“LEAK” OUT TO OTHER COUNTIES. THIS REPRESENTS ABOUT
\$247 MILLION IN LOST RETAIL SALES ANNUALLY.

Clothing 83% Leakage	Misc Retail 77% Leakage	Home Furnishings 70% Leakage
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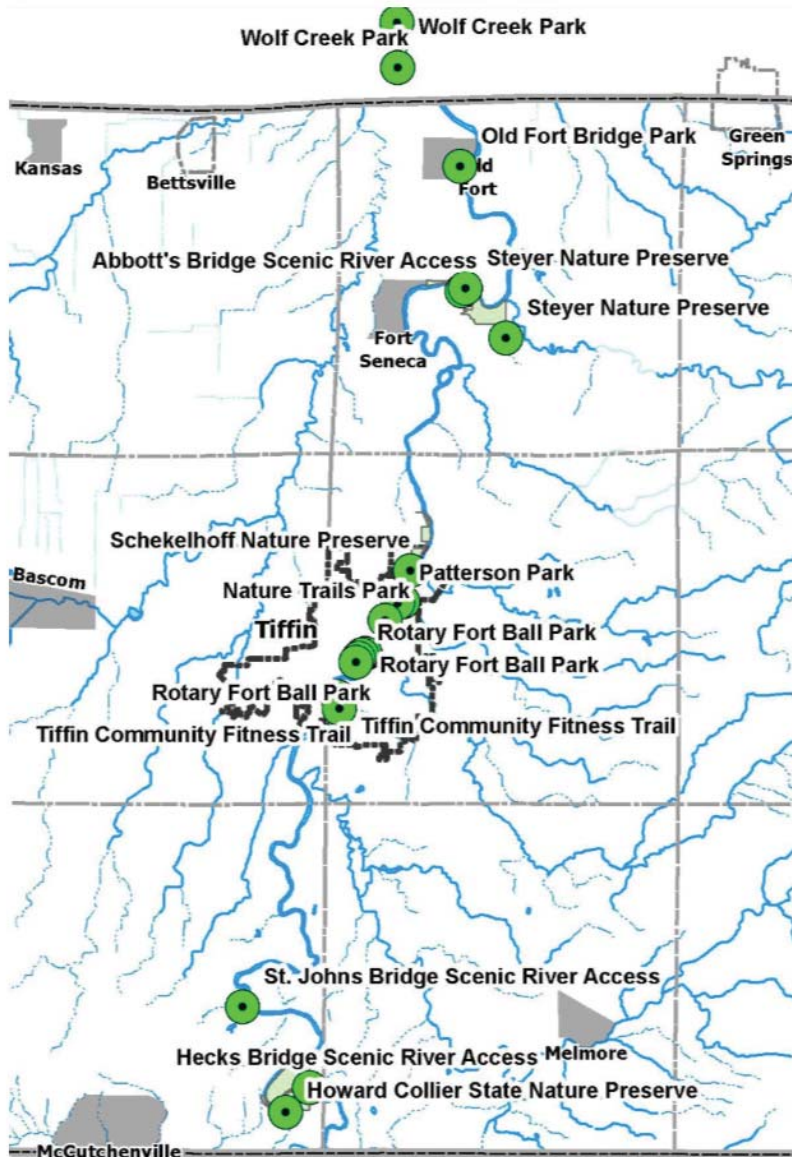
Seneca County has a generally dispersed, low-density population. Tiffin with just under 18,000 residents and Fostoria with about 13,000 residents, lack the critical mass needed to attract certain retailers, as well as merchandise that is easily purchased online. In contrast, there are three retail sectors that actually have sales that exceed local demand, meaning customers are drawn from outside the trade area: lawn and garden supply retailers; beer, wine and liquor establishments; and gasoline stations.

Broadband

Reliable and affordable high-speed broadband internet e-Connectivity has become a necessity for everyone, including residences, businesses, farms, and governments in Seneca County. Every business sector (manufacturing, offices, retailers) needs such access to be successful in today’s global economy because of the growing reliance on data collection, data analysis, and the speedy and accurate transfer of such information. Even for children, access is essential as schools become more technologically savvy and rely more on online learning. Many residents are using cloud-based services to store data on everything from home finance to family photos and recipes, so that now, even home life is increasingly dependent on internet access.

Despite the need, internet access is spotty throughout Seneca County. Smaller villages and rural areas are notoriously difficult for traditional providers to reach with hard lines, but the introduction of mobile hot spots has solved many problems that even 10 years ago were thought to be insurmountable. Nevertheless, large segments of rural Seneca County do not have access to high-speed broadband, as noted on a map prepared by INNOVATEOhio, a program created in 2019 to develop strategies for improving access in Ohio (<https://innovateohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/innovate/priorities/resources/broadband/overview>).





Sandusky River Access



NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

Watersheds

Nearly all of Seneca County (94%) is in the Sandusky River watershed, and the Sandusky River plays an important role in Seneca County's history and development. For example, four forts along the river's banks including Fort Stephenson were instrumental in the Americans' decisive victory in the War of 1812.

The Sandusky River is one of Ohio's longest rivers (130 miles) within the Lake Erie watershed, draining more than 1,825 square miles. It is the least densely populated watershed in Ohio, where agriculture is 83% of the land use. A 65-mile stretch of the Sandusky River between Upper Sandusky and Fremont is designated a State Scenic River.

The Sandusky River has several public access sites and provides fishing along most of its length, highlighted by the annual migration of walleye and white bass from Sandusky Bay to Ballville Dam.

Floodplains and Riparian Corridors

There are a number of floodplains and riparian corridors in the county. Floodplains are the areas adjacent to rivers and streams that are subject to periodic or regular flooding. Riparian corridors include the stream banks and associated areas adjacent to the waterway, including the floodplain. When vegetated, riparian areas function as stream buffer zones, protecting the waterway by absorbing and removing pollutants from runoff and slowing down the flow of storm water into the river thereby helping to reduce downstream flooding and allowing groundwater recharge. If a floodplain or riparian area is farmed or mowed to the water's edge, water quality degradation may occur.

Wetlands and Hydric Soils

Wetlands are defined as those areas that are inundated or saturated by surface or ground water at a frequency and duration to support a prevalence of vegetation typically adapted to life in saturated soil conditions. Wetlands are important for floodwater storage, filtration



and purification of water, and ground water recharge. The presence of wetlands often coincides with the occurrence of hydric soils. The vast majority of Seneca County's soils do not drain well naturally, though most rural areas are tiled to allow for successful farming.

Woodland Resources

Woodlands and trees, their canopy cover, and associated plant and animal communities contribute many environmental benefits: they stabilize soil by controlling wind and water erosion, reduce flooding by slowing and storing stormwater runoff, improve water quality by filtering and absorbing pollutants, reduce fluctuations in temperature extremes, provide wildlife habitat, and provide a source of organic matter.

They also provide a number of benefits related to public health and safety, aesthetics, and livability: for example, they reduce noise levels, cleanse pollutants from the air, produce oxygen and absorb carbon dioxide. Trees in urban areas have also been shown to mitigate ozone pollution. Urban forests also provide significant economic benefits through increased real estate values, improved settings for business activities, and reduced energy costs for heating and cooling. The aesthetic value of trees in urban settings is reflected in civic pride, a healthy community image, and economic vitality.

Water Quality Monitoring

The Ohio EPA uses biological criteria primarily to assess the effects of aquatic pollution sources such as industrial and wastewater treatment facilities that hold National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permits. This data is used to assess the overall health of waterways and identify potential problems. Adverse impacts to aquatic habitat (and thus water quality) stem from point sources (discrete discharge points such as municipal sewage treatment systems or industrial waste outputs) and non-point sources (dispersed sources such as road runoff during rainfall events). Once potential problem areas are identified, resource managers can then begin to assess subwatersheds for sources of degradation and possible solutions.

Non Point Source Impacts to Water Quality

Water quality can be adversely affected by non-point (dispersed) sources (NPS), such as failing septic systems or stormwater runoff from agricultural settings. As storm water flows across surfaces, it carries soil, pathogens and other pollutants from streets, pesticides and fertilizers, and eroded sediment. Unlike point sources of pollution, NPS pollution are difficult to identify, manage, and quantify. There are no pipe or outflow sources to monitor, and it can be difficult to locate sources and the pathways these pollutants travel into downstream receiving waters.

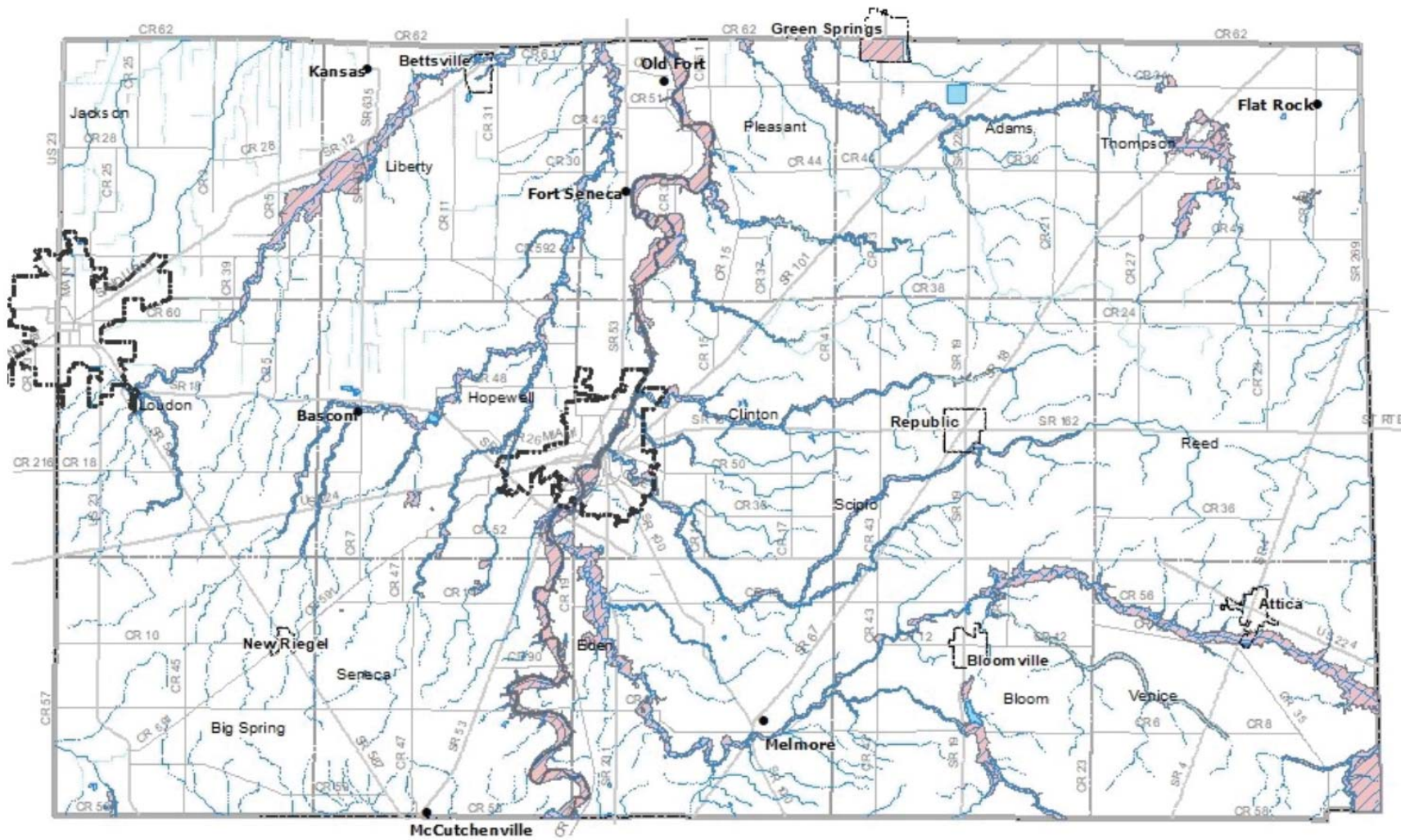
Nearly every stream in Seneca County provides agricultural drainage. Streams that existed prior to when agricultural drainage programs began have been highly modified, and ditches have been dug to drain wetlands and provide outlets for tile drainage. Both ditches and natural streams carry water, nutrients, and energy downstream.

Home Sewage Treatment Systems

Most houses in the townships do not have access to public sewers and must rely on on-site septic systems (referred to as home sewage treatment systems (HSTS)). The average life expectancy of a HSTS is approximately 20 years, though some perform longer and newer systems may fail as well. The Seneca County Health Department has an inventory of about 9,000 failing HSTS and has identified eight hot spots. Failing home sewage treatment systems (HSTS) can have a negative impact on the water quality in the Sandusky River because nutrients from failing systems contribute to algae growth and disease-causing organisms.

Ohio EPA's 2014 report of water quality in the lower Sandusky River and Bay Tributaries Watershed indicated that some of the streams in Seneca County fail to meet water quality goals. The primary sources of pollution that need to be addressed include: waste water collection and treatment systems, cropland drainage and home septic systems.





