

## Executive Summary





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Years of progress have transformed the once sleepy rural town into one of central Ohio's most vibrant and prosperous cities. After substantial growth in the 70's and 80's, and very rapid growth in the 90's and early 2000's, Hilliard is now home to over 28,000 residents and many local businesses.

As farm fields and gravel roads have been developed into subdivisions and modern roadways over the past 150 years, much progress has been made. In spite of these gains, much of the area is still comprised of farms and small homes linked by narrow country roads and little else—a reminder that much has yet to be done.

Trying to stay ahead of the growth, City leaders have adopted numerous land use, transportation, and utility plans over the decades, often as separate planning efforts. Five years after the completion of the last economic development and land use plan, City leaders initiated this process to allow for a comprehensive planning process to update all of the City's planning documents, including the land use plan, thoroughfare plan, and sewer and water master plans.

With this Comprehensive Plan and its vision, City leaders have an extensive resource providing insight into the state of the city and

recommendations to guide efforts to make Hilliard a more prosperous place to live, play and work. The plan culminates with five strategies offered to provide a starting place to implementing the more than 275 action items of the plan.

## Executive Summary Introduction to Planning

### Why do cities plan?

Cities plan in order to better understand their challenges and opportunities, define a vision and goals for the future, and finally establish and prioritize steps to achieve them. After a plan has been adopted, City leaders and staff work to implement the recommendations of the plan, and developers make business decisions based in-part on the plan. As codified ordinances and policies are changed, and infrastructure and private development is constructed, a community will reap the benefits of the planning effort.

Most decisions have a range of impacts which will likely impact future revenues and expenses. The planning process can help City leaders make better, more informed decisions. This is especially true for complicated decisions such as deciding where development should be encouraged and where infrastructure improvements should be made.

### Why produce a comprehensive plan?

In an unplanned community, progress occurs and development provides the infrastructure needed to support their developments and little else, generally placing a burden on the entire community. In many communities that do plan, the traditional approach is to study specific aspects or systems of the city such as the thoroughfare network or water and sewerage systems and develop plans for those systems. Such plans are reactive in

nature, building upon assumptions made in previous (land use) plans and allow for incremental improvements to each system.

By contrast, a comprehensive plan allows for a proactive approach to developing a community vision and allowing this vision to guide the coordination of multiple plans and infrastructure systems at the same time. The result is a unified approach where the resulting changes in policies, City code, and zoning work together to help achieve common community goals. In addition, cost savings and increased efficiency are likely to be found when assessing the costs of building and maintaining infrastructure such as roadways, waterlines and sanitary sewers.

## About this plan

### Impetus for planning

Building upon the community's past planning documents, the Hilliard Comprehensive Plan provides a unified, comprehensive approach toward planning Hilliard's future over the next 20 years. This Plan serves as a guide for future development and policy decisions that reflect the community's long-term vision, goals, and priorities—supporting City staff and communicating the City's values to potential residents, developers, and businesses. The document provides specific recommendations that should be implemented by City officials. Should conditions or trends change, the document should be updated.

### Public Involvement

The public was invited to participate in the development of the Plan through several avenues of public input, including a series of public meetings, an online survey, and in numerous on-the-street interviews. The Plan's authors also sought input from local stakeholder groups and worked with City staff and Hilliard's Comprehensive Planning Task Force to develop and produce the Plan.

Several themes were repeated throughout the public involvement process, notably that Hilliard was a “comfortable” and “nice” place with good services and good schools; however, some participants were interested in strengthening Hilliard's sense of community identity.



Common desires expressed by the public include:

- Improving physical connectivity particularly for those who want to walk or bike;
- Providing more events and places where residents can connect with others;
- Building on efforts to further establish and reinforce Hilliard's identity;
- Working to improving the quality of existing and new development in Hilliard; and
- Continuing the largely successful efforts to develop Old Hilliard into the community's premiere destination.

### Plan Vision and Goals

Based in part on input received from the public, a vision and six goals were created for the Comprehensive Plan. The Plan's vision is a statement of what the community wants to be, what it will offer, to whom it will serve, and how it will be better than the competition.

*"Hilliard is an authentic town, dedicated to providing a comfortably unique environment where real people and businesses connect."*

From this vision, six Plan goals were defined, including:

- 1. Become a better connected community;**
- 2. Grow into a truly sustainable city;**
- 3. Promote active and healthy lifestyles;**

### **4. Define and reinforce the character of Hilliard;**

### **5. Optimize development potential in ways that benefit current and future citizens; and**

### **6. Collaborate with surrounding communities and local stakeholders.**

In short, the goals of the plan and its recommendations aim to help Hilliard prosper into a more connected, sustainable, and healthy city that has a unique character. Additionally, there is a desire to attract development that will benefit current and future residents and businesses—land uses, densities, and forms that are different than the common development pattern today; and to have better relationships with neighboring communities and local stakeholders.

