

Public Input and Vision

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

*Hilliard Comprehensive Plan
vision statement*



Chapter 2:

Public Input and Vision

Extensive public input is critical to the success of any comprehensive planning process. If a plan is to effectively communicate a community's values and address its needs, the first step in the planning process must be to find out what those values and needs are. This was the goal of the public input process, to gain an understanding of what the city's residents and neighbors think, feel, and believe about Hilliard.

Throughout the development of this plan, residents and stakeholders were asked to provide input to the planning team using a wide array

of methods. Several different input forums were incorporated into the project to encourage participation from a broad range of community members. The variety of approaches sought to accommodate varying schedules and levels of involvement. The following chapter is a summation of the public input process and the common themes that were expressed. A detailed summary of all public input received is included in the appendices.

Public Involvement Activities

The Public Involvement Process for the Hilliard Comprehensive Plan was extensive. The following provides a snap-shot of the effort:

- Project Launch Open House (March 2009)
 - Kicked-off comprehensive plan process
 - 60 attendees
- Subarea Meetings (April 2009)
 - Meeting for each subarea of the city
 - 3 meetings and 100+ attendees in all
- Task Force Meetings (entire plan process)
 - Review plan progress at key points
 - 12 meetings
- Comprehensive Plan Website and On-line Survey (March - May 2009)
 - 27 question survey on project website
 - 300 completed surveys
- Stakeholder Interviews (April/May 2009)
 - 11 meetings
 - 35 stakeholders interviewed
- On-the-Street Interviews (April 2009)
 - 4-20 minute informal discussions
 - ~40 interviews
- Media Analysis (May 2009)
 - Analysis of Hilliard media coverage compared to similar Central Ohio cities

- Design Charrette (October 2009)
 - Presentation of design concepts for Retired Railroad Corridor
 - 30+ attendees

Project Launch and Subarea Meetings

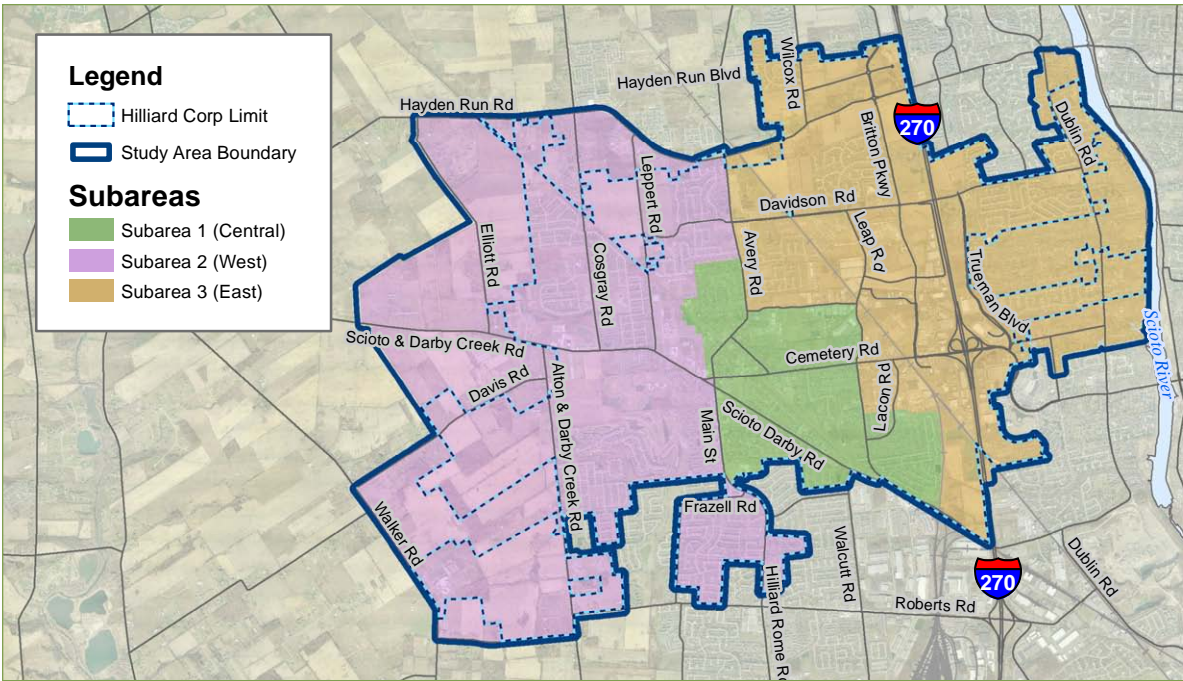
Several open house meetings were held to gather resident input about the issues and needs of the city. A city-wide open house meeting was held during the project launch in March 2009, providing an initial opportunity to receive input. Three more open house meetings were held, one for each of three subareas into which the study area was divided (see Map 2.1). At these meetings, planners led small group discussions to better understand the specific issues and concerns of residents in each

subarea. A variety of methods were used to advertise the meetings, including flyers and posters at area businesses, email and website announcements, as well as press releases to the media.