Floodplain and Riparian Corridors

- | | | | |
|---|-------------------|---|--|
|  | Floodplains |  | Perennial stream or river |
|  | Riparian Corridor |  | Perennial canal, ditch, or aqueduct |
| | |  | Intermittent stream, river, or wash |
| | |  | Intermittent canal, ditch, or aqueduct |



Parks and Open Space

There are a wide variety of both public and private parks and recreation facilities in Seneca County and a number of different entities responsible for preserving important areas of natural open spaces. Based on land ownership from the County Auditor's website, there are 2,918 acres of land devoted to these facilities.

The Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) is the county's largest owner of land in this category, with nearly 900 acres (31% of the 2,918 acres of protected open space) in its two state nature preserves (529 acres combined, based on land owned by ODNR) and six other sites (370 acres collectively).

The second largest landowner is the Seneca County Park District (SCPD). The District owns or has a management partnership on 10 sites that, together, cover more than 800 acres, or 28% of the protected open space in the county.

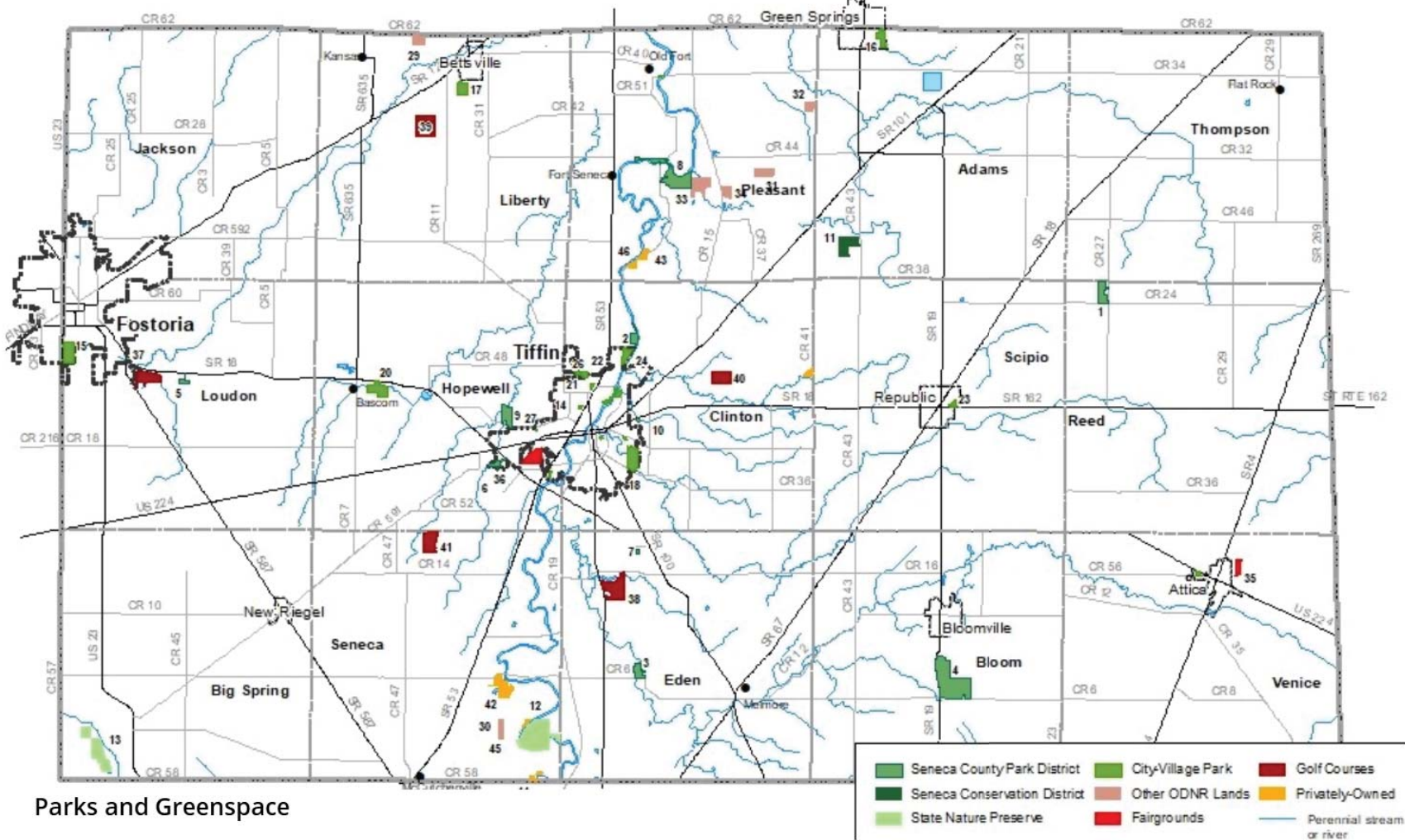
Four hundred seventeen (417) acres are dedicated to city and village parks (14% of the county's land mass). Nearly 600 acres are privately owned parcels used for recreational purposes, including two golf courses (370 acres, 13%) and other privately owned recreational sites (235 acres, 8%).



Based on the responses to the online survey, the primary reasons residents gave for visiting any park in the county was walking/running/hiking (76%), followed by special events sponsored by the park (22%), dog walking (20%), and photography (17%).

When asked specifically about desired investments in city parks and recreation in Tiffin, Tiffin residents identified trails (walking, running and cycling); followed by boating (35%), creating a river promenade (34%) and increasing nature-oriented activities (33%) as the three most important.





Parks and Greenspace

ID PARK

1 Bowen Nature Preserve	9 Tiffin University Nature Preserve	17 H.P. Eells Park	25 Tiffin Baseball Field	33 ODNR 5	41 Seneca Hills Golf Course
2 Clinton Nature Preserve	10 Zimmerman Nature Preserve	18 Hedges-Boyer Park	26 Tiffin Skate Park	34 ODNR 6	42 Camp Fire USA
3 Forrest Nature Preserve	11 Miller Conservation Farm	19 Josiah Hedges Park	27 Beechwood Park	35 Attica Fair	43 Izaak Walton & Camp Hertzler
4 Garlo Heritage Nature Preserve	12 Howard Collier State Nature Pres.	20 Meadowbrook Park	28 Riverview Park	36 Seneca County Fairgrounds	44 NW OH Christian Youth Camp
5 Geary YMCA Fruth Outdoor Center	13 Springville Marsh State Nature Pres.	21 Nature Trails Park	29 ODNR 1	37 Loudon Meadows Golf Course	45 Sandusky River Coon Hunters
6 Mercy Community Nature Preserve	14 Apple-Jack Park	22 Oakley Park	30 ODNR 2	38 Mohawk Country Club	46 Tiffin Rangers
7 Opportunity Park	15 Foundation Park	23 Republic Park	31 ODNR 3	39 Forclosed Golf Course	47 Clinton Lake Campground
8 Steyer Nature Preserve	16 Green Springs Community Park	24 Schekelhoff Nature Pres.	32 ODNR 4	40 Clinton Heights Golf Course	



Seneca County Park District

The Seneca County Commissioners established the Seneca County Park District in 1996, and that same year, the members of the first Park Board were appointed. The following year, the Park District acquired its first property, the 256-acre Garlo Heritage Nature Preserve, through a gift from Alma and Dolly Garlo. Over the years, five other nature preserves have been acquired and developed, as well as four additional properties in cooperation with community partners for a total of ten county parks. The Park District has developed and annually conducts more than 180 nature programs for all ages, with attendance exceeding 4,000.

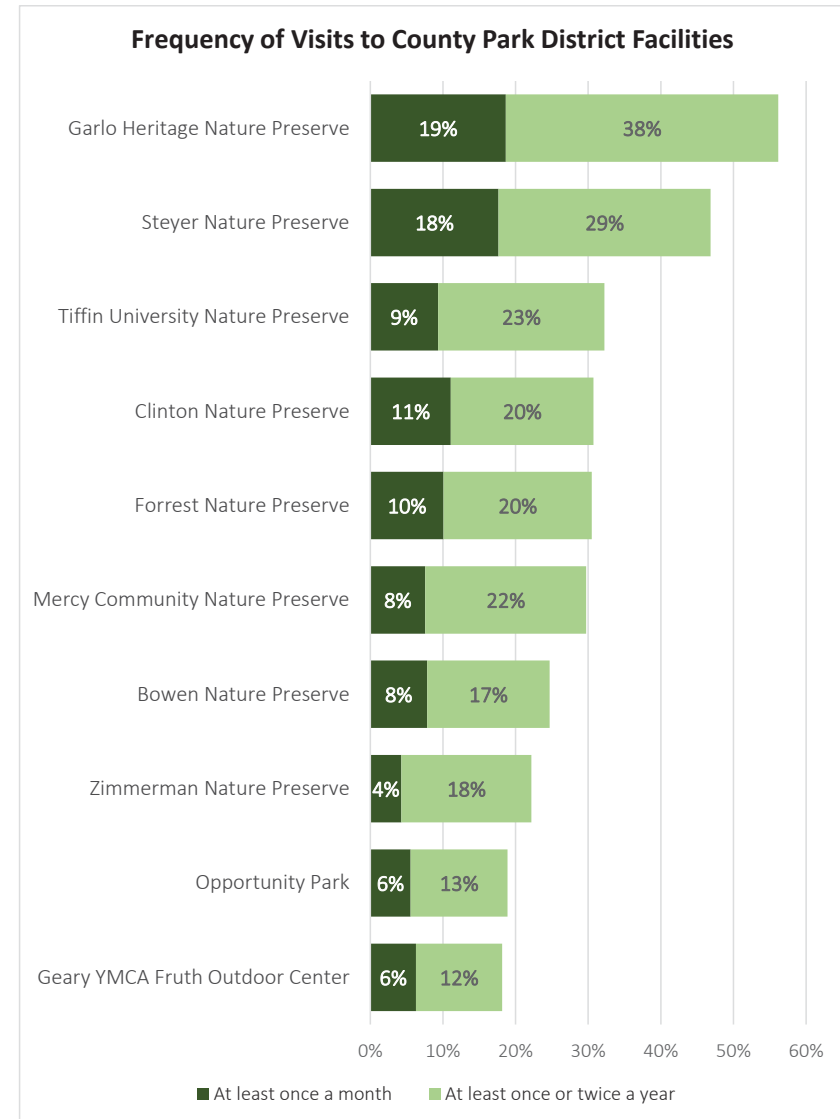
In 2016, the voters passed a 0.5-mill, 10-year levy as the first dedicated funding source to support the Seneca County Park District. The measure will generate around \$575,000 per year to be used to hire full-time employees, fund maintenance, capital improvements, equipment, vehicles, and supplies, and to provide funding for competitive grants for Seneca County townships, villages, and cities.

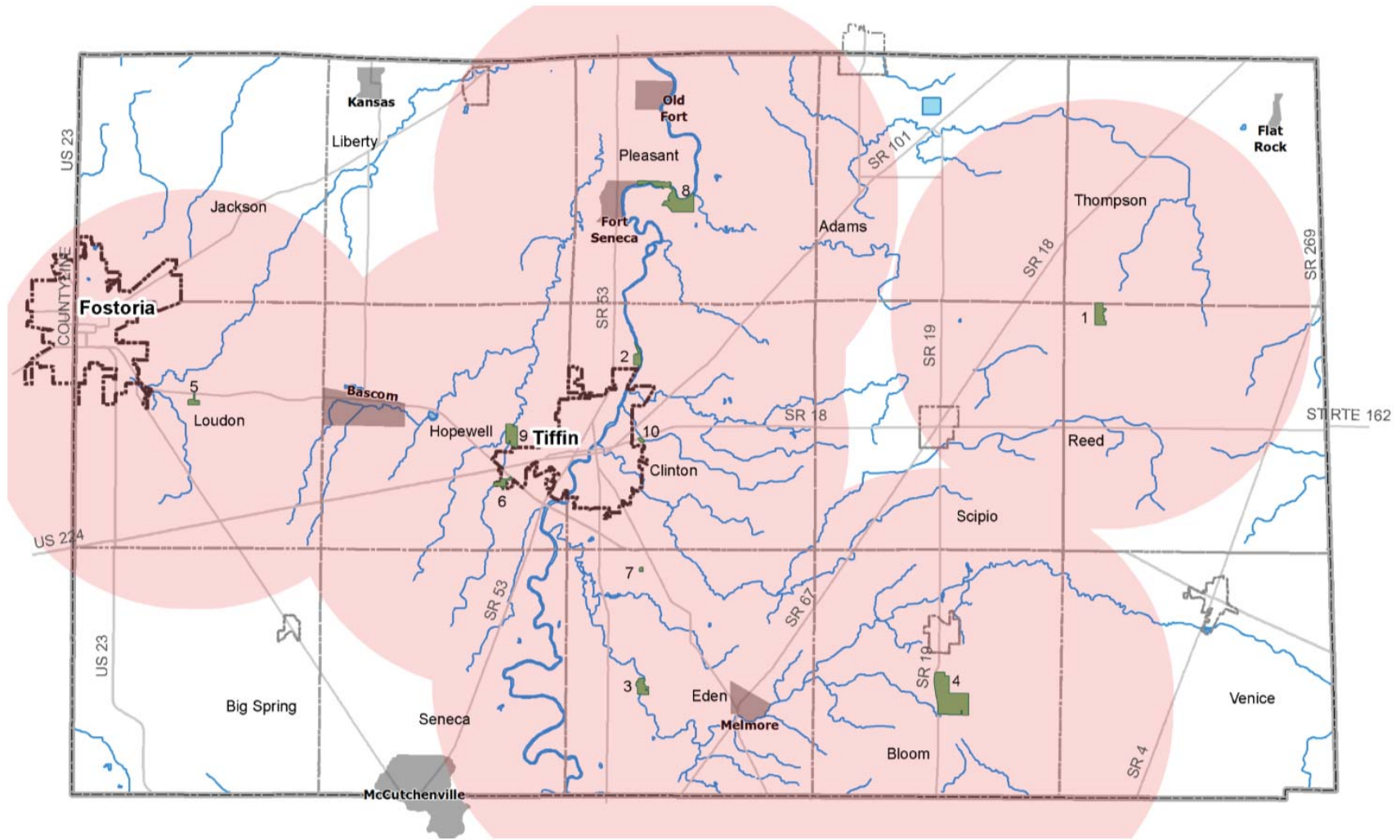
During its strategic planning process in 2017, the Park District identified three primary goals for the future: increase awareness of the park district, develop more key partnerships, and assure the long-term survival of the park district by attracting more youth.