### Summary of Existing Conditions

Grounded by research, this comprehensive planning effort was mindful of several key themes, notably:

- Hilliard is a young community and is continuing to grow as families have children and new families move to the City;
- Though some are choosing to move up or move out into other communities, many are also staying in Hilliard by choice or by a factor of the regional and national economies;
- Housing affordability may impact the ability for young families to move into single family homes in the Hilliard market;



Members of the public participate in small group discussions during one of the Comprehensive Plan's public meeting. Public input was a significant component of the planning process and helped guide the planning effort.

- The lack of housing diversity provides few options for young adults and empty-nesters looking for entry-level and smaller homes respectively;
- There is a strong need for public places where people can meet and interact;
- Hilliard has many successful recreational amenities geared toward children and adults, primarily located in the western half of the City. Many are unable to walk or bike to these amenities;
- The Hilliard area has numerous areas of natural open space and waterways, but many of these spaces are not accessible to the public and at





In developing the focus areas, Plan authors sought to provide places where in-demand uses, development patterns and amenities could be built, creating unique places for both new and current residents, workers, and businesses to enjoy. The images above and at right are examples of the kind of development patterns and quality of appearance Plan authors desire to see constructed in Hilliard's focus areas.



risk of being developed rather than preserved and made accessible;

- Significant progress has been made to make new automobile, pedestrian, and bicycle links, improving mobility throughout the city and more progress can be made to address several specific areas of congestion;
- Continued investment is required to improve the reliability and provide access to new users of Hilliard's water and sanitary sewer utility systems;

### Summary of Key Recommendations

The following items provide a brief summary of critical plan recommendations:

- Encourage the development of four focus areas: Old Hilliard, I-270 Corridor, the Retired Railroad Corridor, and the Big Darby. The vision for each of these areas is a unique mix of land uses and amenities that will expand opportunities for economic development and improve the variety of housing available, benefiting both new and existing residents and businesses. To the extent possible, development would be encouraged first in the focus areas.

- Improve the quality of development citywide by improving design guidelines, connectivity requirements, as well as encouraging the provision of more public spaces and better management of stormwater facilities.
- Create more public places around the city where adult residents and workers can meet and interact, particularly in places throughout the community.
- Develop recreational amenities in the I-270 Corridor that will spur development and improve access to those who live in the eastern end of Hilliard.

- Invest in Hilliard’s transportation network to improve mobility for drivers, pedestrians, and bicyclists.
- Invest in Hilliard’s utility networks to accommodate growth and ensure a high level of service for decades to come.
- Restoration and preservation of Hilliard’s community heritage, and stream corridors and natural habitat.

### Implementation Priorities

With over 275 action items, the Plan authors have provided five implementation strategies comprised of the highest priorities expressed by members of the public, key stakeholders, City leaders and staff

throughout the planning process. Quickly implementing these five strategies and their associated action items will greatly help Hilliard make significant progress toward achieving the Plan’s vision and goals. These strategies include:

- **1. Invest in Old Hilliard first.**

Old Hilliard is the center of the city and the heart of the community. Continuing largely successful efforts to invest and develop Old Hilliard into a regional destination will be key to helping Hilliard further establish and keep its identity. Once significant progress has been made in Old Hilliard, proactive efforts should be made to develop the other focus areas. Though development interest may increase in each of the focus areas, investments should be

targeted to the I-270 Corridor, then Retired Railroad Corridor, and finally the Big Darby.

- **2. Revise necessary regulations.**

Numerous codified ordinances and zoning codes will need to be revised and adopted to realize the recommendations of the Plan.

- **3. Make wise investments in transportation infrastructure.**

Whereas more than half of the Hilliard area was comprised of farm fields and country roads a few decades ago and much remains as such today, significant investments in the transportation network are needed to help pedestrians and bicyclists get around the city and address areas of automobile congestion.

- **4. Create a more healthy and active city.**

Though Hilliard has been very successful in providing a high quality of life for its residents, expectations are rising amongst prospective residents and businesses. Expanding recreational opportunities for children and adults, as well as making Hilliard a more livable, walkable city are critical components to staying competitive and becoming the most desirable place to live and do business in central Ohio.

- **5. Strive to be a more sustainable city.**

Hilliard’s ability to be resilient and thrive in both difficult and prosperous times will require continued efforts to address the city’s economic and environmental sustainability. Though the cost of housing and doing business are still very important, providing more reasons for why prospective residents and businesses would want to locate and grow in Hilliard are a necessary



Streetscape improvements and the opening of Hilliard’s First Responders Park have made significant improvements to Old Hilliard, the historic center of the city. The Comprehensive Plan calls for continued efforts to develop Old Hilliard into the community’s premier destination, supporting the implementation of Hilliard’s Station Park—including a small amphitheater, splash pad, and shelter for events.



part of keeping Hilliard economically sustainable. Likewise, taking care of both the built and natural environment are core components to helping the city be a desirable place to live and work.