Task Force Meetings

Though the public open house meetings afforded an opportunity for many people to provide the input needed to formulate the plan, it was not feasible to involve the entire community in all decisions in the planning process. A Task Force, consisting of City staff and elected and appointed officials, was convened to guide the development of the Plan to ensure the recommendations reflect the values and needs of the community. The Task Force worked closely with the planning team to

Map 2.1 – Comprehensive Plan Subareas



develop, review, and provide comments at key points in the planning process. Task Force members were asked to serve as liaisons between the community and the planning team by facilitating the process in four primary ways:

- Advise – *offer input and suggestions based on their experience and in-depth understanding of the community.*
- Listen – *attend meetings and be open to suggestions from the public.*
- Advocate – *support the planning process and the recommendations that come out of it.*
- Implement – *take responsibility for seeing that the Plan is put into action in the years to come.*

Comprehensive Plan Website and Survey

A project website, titled “Hilliard of the Future,” was developed to provide relevant project information and to collect input from members of the public. The website hosted a 27-question online survey, and provided information about upcoming public meetings and an email address by which residents could submit comments.

Approximately 300 surveys were completed on the website, comprising the most extensive information on the perceptions and concerns held by members of the community. Respondents were asked a wide variety of questions ranging from why they chose to live in Hilliard, to their ranking of various city services, to what they would change about the city.

Stakeholder Interviews

During the public input process, several stakeholder groups were identified and interviewed. These stakeholders represented community members who have a significant interest in Hilliard. These meetings included representatives from the local business community, area developers, surrounding municipal and regional government entities, and public service agencies. In all, eleven stakeholder meetings were held to collect input and better understand local concerns.

On-the-Street Interviews

In-depth informal interviews were conducted with approximately 40 individuals and small groups who live or work in Hilliard. The interviews were intended to gain input from groups who may not have attended meetings or taken the online survey.

Media Analysis

A media analysis comparing Hilliard with Dublin, Grove City, and Reynoldsburg was performed as part of the public input process. An analytic review of 108 local and 23 statewide print and online media outlets identified all stories involving any of the four cities, focusing on positive and negative references. These three cities were chosen for comparison because of their comparable sizes and locations adjacent to I-270. The analysis provided information on how Hilliard is presented in the media and how that presentation relates to similar central Ohio municipalities.

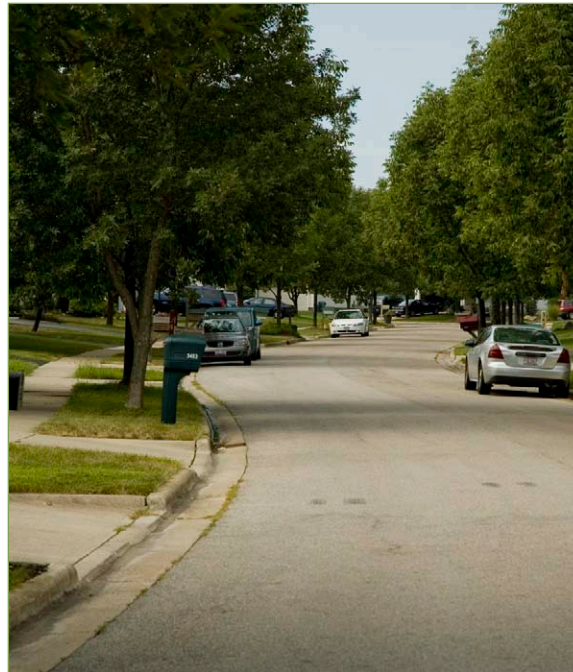
Focus Area Design Charrette

Later in the process, during the development of Plan components, a design charrette was held



Figure 2.1 – Members of the public participate in a design charrette helping to craft a vision for the future of several pivotal Focus Areas.

to develop future recommended land uses and design concepts for the retired Norfolk Southern Railroad corridor that runs from the intersection of Scioto Darby and Leap roads northwest into Old Hilliard. This intensive, three-day design session included several opportunities for members of the community, stakeholders, and the Task Force to review and provide input on the concept plans for the area. The results of the design charrette are illustrated in the concept plan for the Retired Rail Corridor focus area included in Chapter 5.



What We Heard

A wide range of input was received from the community through the variety of public events and forums that were available. While the input included positive comments as well as concerns, the vast majority of responses were optimistic about Hilliard, its future, and the ability of this Plan to address the community's challenges. Among the many comments received, several topics consistently emerged as the top priorities of the community. The following is a summary of those common themes, which helped to formulate the vision, goals, and recommendations of this Comprehensive Plan.