Certain park sites are part of the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), a land conservation program administered by the Farm Service Agency (FSA). The CRP removes environmentally sensitive land from agricultural production and plants species that will improve environmental health and quality. Restrictions are placed on the use of the property for a 10- to 15-year period in order to re-establish valuable land cover to help improve water quality, prevent soil erosion, and reduce loss of wildlife habitat.

Based on the responses to the online survey questions about the Seneca County Park District facilities, Seneca County residents value these facilities. When asked about the condition of each of the District's facilities, all were rated "Good" or better by at least 90% of respondents.



As indicated in the chart below, Garlo Heritage Nature Preserve was visited the most frequently by respondents (56% at least once in the last year), followed by Steyer Nature Preserve (47% at least once in the last year).





**Seneca County Park District Facilities
Highlighting 5-Mile Service Area**

1 Bowen Nature Preserve	6 Mercy Community Nature Preserve
2 Clinton Nature Preserve	7 Opportunity Park
3 Forrest Nature Preserve	8 Steyer Nature Preserve
4 Garlo Heritage Nature Preserve	9 Tiffin University Nature Preserve
5 Geary YMCA Fruth Outdoor Center	10 Zimmerman Nature Preserve

 Seneca County Park District
 5 mi. Park District Buffer



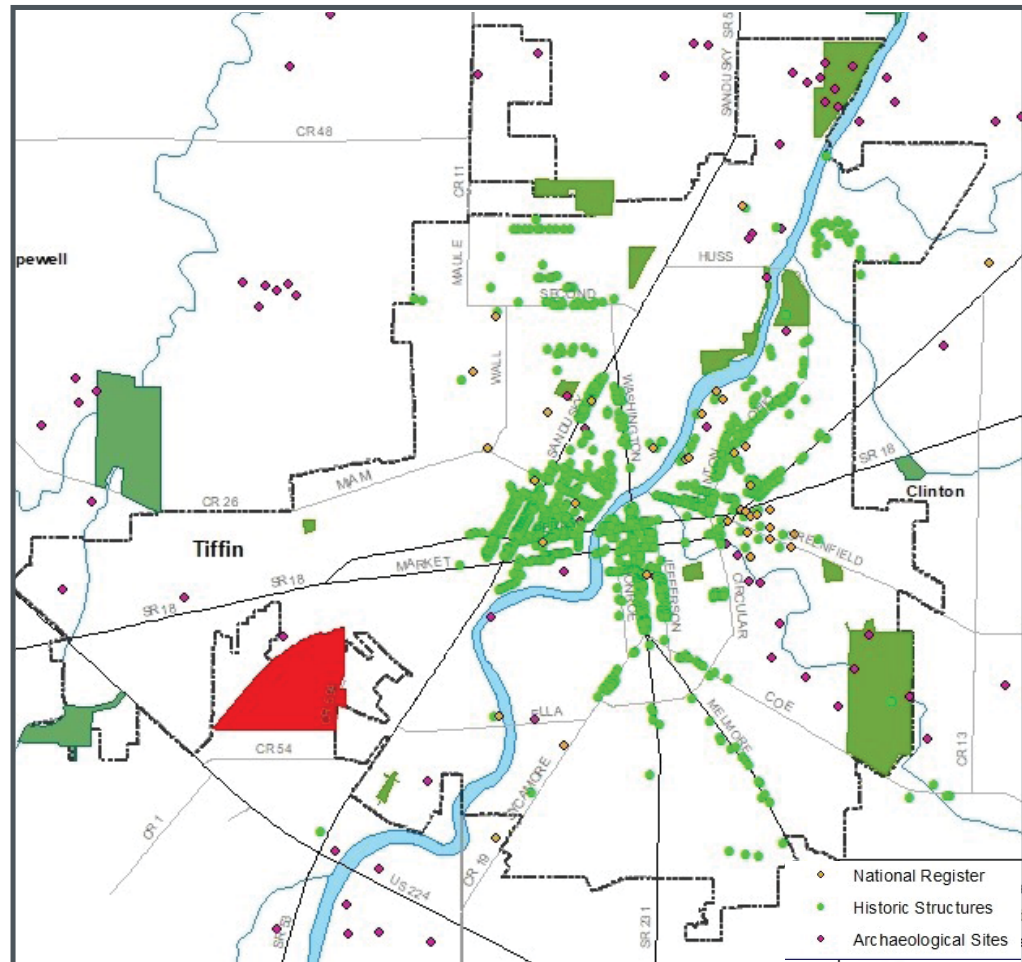
Existing Cultural and Historic Resources

Seneca County is rich in cultural resources and history. Historic resources embody the physical elements in the landscape that reflect human actions in relation to past events, sites or structures. These historic resources symbolize an important era in Seneca County's history and serve to educate viewers while providing an appreciation of the past. Such resources include houses, stores, mills, churches, bridges, waterworks, and landscapes such as farms and farm fields. Archaeological resources embody physical evidence or remains of known human life, activities or cultures.

There are over 2,100 historic, cultural and archaeological sites in Seneca County listed in the Ohio Historic Inventory (OHI) data base maintained by the Ohio Historic Preservation Office. While these sites are located throughout the county, the largest concentration is in Tiffin.

Historic structures make up nearly 58% (1,216) of the OHI listings, the majority of which are historic homes (857). There are 750 archaeological sites, including 598 containing prehistoric artifacts. There are five National Register Historic Districts: four in Tiffin (Downtown Tiffin Historic District, Fort Ball-Railroad Historic District, North Sandusky Street Historic District, and Northeast Tiffin Historic District) and one in Fostoria (Fostoria Downtown Historic District). In addition, there are 39 properties on the National Register, 31 of which are in Tiffin.

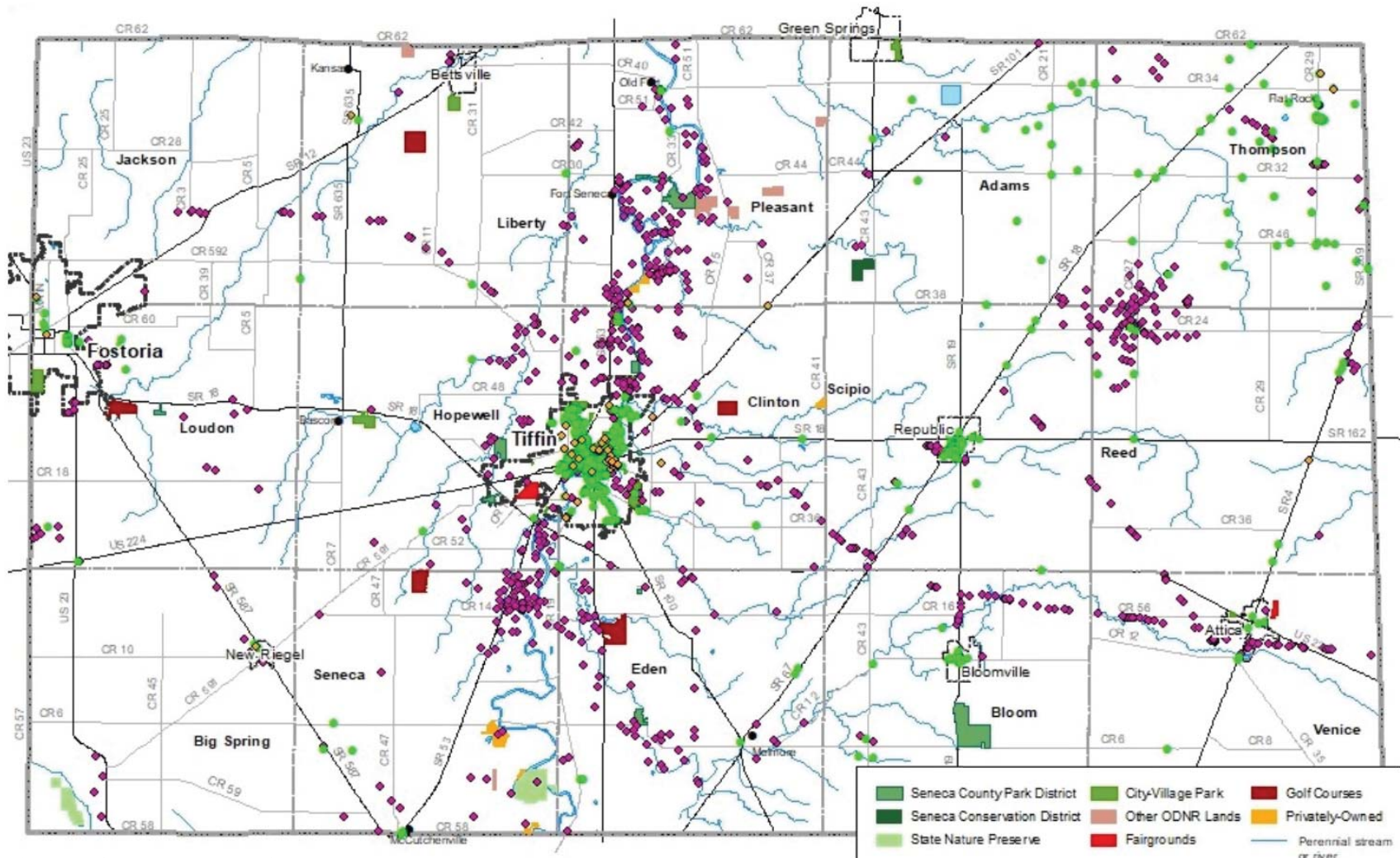
The concentration of these sites, as shown on the Historic Sites map, can provide the basis for establishing a scenic byway.



Tiffin Historic & Archaeological Sites

Total Historic: 975 (705 Historic Houses)
Total Archaeological: 386





Seneca County Historic & Archaeological Sites

Total Historic: 1,216 (857 Historic Houses)
 Total Archaeological: 750

- ◆ National Register
- Historical Structure
- ◆ Archaeological Site
- ▭ Cities
- ▭ Villages
- ▭ Township Boundaries



TRANSPORTATION

Roadway Network

Transportation is an essential service that contributes to the county's ability to keep its citizens safe, provide a great quality of life, and facilitate economic growth and prosperity. In conjunction with the establishment of the Seneca Transportation Improvement District, the Seneca County Transportation Commission maintains the Seneca County Transportation Improvement Plan.

The road system in the county is composed of approximately 222 miles of state highways, 373 miles of county roads, 634 miles of township roads, plus over 130 miles of municipal roads. The state highways include US Route 224, which moves traffic east and west; US Route 23 and OH Route 53, which carry traffic north and south across the county while US 224; and OH Routes 18, SR 101, and SR 4, which serve primarily as arterial and collector routes that carry traffic through the county.

A number of transportation issues were raised during the planning process (e.g. from both the online survey and the public forums) including:

- » Roads need resurfacing and improvements;
- » Need for connections/highway access for industry within county and region, especially appropriate routes through Tiffin and Fostoria;
- » Need connecting roads, I-75 link;
- » Need to improve safety for children/students to walk;
- » Need to provide access for trucks to US224; and
- » Improve safety at rail crossings.