### Plan approval

The completed document was approved by the Planning Commission on the August 11, 2011 and adopted by the Mayor and City Council on October 24, 2011.

## Using the Plan

The Plan is divided into 10 chapters. The first three chapters introduce the Plan, summarize public input and define the vision, and provide an analysis of the existing conditions in Hilliard. Chapters four through nine address specific aspects of the City; such as the regulation of land use or enhancement of the City's transportation network. Of chapters four through nine, each has a goal, includes a summary of existing conditions, and provides objectives and action steps that work together to achieve the overall community vision. The 10th and final chapter provides guidance to the City in how to implement the Plan. Following this chapter are numerous appendices providing supplemental research, information, and planning documents that support the conclusions of the Plan.

### Plan Chapters

- **Chapter 1—Introduction**

Start here. This chapter provides context about the Hilliard area and why the City is planning for the future. Descriptions are provided for what a comprehensive plan is, as well as, how it was made and how it is organized.

- **Chapter 2—Public Input and Vision**

A summary of the methods used to engage the public. A vision was derived, in part, from the comments received and is presented for the Comprehensive Plan and the City of Hilliard.

- **Chapter 3—Existing Conditions**

This chapter provides snapshots of a variety of topics that explain existing conditions in

the city. These topics were researched and the resulting analysis is presented along with a summary of the key points.

- **Chapter 4—Land Use**

The land use chapter serves as a tool to guide the City as it works with developers to accommodate growth. The growth needs to be in line with the City's vision and priorities. The roles of public input, existing land use patterns, current market demand, and development potential are explained and form the basis of the future land use plan presented in this Plan.

- Chapter Goal: Hilliard will be a prosperous and fiscally balanced community that takes advantage of new and emerging markets, as well as underutilized properties, to increase its tax base and maintain the high level of services that residents have come to expect.

- **Chapter 5—Focus Areas**

A key component of this plan is to focus future growth within several focus areas around the city to help improve the community's vision, make new connections, and advance the City's economic development priorities. This chapter provides a vision for how development should occur within those focus areas to achieve these ends.

- Chapter Goal: Develop Focus Areas that improve the image and character of the City of Hilliard and tap the economic development potential of desirable, mixed-use developments that encourage a vibrant blend of office, retail, residential, and amenities



improving the lives of all who live and do business in the city.

- **Chapter 6—Transportation**

The transportation chapter outlines the City’s plan to improve mobility in Hilliard. Recommendations were greatly influenced by the Thoroughfare Plan (see appendices), public input, and the coordinated development of the other chapters of this plan.

- Chapter Goal: Hilliard will develop a safe, efficient, and balanced transportation network that provides all users with mobility choices, connects land uses, enhances the environment, and improves the quality of life for those who live and work in Hilliard.

- **Chapter 7—Parks and Public Spaces**

The City’s park system and public spaces are discussed in this chapter. Recommendations are offered for how to improve these resources, create new spaces and make new connections for recreation.

- Chapter Goal: Hilliard will be a leader in offering quality parks, public spaces, and recreational opportunities for its residents, employees and visitors. Hilliard’s parks and public spaces will be diverse, active and accessible while providing opportunities for physical activity, social interaction and education.

- **Chapter 8—Economic Development**

This chapter will include an update on the commercial areas reported in the 2003 master plan, along with an analysis of current and potential

incentives, a fiscal impact analysis and overall recommendations for economic development throughout the city.

- Chapter Goal: Hilliard will be a prosperous and fiscally balanced community that takes advantage of new and emerging markets, as well as underutilized properties, to increase its tax base and maintain the high level of services residents have come to expect.

- **Chapter 9—Utilities**

An evaluation of existing utility services, as well as the utilities required to accommodate future demand will be discussed in this chapter. A detailed analysis will be provided by the Utility Master Plan, an appendix to this document expected to be complete shortly after the adoption of the Comprehensive Plan.

- Chapter Goal: Continue to provide high quality public utility service to both current and future users, balancing the objectives of increasing system capacity and improving system reliability with the need of ensuring reasonable utility rates for all users.

- **Chapter 10—Implementation**

The implementation chapter provides a prioritization for the objectives and action items/ recommendations offered in the plan. This resource is designed to provide a resource for City officials as to the timetable by which recommendations should be acted upon.

## Plan Appendices and Supporting Documents

Several appendices are referenced throughout the Plan. These appendices are provided on a data disc enclosed on the back cover of the printed edition of the Plan, as well as on the same disc by which the electronic version of the Plan was distributed.