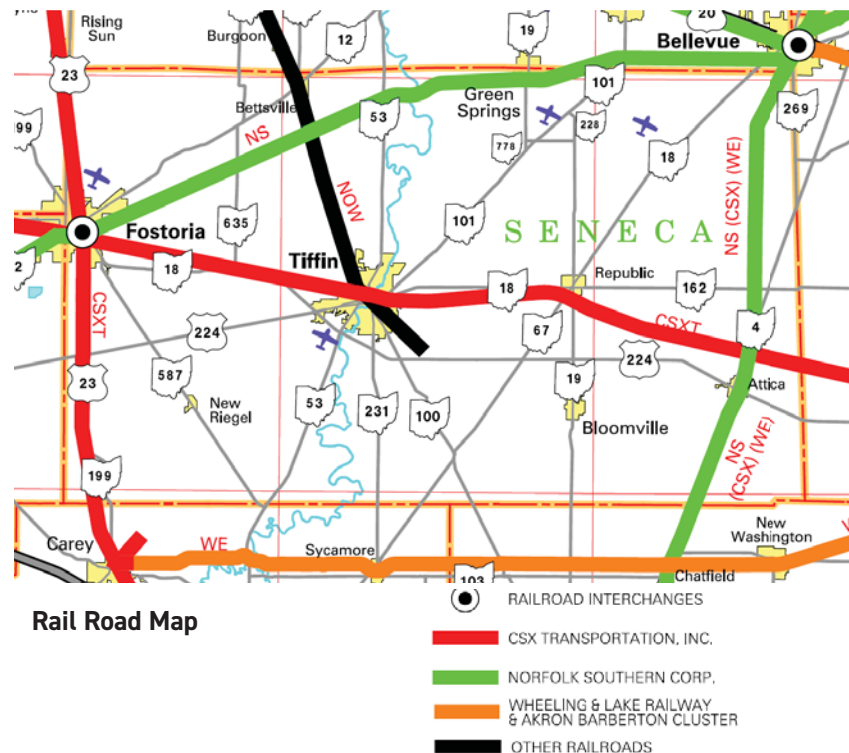
Rail Lines

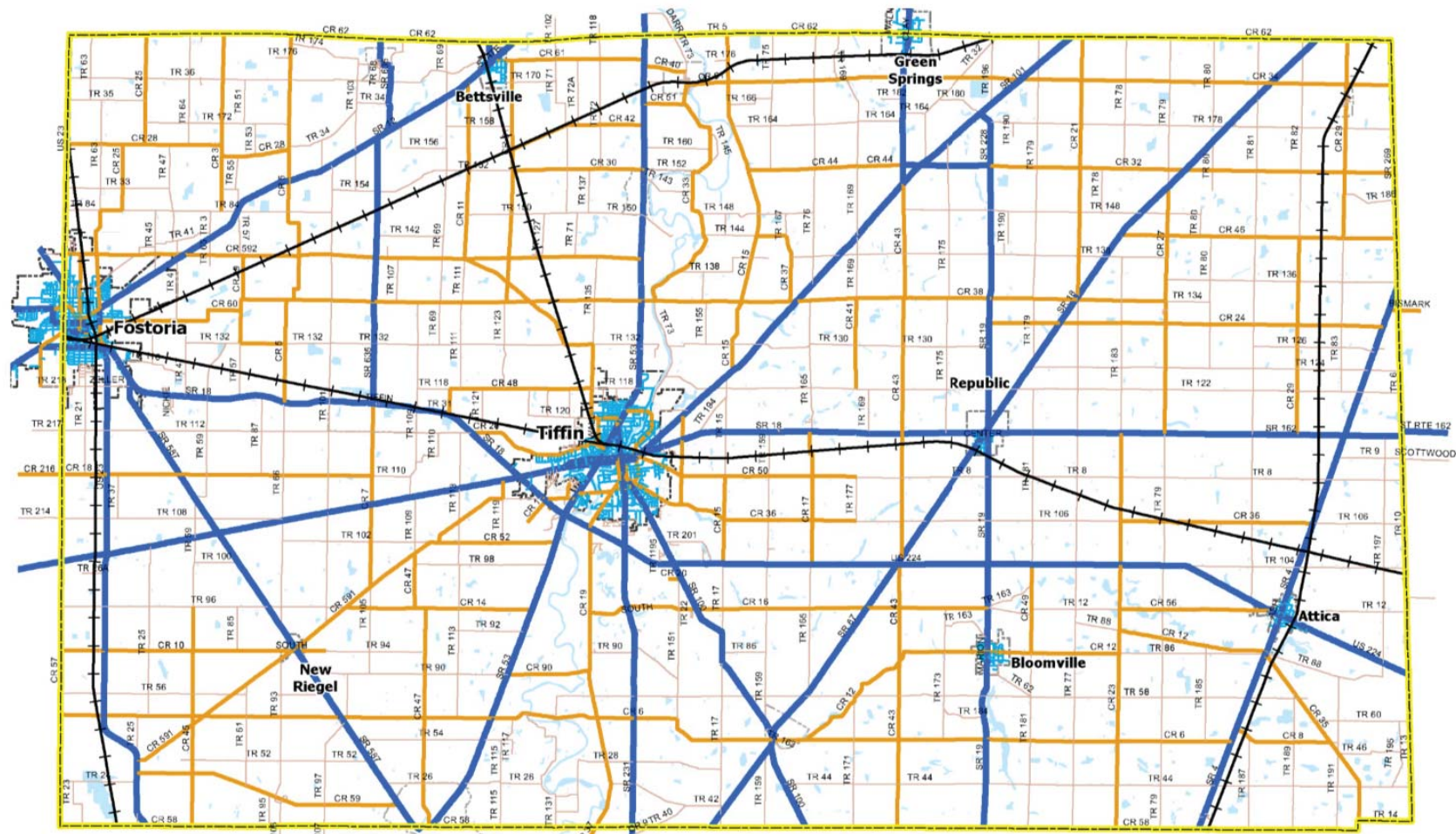
There is considerable use of rail to transport goods to and through Seneca County. Two lines pass through Tiffin and three lines pass through Fostoria. Each of the rail lines also passes through numerous villages. The most heavily used line is the CSX line passing through Tiffin, Bascom, and Fostoria, which serves 70 trains per day. A second CSX line running north-south through Fostoria serves 25 trains per

day. The Norfolk Southern Railroad running east-west through Fostoria to Bellevue also serves 25 trains per day. In the eastern region of the county, the Norfolk Southern Railroad running north-south through Attica serves over 50 trains per day.

All of the rail lines serving the region have many crossing points in Seneca County. The greatest concern with railroad crossings is at the locations where they cross major thoroughfares with high traffic volumes in and around Fostoria and Tiffin.

In 2019, the Ohio Rail Development Commission (ORDC) directed CSX Transportation (CSX) to consolidate rail crossings in the city of Tiffin. CSX will upgrade the grade crossings at five crossings in the city of Tiffin to four quadrant light and gate systems at Perry St., Market St., Nelson St., Clinton St., and Wall St. CSX will close the grade crossings in Tiffin at Monroe St. and Homes St.





Road Classification Map

- County
- Municipal
- US/State Route
- Township
- Railroads

0 2.5 5 10 Miles



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**CHAPTER 4:
SENECA COUNTY TOMORROW**

CHAPTER 4: SENECA COUNTY TOMORROW

In order to achieve the best future possible for our next generation we need to agree on what that future looks like. By formulating a shared, overarching vision, we agree to leverage our individual resources in ways that move us in the same direction, toward the achievement of our Vision. That doesn't mean we're all doing the same thing, but that all entities are thinking more holistically about the challenges and opportunities ahead, agree on what's important to preserve and conserve, and what our long-term outcomes should be.

Overarching Vision

- » A thriving, resilient and forward-thinking community;
- » A leader in leveraging our assets (people, places, resources) within a balanced, sustainable framework in a manner that honors our past, strengthens our existing assets, and anticipates, plans for, and embraces the future;
- » An attractive, distinctive, memorable and desirable place to call home, visit, and do business in; and
- » Engaged in good stewardship of both our built and natural environment.

In addition to the **Overarching Vision**, each jurisdiction has its own vision tailored to its specific perspective.

Vision for Seneca County

To be an inclusive community that celebrates & brings to life both its rural and urban cultural heritage: fostering active lifestyles by improving access to existing natural resources for all county residents; & supporting a robust & innovative local economy that both integrates with & helps lead the regional economy.

Vision for the Seneca County Park District

To be a recognized leader & desired partner in providing life-enhancing and lifelong, nature-based outdoor experiences for all; & to build a legacy of good environmental stewardship for future generations.

Vision for Tiffin

To be a regional hub for business & industry, & a vibrant & active place for residents, employees & visitors: providing a range of housing to meet the needs of all households; continuing to celebrate & preserve our historic & cultural resources & recognizing them as economic drivers; working cooperatively with local institutions to foster learning & advancement; & supporting active lifestyles of residents.

Vision for Fostoria

To be a place where all residents feel safe and secure; a hub for job training and skills development; and a place where families & businesses feel good about investing. Having galvanized local leaders & engaged residents, Fostoria will continue to embrace its heritage while actively preparing for its future.



Integrated Goals

This multi-jurisdictional comprehensive plan can be summed up in six integrated goals and their associated objectives. “Integrated” goals are defined as those that apply to all of the four jurisdictional partners, either directly or indirectly. The thoughts expressed in this chapter are broad in nature and represent common objectives that generally apply.

For ease of language, Seneca County and the phrase “the County” are often used to collectively represent the four jurisdictional partners in this section. When used in the descriptions of the Goals and Objectives, readers of this section can infer meaning for all of the participating jurisdictions: Seneca County, the cities of Fostoria and Tiffin, and the Seneca County Park District. In Chapter 5, specific strategies for each entity are outlined separately as follows:

5.1 Seneca County

5.2 Seneca County Park District

5.3 City of Tiffin

5.4 City of Fostoria

The **Integrated Goals** provide a structure for developing the more detailed objectives and associated action steps.

1. Prosperous and Resilient Economy

Ensure we are prepared to & successfully capitalize on opportunities in the local, regional, national & global economy, with an emphasis on jobs & tax revenue.

2. Attractive, Desirable, and Livable Places (Built Environment)

Ensure we have sustainable quality places for living & socializing, with a sense of place that embraces our cultural heritage.

3. Quality Community Facilities and Services

Create & foster a strong sense of community by ensuring social needs are met with equitable programs & access to a wide range of community & public facilities & services.

4. Environmental Stewardship – Valued Natural Resources

Be good stewards of our natural resources as they contribute to human & economic well-being, provide recreation & educational opportunities for locals & tourists, & significantly enhance the character of our community.

5. Enhanced Mobility, Accessibility, and Public Utilities

Provide modern, well-maintained infrastructure & utilities (roads, water, sewer, telecommunication, etc.) to serve current & future residents & businesses.

6. Strong Community Character and Image

Enhance & strengthen our community character & brand to establish a reputation as a great place to live, work, study & visit; instill community pride; & attract new residents, businesses & visitors.

In thinking about the our **Integrated Goals** for the future, more detailed objectives were formulated to help frame the development, investment, and conservation policies and provide direction for the individual action plans to be developed by the County, Tiffin, Fostoria, and the Seneca County Park District. These objectives, summarized in this chapter, are broad policy statements that stand the test of time to provide guidance over the next 20 years.



Goal 1: Prosperous and Resilient Economy

Ensure we are prepared to and successfully capitalize on opportunities in the local, regional, national and global economy, with an emphasis on jobs and tax revenue.

A prosperous economy is one where everyone benefits; and a resilient economy has the capacity to return to employment growth after any economic downturn. Seneca County wants to create a platform for growth to ensure we are prepared to and successfully capitalize on opportunities in the local, regional, national and global economy. Our economic well-being relies on jobs offering good incomes. In comparison to the rest of Ohio, the average Seneca County resident's income is seven percent lower, but the county's current economic trajectory is positive. During the past few years, our area has seen a surge of growth, gaining national recognition for economic development among similar-sized communities. To continue this progress, we need to adopt the most up-to-date development strategies and have a firm understanding of the existing economy and its resources. Ups and downs in the local economy are inevitable, but deliberate community planning regarding the economy can help us weather instability and capitalize on growth.

Objective 1.1 Strategic Planning

Create/update and successfully implement economic development strategic plans and ongoing planning processes for Seneca County (rural Seneca County, Tiffin and Fostoria) that strengthen and grow the economy, providing fiscal sustainability for the county and local jurisdictions.

A strong economy helps to pay for a better quality of life in Seneca County. Working together, economic development plans can help create and retain desirable jobs, providing a good standard of living.

Summary of Objectives

- | |
|--|
| 1.1 Engage in Strategic Planning for Economic Development - Create/update and successfully implement economic development strategic plans and ongoing planning processes for Seneca County (rural Seneca County, Tiffin and Fostoria) that strengthen and grow the economy, providing fiscal sustainability for the county and local jurisdictions. |
| 1.2 Promote Workforce Development - Attract, retain and develop a diverse, educated, skilled workforce to meet the needs of current and future companies and industries. |
| 1.3 Ensure Suitable Locations for Economic Development - Facilitate and promote economic development in the best, most appropriate locations and create/enhance locations as needed (taking into account available utilities, transportation network and zoning/land use) to encourage a clearly understood, cooperative and strategic development-friendly environment. |
| 1.4 Retain, Expand & Attract Businesses - Strengthen the existing and attract new businesses, industries and clusters that encourage economic growth, investment, job creation and retention, and increased tax revenue to support public services. |
| 1.5 Support & Expand Agribusiness - Support and expand the county's agriculture/food industry cluster, including productive agriculture as well as business services, retail and wholesale trade establishments dedicated to agriculture. |
| 1.6 Support & Promote Entrepreneurship - Support and strategically promote and facilitate entrepreneurship. |
| 1.7 Revitalize Downtowns - Promote downtown revitalization and strengthen the downtowns in Tiffin, Fostoria, and the villages in rural Seneca County. |

Increased personal income and wealth not only provides a higher and more attractive quality of life, but correspondingly increases the tax base so the County and local jurisdictions can provide the level of services



residents expect. Economic development is guided by carefully crafted public policies that allow a community to determine its future direction and guide appropriate types of development according to its own values. In today's 21st century economy, Seneca County can focus on creating a skilled and educated workforce, investing in an infrastructure for innovation, and fostering an innovative business climate.

Objective 1.2 Workforce Development

Attract, retain and develop a diverse, educated, skilled workforce to meet the needs of current and future companies and industries.



The availability of a reliable, skilled workforce is one of the most important factors for businesses planning to expand or relocate. Today, the shift to a knowledge economy has brought widespread concern that

young people are entering the workforce without the skills employers value most, such as communication, critical thinking, leadership, and teamwork skills. Seneca County needs a quality workforce to stay competitive, to keep existing businesses strong, to keep young people in the community, and to raise residents' standard of living. Workforce development strategies include developing approaches to enhance the skills of workers so that all residents can become contributing members of the local economy. These strategies involve partnerships with educational institutions, employers, unions and state and local workforce development agencies and organizations.

Workforce development can include adjusting the local education system to produce graduates who have the necessary skills, and providing skill development for displaced workers and on-the-job training. When employers have access to a good workforce, they can become more

competitive, increase productivity and retain workers, and are more likely to prosper. Seneca County is committed to ensuring residents have the skills that local employers need to ensure businesses have a competitive advantage in the 21st century global marketplace.



Objective 1.3 Suitable Locations

Facilitate and promote economic development in the best, most appropriate locations and create/enhance locations as needed (taking into account available utilities, transportation network and zoning/land use) to encourage a clearly understood, cooperative and strategic development-friendly environment.

Employment centers (businesses and industries) need to be strategically located to take advantage of the existing highway network, have access to the necessary utilities such as water, sewer, gas, electricity, broadband, and be appropriately buffered from nearby residential neighborhoods. Most important is the need for suitably zoned land that allows for construction and expansion, and in certain cases, is necessary in order to obtain funding.

In the broadest sense, infrastructure is the support system needed for producing, selling and delivering goods and services. In order to improve the local business climate and overall quality of life in Seneca County, it is essential that our infrastructure is well-maintained, and improved and expanded when necessary. This requires ongoing long-term capital improvement planning for all infrastructure in the county:



- » Transportation infrastructure enables the movement of goods and people.
- » Communications infrastructure, including broadband, is key to communicating globally and providing telecommuting opportunities.
- » Public utility infrastructure includes the provision of water and sanitary sewer service, which are critical for business operations.
- » Social infrastructure is the people-oriented aspect of communities, such as quality of life services for residents, including health, education, government services, etc.
- » Infrastructure can also include available facilities such as speculative buildings, infill opportunities, industrial and business parks, available sites with transportation, communications and utility infrastructure in place; and brownfield conversions.

Objective 1.4 Retention, Expansion & Attraction

Strengthen the existing and attract new businesses, industries and clusters that encourage economic growth, investment, job creation and retention, and increased tax revenue to support public services.

Seneca County, given its location within the state, is a locally-focused economy, and should take advantage of its location near major cities such as Toledo, Detroit, Cleveland, and Columbus. Policies and programs that foster the retention and expansion of existing businesses, entrepreneurial development, and business attraction will help all of Seneca County. Current efforts to engage and listen to the local business community to identify and solve problems should continue and expand. The County should continue to use available and appropriate economic development incentives to foster new development, providing both relocating and new firms with “one-stop shopping” economic development services to encourage them to grow in Seneca County.

Real estate developers actively focus on areas where demand and buying power are high enough to create a return on investment.



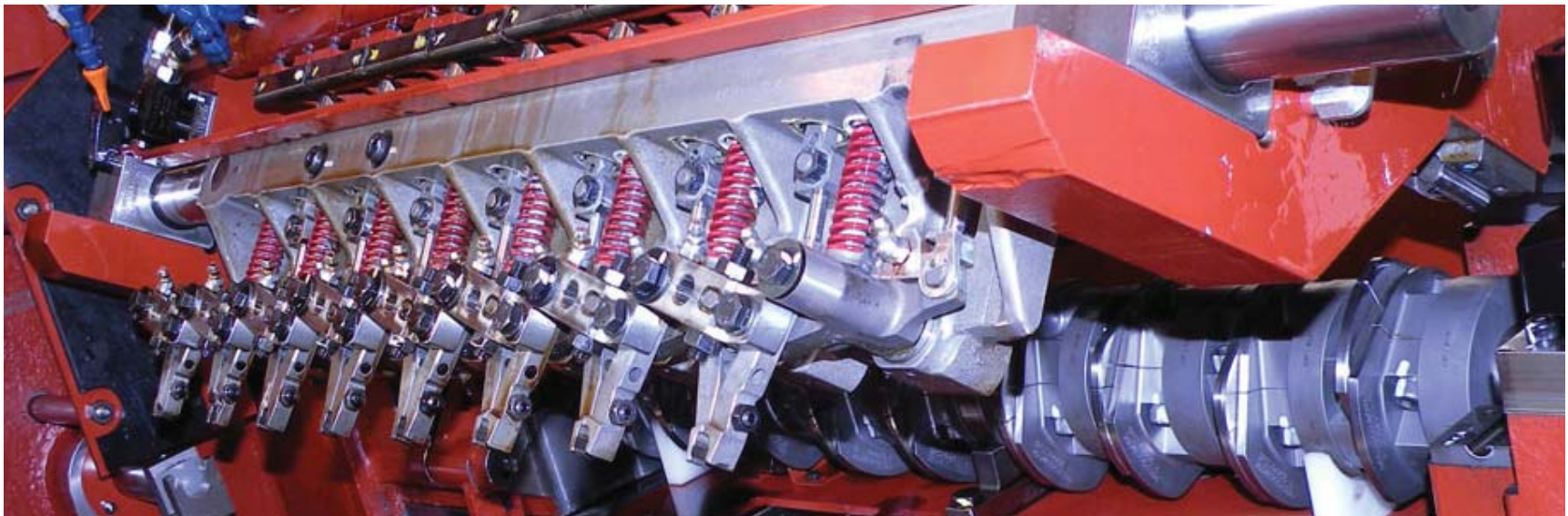
Seneca County should engage in business retention and expansion strategies to help existing local businesses keep their doors open. The County should also invest in business attraction



and retention strategies that encourage or promote business growth in areas that wouldn't otherwise be considered viable options for investment, ensuring that retail has a chance to be successful, and that neighborhoods have affordable goods and services for residents.



Seneca County should carefully consider the market when developing retention and attraction strategies to sustain a healthy and diverse local business community across all neighborhoods. The County needs to have a solid understanding of both the similarities and differences between market sectors and the factors that influence their location decisions. For example, industrial development tends to be more regional in focus while commercial and office developments are often more locally oriented. The rapid changes in the retail industry have dramatically impacted local businesses and both retailers and service establishments must become more personalized in their approach. We need to stay up to date on criteria used by site selectors for each of these segments.



Objective 1.5 Agribusiness

Support and expand the county's agriculture/food industry cluster, including productive agriculture as well as business services, retail and wholesale trade establishments dedicated to agriculture.

We are one of Ohio's leading farm counties. With over 90% of the county in farmland, agribusiness is clearly a key economic driver. Retaining and expanding existing agricultural businesses is an effective economic development strategy. Investment in agribusiness contributes to the local economy in many of the same ways as investments in other local businesses. One area of opportunity to explore is expanding our agriculture/food industry cluster to embrace and encourage businesses that are related to agriculture. With a rich agricultural heritage and the growing demand for local foods, culinary tourism and outdoor recreation, agricultural-based tourism can also be a significant contributor to maintaining the economic viability of agriculture in Seneca County.





Objective 1.6 Entrepreneurship

Support and strategically promote and facilitate entrepreneurship.

Entrepreneurship is an important driver of our local economy. Local start-ups are often the ones that stimulate the local economy the most, and today's knowledge-based economy encourages the development of new, local businesses. Entrepreneurs, whether involved in high-tech or middle-tech businesses, help drive change through innovation, new product development and improved quality of life. To support these individuals and businesses, Seneca County needs to attract a skilled workforce, and ensure the availability of high-speed internet access, provide allowances for home-based businesses, and ensure the availability of office spaces that can accommodate intense computer-based activity with adequate backup power sources.

Objective 1.7 Downtowns

Promote downtown revitalization and strengthen the downtowns in Tiffin, Fostoria, and the villages in rural Seneca County.

Many rural communities are engaged in revitalization efforts to renew downtown areas and restore them to their former prominence as a center of community activity. Nationally, the most successful strategy or framework for revitalization efforts is the National Main Street Center's Main Street Four Point Approach to downtown revitalization. This approach capitalizes on historic downtowns' atmosphere and unique personality, focusing on re-centering the downtown as the cultural and civic heart of the community. It advocates for preserving the downtown built environment while ensuring it meets the needs of current businesses and residents. Tiffin has used this strategy quite effectively; other communities in Seneca County could benefit as well.

Downtowns are often home to many small businesses, including boutique and specialty stores, local restaurants, etc. Many locate there due to lower rents than in newly built strip centers. Others, especially



retailers, benefit from being in a compact, walkable environment. Historic downtowns are increasingly popular for their authentic sense of place, offering visitors an experience unlike anything they can find in more modern commercial areas.

Nationally, small businesses (like those in the county's downtowns) employ over 50% of the workforce, and have generated over 65% of new jobs since 1995. There are almost 28 million small businesses in the U.S., of which over 22 million are self-employed with no additional payroll or employees, and their growth is on the rise (www.forbes.com). Plus, local businesses tend to buy locally, pumping more of the profits from their economic activity back into the community than chain store counterparts, sparking economic development. Downtown investment and focus in Seneca County should continue.



Goal 2: Attractive, Desirable & Livable Places (Our Built Environment)

Ensure we have sustainable quality places for living and socializing, with a sense of place that embraces our cultural heritage.

An attractive, desirable and livable built environment may take many forms. But the common denominator is the relationship between the built environment and how it affects the lives of residents. As we develop attractive, desirable, and livable places, we must address all elements of the built environment and how people experience and use it.

We acknowledge that a relationship exists between the built form and the way it impacts the quality of life for our residents. Quality places and neighborhoods foster a sense of community that both welcomes newcomers and entices them and long-time residents to stay. We will ensure that our decisions impacting the built environment coexist in ways that advance a resilient economy, a healthy community, and harmony with the natural environment.

Seneca County will be enhanced through preservation of neighborhood character and celebration of the cultural and historic resources. We want to attract new residents with a variety of housing opportunities in vibrant neighborhoods, our historic villages, and thriving downtowns, making sure any new development does not interfere with our rural and scenic appeal or our natural resources. We need abundant housing choices for people at all economic levels, stages of life, and walks of life to live, create, and thrive.

Summary of Objectives

- | | |
|-----|---|
| 2.1 | Increase Housing Options - Encourage and facilitate responsible/ quality housing development in suitable locations in order to increase the housing supply to meet diverse housing needs of different ages, households, incomes and desired amenities. |
| 2.2 | Maintain Desirable Neighborhoods - Maintain safe, walkable and desirable neighborhoods. |
| 2.3 | Celebrate our Valued Culture & Places - Strengthen and celebrate the unique heritage and identities of places (including our downtowns and distinctive neighborhoods) and culture through historic preservation, quality urban design and architecture, and support for the arts. |
| 2.4 | Foster Property Maintenance - Promote well-maintained buildings and properties. |
| 2.5 | Sustainable Land Use - Maintain a balance of rural and city/ village and natural environments. |



Objective 2.1 Housing Options

Encourage responsible/quality housing development in suitable locations in order to increase and diversify the housing supply to meet the housing needs of different ages, households, incomes, and desired amenities.

Seneca County has a shortage of residential options that appeal to a diversity of households. Desired household types range from young, single adults; young, married couples; families with small children; families with older children; empty-nesters; and older, retired singles and couples. We should undertake a careful analysis of local markets to determine the type of housing needed, as well as locations for new construction versus rehabilitation. Both current residents and newcomers looking for housing in Seneca County have expressed a desire to see a greater variety of options: to buy and to rent, in urban and rural settings, as well as budget-friendly and luxury units.



Objective 2.2 Desirable Neighborhoods

Maintain safe, walkable and desirable neighborhoods.

Our residents want to live in safe, walkable and desirable neighborhoods. Those who live (or want to live) in urbanized areas want the option of walking or bicycling to destinations rather than depending solely on cars. Providing a complete sidewalk network and safe neighborhoods not only improves social equity, but also contributes to a healthier lifestyle and more regular interaction of residents, leading to a stronger sense of community. Well-designed communities are not just a collection of individual houses, rather they are planned places that give equal attention to public areas that are conducive to walking, jogging, and casual socializing.



Objective 2.3 Valued Culture & Places

Strengthen and celebrate the unique heritage and identities of places (including our downtowns and distinctive neighborhoods) and culture through historic preservation, quality urban design and architecture, and support for the arts.

Seneca County has a long and rich history that is reflected in the built environment. Historic and cultural resources are essential to protect because they provide community identity, foster local pride in the community, and attract other people to come to the community. The added benefit is that by protecting historic areas, Seneca County ensures that old buildings are reused in areas that are already served by public infrastructure and safety services.

Seneca County's downtowns each contain a mix of significant public buildings, locally owned restaurants, stores, professional offices and upper floor residences. The combination of shops, businesses, and religious and civic uses is enhanced with special events. The Main Street Four Point Approach promotes a comprehensive revitalization effort that focuses on re-creating a distinctive sense of place and an authentic experience for downtown patrons. Downtowns can and should be



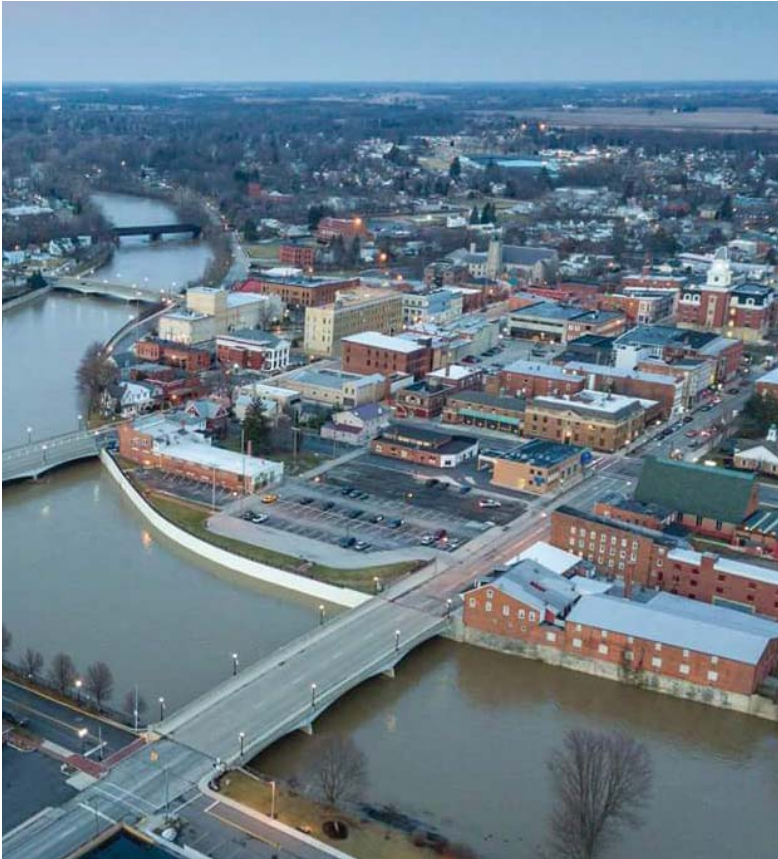
places where residents meet friends and neighbors to enjoy community activities, amenities and atmosphere.

Objective 2.4 Property Maintenance

Promote well-maintained buildings and properties.

Residential neighborhoods, downtowns and other shopping and entertainment areas in Seneca County benefit when buildings and landscaping are kept in good repair. Proper maintenance of both the built environment and the greenspace surrounding it is a critical element of desirable and safe neighborhoods. When lacking, neighborhoods can feel unsafe, which leads to a dangerous decline toward disinvestment, decreased property values, and blight. In addition to looking better and feeling safer, well-maintained





properties are a significant indicator of community pride, something that resonates with residents. To maintain community pride, property values, and a feeling of safety and security, Seneca County will invest in policies and processes to ensure that all property owners maintain our built environment.

Objective 2.5 Land Use

Maintain a balance of rural and city/village and natural environments.

Farms and farmland are an integral part of the fabric of Seneca County. These landscapes are valuable not only for agricultural production, but also for an abundance of wildlife, natural vegetation, woodlands, and historic and natural landmarks. Scenic vistas provide a natural escape from population, pollution, and noise. Even agricultural lands not in production contribute to the character of the county, adding to its rural charm, beauty, and serenity. This pastoral setting is dotted with six villages and two larger cities that have historically served as commercial and civic hubs for rural residents. Both villages and cities have character-defining elements, and each contributes to the county's identity. It is essential that Seneca County's municipal and township governments carefully craft appropriate and tailored land use policies that direct development to areas that are most easily served by existing infrastructure to maintain the historic balance between rural and urban.



Goal 3: Quality Community Facilities & Services

Create and foster a strong sense of community by ensuring social needs are met with equitable programs and access to a wide range of community and public facilities and services.

Seneca County is home to two world-class universities, twenty-six public schools and five private schools. Quality parks and recreational opportunities are readily available. Art, music and theater productions are produced and held at various locations throughout the year. Health and social services support the physical and emotional well-being of community members. The public libraries, as well as those associated with our various educational institutions, offer residents ready access to learning opportunities. Our amenities “package” is vast, and gives us a high quality of life and the ability to raise well-rounded, healthy and knowledgeable citizens.

Seneca County strives to create an inclusive, diverse community, where everyone has the opportunity to fulfill their potential. As a community, we have prioritized access to healthy, affordable food, quality education, and living wage jobs. We aim to promote active living through thoughtful, resident-led planning that results in pedestrian-oriented development for all ages and abilities, harmonized with an integrated transportation system.



Summary of Objectives

- | | |
|-----|---|
| 3.1 | Foster Inclusive Community - Foster inclusive communities that embrace the strengths, perspectives and needs of an increasingly diverse population. |
| 3.2 | Promote Education & Lifelong Learning - Maintain and promote robust educational systems to improve our overall educational attainment and encourage a lifelong learning attitude. |
| 3.3 | Foster Active Living - Promote active living/active lifestyles through local parks, recreation facilities, trails, and programming to provide opportunities for residents to experience nature, and to increase their awareness and appreciation of the natural environment. |
| 3.4 | Promote Health & Wellness - Provide equitable and accessible community/public facilities and supportive services that build strong communities and foster our physical, mental and behavioral health and well-being, such as: health care, libraries, public safety, and emergency response systems, and improve our overall standard of living. |
| 3.5 | Increase Food Security/Access - Support food security and year-round access to healthy food, especially for children. |



Objective 3.1 Inclusive Community

Foster inclusive communities that embrace the strengths, perspectives and needs of an increasingly diverse population.

One of the things we value most about our community is the “small-town feel,” where “everyone knows each other.” This provides a more intimate sense of community that enables us to appreciate each other and our differences. We want to be an inclusive and diverse community that thrives by offering safe and affordable housing as well as food security to people of all income levels, ages, and backgrounds. We want to create a more sustainable and empowering community for both present and future citizens.

Objective 3.2 Education

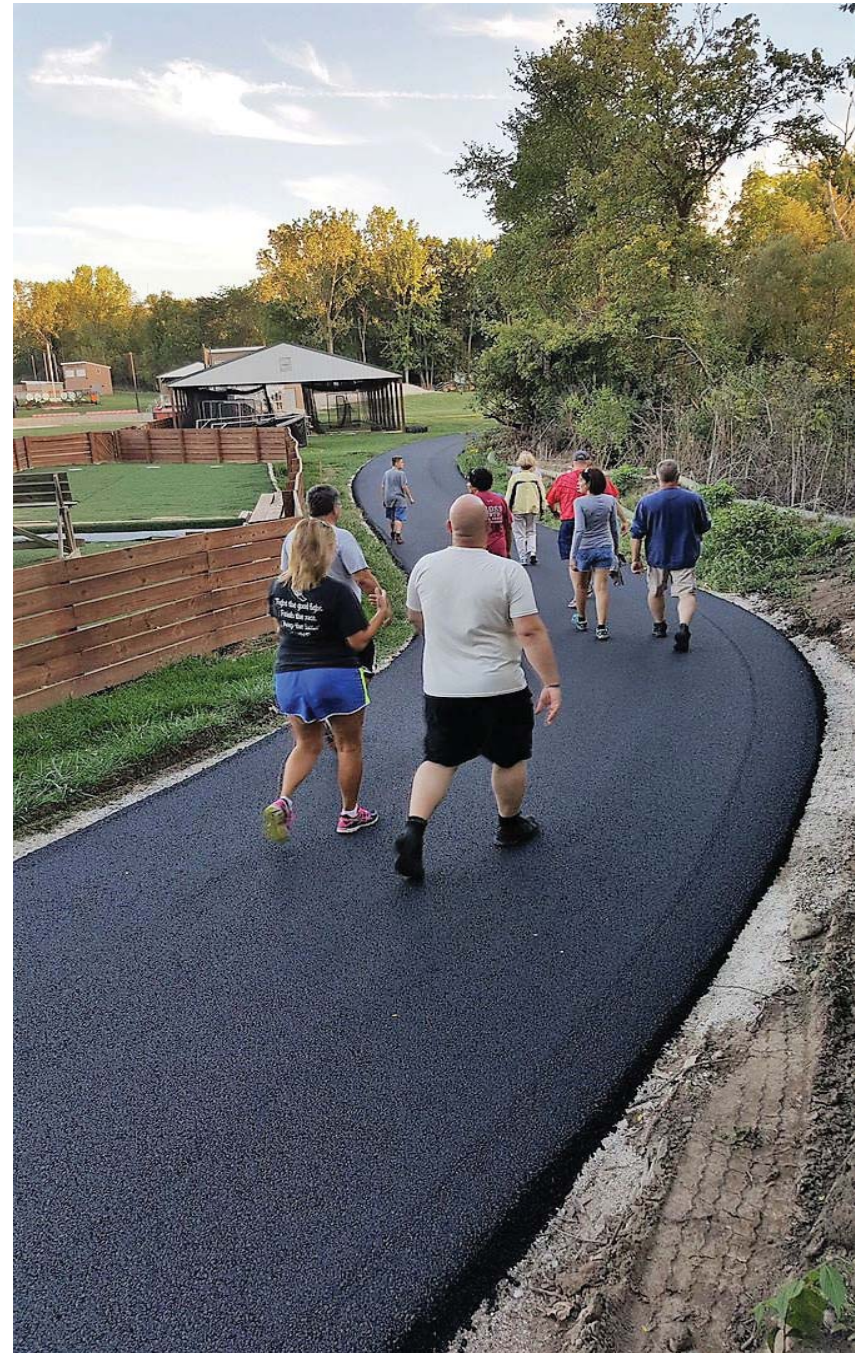
Maintain and promote robust educational systems to improve our overall educational attainment and encourage a lifelong learning attitude.

Despite the deep educational resources available in Seneca County, we have a lower percentage of college-educated residents than the state (15% compared to 27%). Both universities desire to partner with local schools and community organizations to create a culture of lifelong learning in Seneca County. We want to explore these options and create new programs that make learning fun for residents of all ages.

Objective 3.3 Active Living

Promote active living/active lifestyles through local parks, recreation facilities, trails, and programming to provide opportunities for residents to experience nature, and to increase their awareness and appreciation of the natural environment.

Proximity and access to parks leads to regular physical activity, which increases longevity and well-being, helps children and adults maintain a healthy weight, and can reduce risks of obesity and related health consequences. Parks and playgrounds provide a variety of opportunities for physical activity, which makes it easier to lead a more active lifestyle.



Objective 3.4 Health & Wellness

Provide equitable and accessible community/public facilities with supportive services, such as: health care, libraries, public safety, and emergency response systems, that build strong communities, foster our physical, mental and behavioral health and well-being, and improve our overall standard of living.

Community facilities are integral parts of the neighborhoods they serve. This careful integration of uses helps create distinctive and supportive neighborhoods. Seneca County wants to encourage the location of large community wide facilities where adequate infrastructure, such as roads, sewers, and water service, exists to serve the intended uses. County residents would also benefit from connections such as bike paths that provide access to these facilities.

Our goal is to ensure that all residents lead healthy and successful lives. One way to help achieve this goal is to ensure those who need support and assistance can obtain it. Seneca County can work with the numerous public and private agencies that provide an array of supportive services to help, including assistance to help obtain and maintain safe housing, counseling, and other support services to improve quality of life.



Objective 3.5 Food Security

Support food security and year-round access to healthy food, especially for children.

Children who live in households that are food insecure are likely to be sick more often. Food insecurity is a condition in which households lack access to adequate food because of limited money, transportation or other resources. Lack of adequate healthy food can impair a child's ability to concentrate and perform well in school and is linked to higher levels of behavioral and emotional problems from preschool through adolescence. Food insecurity can affect children in any community, not only traditionally underserved ones. For many families, seemingly small changes in income, expenses, or access to federal or state assistance programs may instantly reduce the ability to purchase healthy food and result in increased vulnerability to food insecurity and missed or meager meals. Moreover, the effects of food insecurity to families and children extend well beyond the immediate hunger pains from lack of food; long-term health and economic consequences include higher health care expenditures, lower educational achievement, lost productivity and lower earnings in adulthood, and increased risk of poverty later in life.



Goal 4: Environmental Stewardship – Valued Natural Resources

Be good stewards of our natural resources as they contribute to human and economic well-being, provide recreation and educational opportunities for residents and tourists, and significantly enhance the character of our community.

The changing status of our natural environment is a global concern. Locally, there are numerous steps that communities can take to be stewards of our natural resources and promote environmental sustainability. Improving the environment is not just adopting more “green” practices; helping community members realize the opportunities and benefits the natural environment provides will lead them to take steps to become environmental advocates. Seneca County is rich with natural resources to appreciate and protect. Preservation and restoration of green infrastructure is essential to maintaining natural ecological processes that improve and protect air and water resources, habitat and species diversity.

Objective 4.1 Resource Protection

Conserve and protect the ecosystems (rivers and streams, floodplains, woodlands, wetlands, steep hillsides, and sensitive habitats, etc.) in order to:

- » maximize their natural functions for the benefit of the community, such as for storm water management, wind breaks, and energy conservation;
- » reduce flooding and erosion;
- » maximize their visual and aesthetic value;
- » reduce development costs; and
- » maximize their environmental benefits such as provide critical habitat and biodiversity.

Summary of Objectives

<p>4.1 Practice Natural Resource Preservation/Conservation - Conserve and protect our ecosystems (rivers and streams, floodplains, woodlands, wetlands, steep hillsides, and sensitive habitats, etc.) in order to maximize their natural functions, environmental benefits, and visual and aesthetic value; and to reduce development costs.</p>
<p>4.2 Preserve & Properly Manage Accessible Greenspace - Preserve and properly manage green space for current and future generations, to ensure its environmental quality, health and resiliency and to provide critical habitat and support for diverse wildlife.</p>
<p>4.3 Ensure Clean Air & Water through Best Management Practices - Promote low-impact development, green infrastructure and other best practices that ensure clean air and clean water and reduce pollution (air, water, nonpoint source pollution, etc.) and its deleterious effects.</p>
<p>4.4 Protect River Life - Protect and promote the Sandusky River, its tributaries and other waterways as key natural resources.</p>
<p>4.5 Promote Green Energy - Promote renewable and alternative energy systems.</p>
<p>4.6 Promote Solid Waste Management - Promote solid waste reduction, reuse and recycling.</p>



Growth that significantly diminishes environmental quality, community character, and ecological systems is shortsighted and is a poor legacy to leave the next generation. If we develop the landscape without an awareness of the environment, fewer natural areas will be left to provide public health and safety functions. Such practices in the past have made those remaining areas with high ecological integrity even more critical. These resources are an important part of the quality of life in Seneca County. It is critical to maintain a thorough inventory and understanding of these resources. Preserving the ecological health and function of our natural areas will avoid the costs of environmental degradation and translate ultimately into economic viability.

Natural areas that can be protected based on public health and safety values include flood plains, wetlands, changeable ground surfaces, areas with high water tables, and areas subject to landslides. Other zones that can be protected include wetlands and wetlands transition areas, steep slopes, high ground water pollution potential areas, and aquifer recharge areas. In addition, developed canopy cover and permeable surfaces reduce the incidence and severity of floods, reduce soil erosion, and improve surface and groundwater quality.

Objective 4.2 Accessible Greenspace

Preserve and properly manage green space for current and future generations, to ensure its environmental quality, health and resiliency and support for diverse wildlife.

Green spaces are a critical component of the county's ecological health, environmental quality, aesthetics, and livability. In addition to larger natural areas, smaller urban green spaces and the urban forest are maintained for aesthetics and because they are a part of where we live and work. We come into contact with these spaces as we drive along a city street, as we walk through parks, and enjoy views of the open landscapes around our homes and where we work. Green open spaces help stabilize soil by controlling wind and water erosion, reduce noise

levels, cleanse pollutants from the air, produce oxygen and absorb carbon dioxide, provide wildlife habitat, and improve water quality by filtering soil and pollutants. They also provide significant economic benefits through increased real estate values, improved settings for business activities, and, in the case of the urban forest, reduced energy costs for heating and cooling. The aesthetic value of green spaces in urban settings is reflected in civic pride, a healthy community image, and economic vitality.

Objective 4.3 Clean Air & Water Best Management Practices

Promote low-impact development, green infrastructure and other best practices that ensure clean air and clean water and reduce pollution (air, water, nonpoint source pollution, etc.) and its deleterious effects.

Green spaces can help reduce the dust and dirt that fills the atmosphere, which contain toxins that are bad for health and deplete the ozone layer.



The waterways of Seneca County provide numerous valuable functions, including drinking water, habitat, recreation, and transportation. Water quality is reflective of the surrounding landscape and efforts to preserve, protect, and improve the integrity of our rivers and streams should address the long-term management of the larger watershed. Water quality designations indicate how sensitive certain waters are to alteration and contaminants. These designations help resource managers monitor how well water quality goals are being met. While improvements in treating point sources of pollution, such as municipal and industrial wastes, have led to major improvements in water quality, increases in development and more intensive agriculture have created nonpoint source (NPS) pollution from pesticides and fertilizers, eroded sediment from developing areas and increased water runoff from impervious surfaces.

Limiting impervious surface area serves to reduce storm water runoff volume. The greater the area of impervious surfaces, the more runoff will occur, carrying water downstream. Low-impact development, green



infrastructure and other best practices encourage on-site absorption (run-on). Runoff is defined as the direction of storm water flow from pervious cover to impervious cover (for example, sloping lawn to paved road); whereas, run-on can be defined as the flow of storm water from impervious cover to pervious cover. If sites are graded to produce run-on, water is much more likely to infiltrate the soil and reduce storm water runoff. Some examples of run-on include: rooftop discharge that travels through downspouts and across grassed yards, road drainage that is directed into swales rather than curbs and gutters, and runoff from small parking lots, sidewalks and bike paths that drains into grassed areas, forests or fields.

In addition, limiting the amount of impervious surfaces in groundwater recharge areas is an effective way to preserve groundwater supplies, especially during times of drought. Groundwater recharge is the replenishment of groundwater sources by seepage of precipitation, surface water, and runoff. The maintenance of mature vegetation (preferably large, native tree species) on recharge areas also preserves and protects groundwater quality and quantity. Although precipitation is usually abundant, recharge is moderate.

Objective 4.4 River Life

Protect and promote the Sandusky River, its tributaries and other waterways as key natural resources.

The Sandusky River is one of Ohio's longest rivers within the Lake Erie watershed, and it is the predominate watershed in Seneca County. It is also the least densely populated watershed in Ohio where agriculture is 83% of the land use. The portion of the river that runs through Seneca County is designated a State Scenic River.

Adjacent to the river is the riparian corridor, a system that includes land, soils, plants, wetlands, water bodies, land cover, and people. These all affect the water flowing down through the watershed to the streams and ultimately the Sandusky River, influencing flooding, erosion, water



quality, water temperature, and habitat. When vegetated, the land filters water pollutants (toxic chemicals, nutrients, and sediment) from runoff, prevents stream warming, and provides food, cover, and habitat for wildlife.

If a riparian area is developed to the water's edge, water quality degradation may occur at that site. Flooding, erosion, sedimentation of surface waters, increased storm water runoff, loss of wetlands and riparian areas, increased pollution, and wildlife habitat losses are some of the problems that could occur if the Sandusky River, its tributaries and their associated riparian areas are not protected.

Protection of the Sandusky River and its tributaries is also instrumental in adding aesthetic and economic well-being to the community. A healthy and accessible river provides recreational and health benefits, cultural enhancement, increased property values, and an improved quality of life.

Efforts are underway to designate the Sandusky River as a state and national water trail. With such a designation, the county could benefit



from increased recreational opportunities, blue green trail connections, and economic development. The Water Trail designation raises awareness, appreciation, and stewardship for water quality and for our natural resources. It connects people to our natural resources and ever improving greenspaces; systems of natural corridors; regional, state, and national trail systems; scenic views; and critical natural areas. It is a strategy that will enhance the quality of life for residents in the region and contribute to continued water quality and ecological improvement of this river and its entire watershed.

Objective 4.5 Green Energy

Promote energy efficiencies and renewable energy systems.

Energy conservation can be achieved through improved energy efficiency and integration of renewable energy technologies. Both are smart investments that create significant financial returns. In addition, **small-scale** renewable energy systems, such as wind, solar and geothermal, that service an individual site can be developed in ways that are beneficial for both the property owner and compatible with the immediate surrounding neighborhood.

Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) financing in Ohio allows property owners to borrow money through government loans or bonds to pay for energy improvements to their properties via a special assessment on the property tax bill over a period of up to 30 years. Participating local governments must pass legislation to establish an "Energy Special Improvement District" or ESID. Most PACE projects either increase energy efficiency or generate energy through renewable technologies such as small-scale wind, geothermal, and solar.

There has been a significant amount of debate among Seneca County residents in regard to **large-scale** alternative energy projects. These types of projects, also known as utility-scale projects, are typically facilities that are connected to the nation's transmission system. The county is not opposed to **large-scale** alternative energy but reserves the



right to review each project on its individual merits or lack thereof. The county should carefully consider its options and weigh the benefits and consequences of any actions at its disposal.

Objective 4.6 Solid Waste Management

Promote solid waste reduction, reuse and recycling.

The purpose of solid waste management is to ensure solid waste is managed in such a way that protects both public health and the

environment. There are always opportunities for residents, industries, businesses, institutions, and public facilities to reduce solid waste generation, recycling and saving money rather than sending it to landfills. Waste can be categorized based on material, such as plastic, paper, glass, metal, and organic waste. Categorization may also be based on hazard potential, including radioactive, flammable, infectious, toxic, or non-toxic. Categories may also pertain to the origin of waste, such as industrial, domestic, commercial, institutional or construction and demolition.



Goal 5. Enhanced Mobility, Accessibility & Public Utilities

Provide modern, well-maintained infrastructure and utilities (roads, water, sewer, telecommunication, etc.) to serve current and future residents and businesses.

Communities are increasingly developing multi-modal and active transportation plans. In more rural environments like Seneca County these initiatives are critical as transportation options beyond personal vehicles tend to be more limited than in more populated areas. Alternative transportation methods especially help the elderly and younger citizens who may not be able to drive. Safe and efficient transportation also includes the proper design of the roadway system and quality of roads themselves. All transportation routes should be as open and universally accessible whenever possible.

Beyond transportation issues, a well-developed and modern community should be ready for enhanced technology, ensuring easy access to high speed telecommunications for all citizens. Less developed areas can sometimes struggle with this, but with technology developing at such a fast rate, staying apprised of these changes is critical in continuing to be a relevant and viable community.

Finally, well-maintained infrastructure also consists of public utilities like sewer and water. These services are essential for the residential, commercial and industrial sectors. Communities with inadequate services will experience a lack of growth as access to sewer and water often dictate development. Not only should there be sufficient services, utilities should also be well-maintained and up-to-date to keep problems for citizens and business owners at bay.

Summary of Objectives

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| 5.1 | Ensure Regular Roadway Maintenance - Maintain and improve existing roads to address health and safety issues. |
| 5.2 | Provide a Connected Roadway Network - Provide a well-connected and well-designed roadway system with improved access to major thoroughfares within and out of the county. |
| 5.3 | Provide Alternative Transportation Options - Create a multi-modal transportation network that promotes active transportation and alternative responsive transportation opportunities. |
| 5.4 | Increase Use of Existing Air & Rail Networks - Maximize use of the existing airports and rail lines for economic development, and ensure safety, local accessibility, and livability for area residents. |
| 5.5 | Embrace Smart Community Technologies - Embrace “smart community” technologies including easy access to high speed telecommunications infrastructure throughout the county to increase economic competitiveness, support and enhance environmental and social sustainability, and to be prepared for continued advancements in technology (e.g. 5G networks and autonomous vehicles). |
| 5.6 | Provide Water/Waste Water Infrastructure - Provide water and sanitary sewer service commensurate with the current and future needs of industrial, commercial, and residential sectors. |



Objective 5.1 Roadway Maintenance

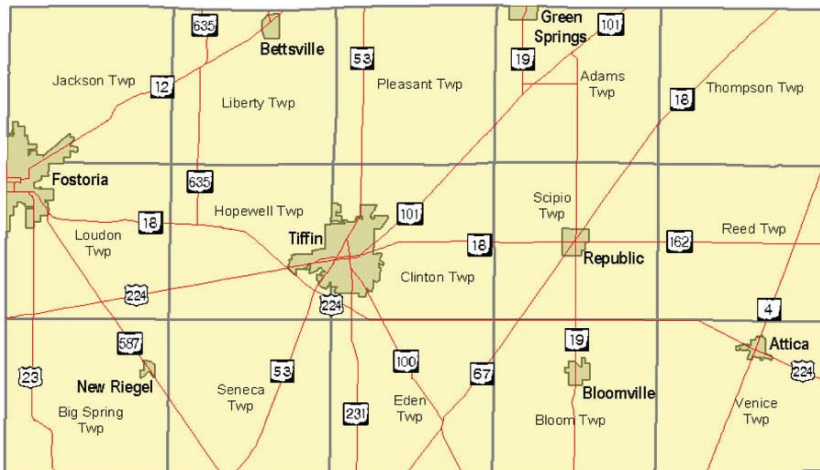
Maintain and improve existing roads to address health and safety issues.

Modern society revolves around motorized transportation. From large utility vehicles that move freight and other heavy goods, to personal vehicles that make it easy to travel throughout the county, well-maintained surface transportation routes are critical to maintaining and improving quality of life in the county. Properly maintained roads are critical for emergency vehicles to reach residents in need of assistance. As a community, we should identify health and safety issues, devise a corrective plan, then put together an implementation strategy to address those issues.

Objective 5.2 Roadway Network

Provide a well-connected and well-designed roadway system with improved access to major thoroughfares within and county.

A well-designed and well-maintained roadway system is imperative for the economic health and growth of Seneca County. The ability to move goods to, from and within Seneca County is a critical element of any economic development strategy. We should, therefore, continue to upgrade and improve paved surfaces throughout the county.



Objective 5.3 Alternative Transportation

Create a multi-modal transportation network that promotes active transportation and alternative responsive transportation opportunities.

In order to be the kind of progressive, forward-looking community we want to be, we must create a transportation system that provides safe, convenient, and efficient movement of vehicular, pedestrian and other non-motorized traffic. This kind of connectivity has significant influence on the appearance, character, and economic viability of the area and it directly impacts everyday quality of life. The recently completed Active Transportation Plan sets broad guidelines to assist public officials, developers, and other interested parties in making decisions relating to traffic flow; reserving rights-of-way for future roadway improvements; selecting pavement widths; identifying public and private funding for infrastructure; identifying appropriate locations for community centers and facilities (for example, schools); and other transportation issues.



Objective 5.4 Air & Rail Networks

Maximize use of the existing airports and rail networks for economic development, and ensure safety, local accessibility, and livability for area residents.

Transportation connectivity is a necessity for growth and even basic existence. People and goods must be able to move into, within and out of the county. While there are no four-lane divided limited access highways in Seneca County, a fact lamented by many, the community is blessed to have multiple state routes, rail lines, and airports to support commerce. These existing assets should be supported and promoted to all businesses in the county, and partnerships encouraged among both similar and dissimilar enterprises when efficiency, cost, or safety can be achieved. Success in maximizing air and rail networks has the ability to directly impact the cost of living, available amenities within

the community, and overall quality of life for residents, all of which are important for the continued future success of the county.

Objective 5.5 Smart Communities

Embrace “smart community” technologies including easy access to high speed telecommunications infrastructure throughout the county to increase economic competitiveness, support and enhance environmental and social sustainability, and to be prepared for continued advancements in technology (e.g. 5G networks and autonomous vehicles).

High speed internet service is either unavailable or unreliable for much of Seneca County. Access needs to be expanded to include all households, institutions, and businesses. Electronic and/or virtual connectivity is a big factor in retaining exiting and attracting new residents and businesses to the county. Organizations like Connect



Ohio have been working to assist communities, particularly rural areas, in improving access. Understanding that rural broadband is often not economically profitable for providers, Seneca County should communicate with providers to explore collective broadband service programs and seek funding through programs such as the Connect America Fund, USDA Grants and Loans, and the American Broadband Buildout Act. The County should also work with ODOT who controls the right-of-ways to eliminate barriers for providers. Zoning should be revised with language which encourages dark fiber in the preparation of new housing developments. A comprehensive technology assessment, improvement plan, and prioritization effort could be a first step in providing access for residents that are underserved in this respect. Innovative funding mechanisms should be identified, partnerships built to implement the plan, and local zoning regulations reviewed and updated to ensure they adequately accommodate broadband improvements.

Objective 5.6 Water/Waste Water Infrastructure

Provide water and sanitary sewer service commensurate with the current and future needs of industrial, commercial, and residential sectors.

We should consider water and wastewater service needs as we plan future urban expansions while continuing to provide high-quality service to our existing customers. Fostoria has retained a water treatment plant and ownership of city water lines; Tiffin outsources that to AquaOhio. Many rural areas get their water from wells. Regardless of its source or ownership of the lines, we must provide clean, safe drinking water to all of our residents. Likewise, we should continue to improve waste water lines and treatment facilities to reduce pollution and other potential hazards. Additionally, the County Sewer District should strongly consider expanding sanitary lines to unsewered areas where there exist high

percentages of failing home sanitary treatment systems (HSTS).

Sufficient and effective public systems that provide drinking water and sanitary sewer services in developed areas are fundamental human needs, and key factors in retaining and attracting residents, businesses, and industry.



Goal 6: Strong Community Character & Image

Enhance and strengthen our community character and brand to: establish a reputation as a great place to live, work, study and visit; to instill community pride; and attract new residents, businesses and visitors.

What makes people come to Seneca County? What makes them stay? A strong community character and image is essential to drawing young people and growing a population base, while also seeing that retirees and families remain in the community. People choose to live in a place for a variety of reasons. Often times family connections play a large role. But even when there is no personal family connection, people need a reason to lay down roots. A warm spirit of belonging and a welcoming atmosphere are among the biggest factors graduates of local universities cite as reasons they stay. Not coincidentally, these same values influence people to “come back home,” or to never leave in the first place. A community must make people aware of their strengths and what they have to offer. Every place has strengths and unique assets, but they often go unsung.

From our historic neighborhoods to the Sandusky River, our business and industrial community to our educational institutions, Seneca County should be on the map as a destination to live and visit. Now more than ever, people from far and wide are looking to experience a unique sense of place with vibrant local community rich in natural and cultural landscapes. Promoting resources and showing pride and support for the area’s people and places must be integrated into the fabric of everyday life in Seneca County.

Summary of Objectives

6.1 Celebrate Seneca County - Identify, document, and celebrate the various reasons why the county and local communities are a great place to live, work, visit, study, and run a business.

6.2 Engage in Branding & Promotion - Proactively, positively, creatively, and effectively communicate and market the community brand and brand reasons locally, regionally, statewide, nationally and globally, and effectively implement the branding efforts through signage, online media platforms, and other creative ways.

6.3 Promote Tourism Development - Proactively support, encourage and market Seneca County as a destination to attract new businesses, tourists and visitors, both as an economic development strategy and as a way to attract new residents.



Objective 6.1 Celebrate Seneca County

Identify, document, and celebrate the various reasons why the county and local communities are a great place to live, work, visit, study, and run a business.

Pride is a community asset. Residents value their history, agricultural heritage, neighborhood charm, and scenic and natural vistas. Local identity provides residents with a sense of place and belonging in Seneca County. The County should celebrate its assets and understand that, with local pride, comes resilience in the face of any economic and social challenges.

There are multiple festivals and events held throughout the county throughout the year, including street festivals, parish festivals, and other activities sponsored by civic organizations. Events like the Heritage Festival and the Seneca County Fair have been drawing people together to celebrate what's best about Seneca County for decades. More recently, Farm to Table efforts have brought people together to celebrate not only our local food producers, but also the relationships that are deepened by "breaking bread" over the same table together. Downtown



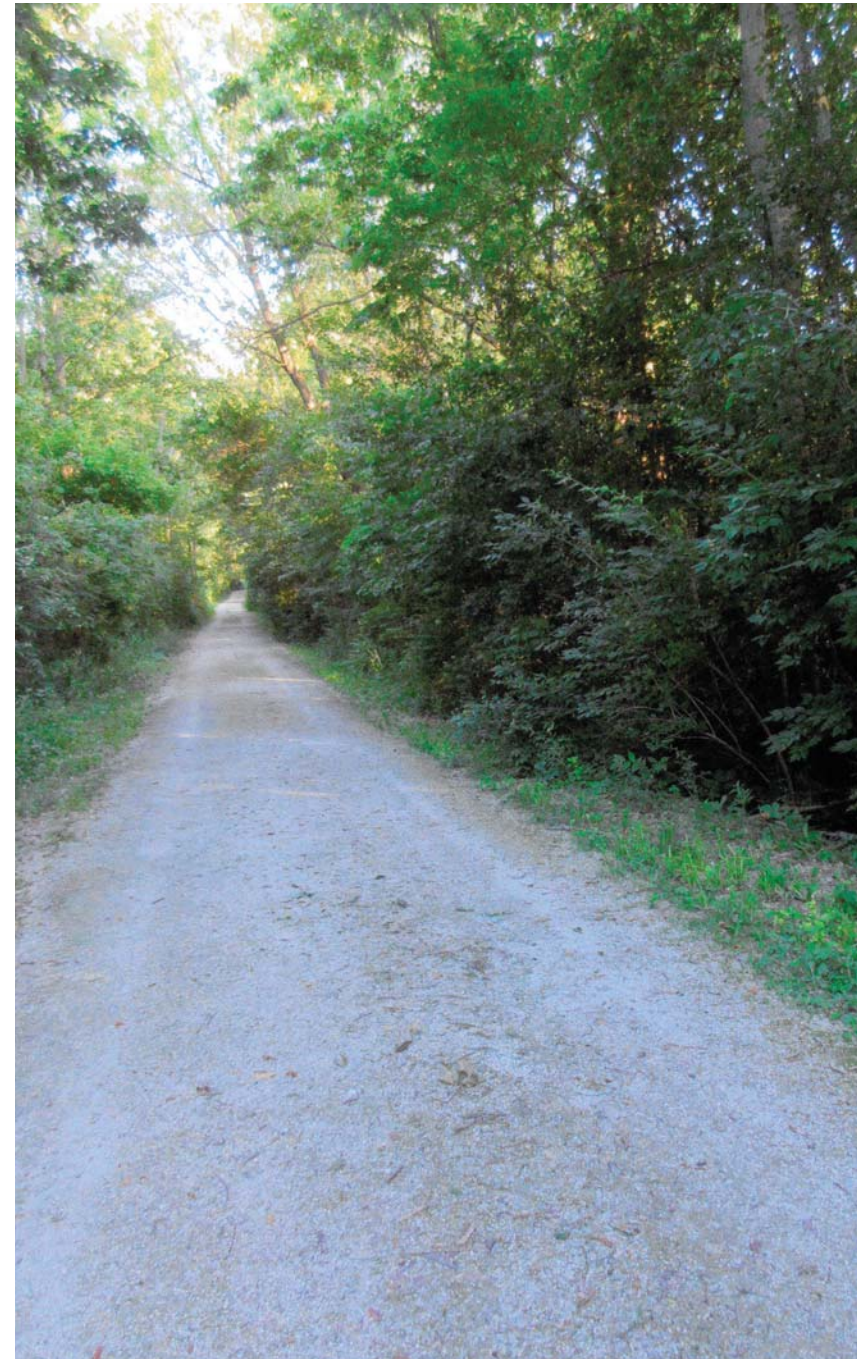
events in both Fostoria and Tiffin routinely bring people into the historic business districts to have a good time while remembering their roots. It is this intimacy and familiarity that residents value.

Objective 6.2 Branding & Promotion

Proactively, positively, creatively, and effectively communicate and market the community brand and brand reasons locally, regionally, statewide, nationally and globally and effectively implement the branding efforts through signage, online media platforms, and other creative ways.

In the effort to sell or promote almost any product or service, company “branding” has become a critical way of creating a memorable impression on consumers. Simply put, branding combines the elements of communication (brand narrative) and design (brand logo and design guidelines) that enable a company to distinguish itself from its competitors in the marketplace.

Communities, too, are working to promote and sell their assets, advantages, and uniqueness to current and future residents, visitors, workers, and businesses. The message they consistently communicate, how they present themselves graphically, and the experiences they



promote (and deliver) all create their brand. Creating and managing an effective community brand has become an important consideration for successful, forward-thinking, and progressive communities.

In 2018, the Seneca County Commissioners, city of Tiffin, Seneca Regional Chamber, Seneca Regional Planning Commission, and Tiffin-Seneca Economic Partnership (formerly SIEDC) went through a branding process. The process deliberately engaged the community, identified themes and produced graphic standards that all stakeholders could use at their discretion. The cohesive message visitors get when they see the economic development and planning organizations, chamber of commerce, and government offices all using integrated graphics is powerful. The resulting logo encompasses all that makes this place special: first and foremost the connection everyone feels to each other and to the community represented by a bridge and a single line (A Life Connected); the historic and new built environment; rural life, agriculture, and growth; water and dynamic movement; and the Seneca County Justice Center as a symbol of cooperation.

The result is a connected look and feel, and a singular brand that is repeated throughout the county. The message is clear: “If you come to any one of us, you can work with all of us.” (credit: branch launch video). The participants in this effort agree that this kind of collaborative project requires significant effort, but pays large dividends.

In 2015, the city of Fostoria and the Fostoria Economic Development Corporation launched their new brand. At the same time, they also launched new websites designed to promote their communities. Likewise, the Seneca County Park District, Seneca County Chamber, and city of Tiffin launched new websites within the past few years.

Moving forward, additional efforts should be made to further develop, promote, connect, enhance and implement the community brands in an intentional, thoughtful, strategic, and collaborative way.

Objective 6.3 Tourism Development

Proactively support, encourage and market Seneca County as a destination for tourists and visitors, to elevate the county's reputation, both as an economic development strategy and as a way to attract new residents and businesses.

There are numerous historic sites, natural resources, parks and other local destination sites that are promoted by the county and already attract tourists and visitors. The Seneca County Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB) is managed by the Seneca Regional Chamber of Commerce and branded as “Destination Seneca County,” and the CVB has a website (www.destinationsebecacounty.org) and social media presence on Facebook.

Yet, now, more than ever, this is the age of “experiences”, and it is important to continue to promote, support and expand the tourism industry in the county and to work with State, regional and other local tourism officials to develop partnerships and participate in State and regional tourism initiatives.



To promote tourism, and protect and enhance the county's intrinsic qualities, Seneca County could designate qualifying roadways as Scenic Byways through Ohio's Scenic Byway Program. The county has the cultural, historic, archaeological, recreational, natural, and scenic resources needed to meet the criteria.

Statewide tourism maps and promotional materials identify scenic byways and highlight the communities along the corridors. This recognition can be a source of pride for the community and can spur tourism and associated economic development opportunities.

Other types of recognitions such as the Sandusky River's designation as a State Scenic River in 1970, enable the county and local businesses to capitalize on the scenic qualities of the river.

In order to most effectively build on the successes of the past and chart a bold new course for the future of tourism in Seneca County, a collaborative, inclusive, and professional strategic plan should be developed for tourism, to be implemented by the CVB in partnership with the many stakeholders involved locally, regionally, and on a statewide level.