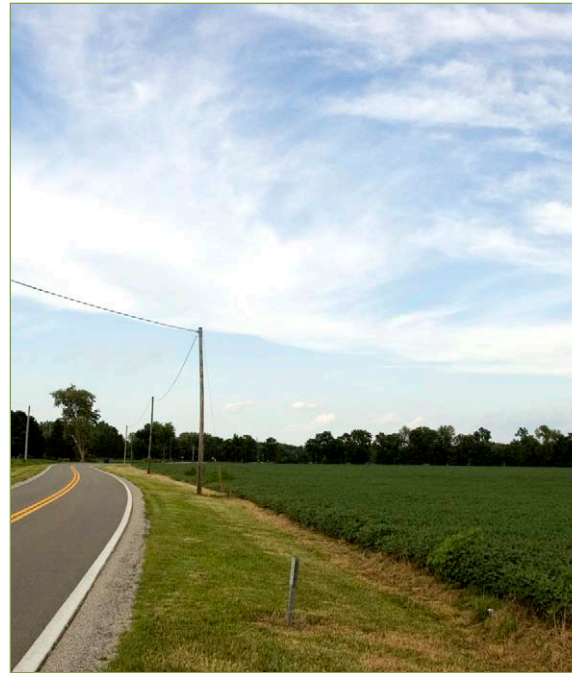
- Hilliard is generally perceived as a “comfortable” and “nice” place to live and/or work, yet many respondents feel that it lacks community

cohesion and a strong sense of identity. This was the most commonly expressed sentiment, and was articulated in a variety of ways:

- A desire for more unique shopping, dining, and events that could make Hilliard a destination and bring the community together;
- Concerns about the number of large residential subdivisions, strip retail centers, and other disjointed developments that contribute to a lack of identity;
- The feeling that Hilliard was chosen as a “default” community because of affordability, location, or schools, and not a particular desire to live here;
- The need for better defined gateways, public art, and uniform aesthetics.

Figure 2.2 — Left: A typical suburban neighborhood in Hilliard. Though many see Hilliard as an affordable place to raise a family, concern was expressed about a perceived lacking of community character particularly in regards to neighborhood and retail center design, and retail offerings. Center: Public comment identified Old Hilliard as a strength that has the potential to grow as a destination if progress continues toward development of the historic town center. Right: Activities in Old Hilliard, such as the farmers market above, help to bring residents into the historic center and encourage the small town feel of the city.

- There is consensus that Old Hilliard is the core of the City and will continue to be in the future. Most people feel that good progress has been made in redeveloping Old Hilliard, and that it has the potential to become a destination if more public spaces, businesses, and entertainment options are encouraged to locate there. Examples of some frequently suggested



retail uses include a coffee shop, bookstore, bike shop, and ice cream shop.

- City services were rated well, with the public library, fire and police protection, and schools receiving the highest marks. Many residents did express concerns that school taxes are too high and that continued residential development will require continued increases in school funding.
- There is a strong desire for future development to occur in an organized and controlled manner. Support was expressed for increased commercial development and limited residential growth. Several comments also asserted the need to take advantage of underutilized areas, such as the fairgrounds and the I-270 corridor.
- As the area west of the City begins to develop, people are most concerned with:
 - protecting the environment;
 - preserving open space and the rural character of the area;
 - controlling traffic;
 - encroaching on the rural residents.
- The majority of participants are interested in improving walking and biking connections, primarily by extending the path network throughout the city.

Figure 2.3 — Left: There's a strong desire to encourage high-quality development that contributes to the community character in the I-270 Corridor, particularly along Britton Parkway and Trueman Boulevard. Center: Development pressure remains high in sections of the Big Darby watershed. In spite of such pressures, members of the public expressed the desire for the area to retain its rural character. Right: The Heritage Rail Trail is one of the most popular park facilities in all of Hilliard. Extending the trail and creating new paths was a priority of members of the public.

Comprehensive Plan Vision

The vision is the foundation of the Comprehensive Plan. It is a statement that encompasses a plan for future prosperity and helps direct development and other program and policy decisions. It is a clear statement of how the community perceives itself, what it wants to become, and why residents and businesses should want to locate here.

In order to create a successful vision for Hilliard, it was critical to identify and build upon the beliefs, values, and aspirations of the community. The purpose in identifying these values and aspirations was two-fold. As was discussed in the public input summary, the first was to build a foundation from which the recommendations of the plan are shaped, directly reflecting the community's values.

The second purpose in creating the vision was to understand and create a brand for what the Hilliard community represents and aspires to be. In this sense the vision of the plan also serves as a brand for the Hilliard community.

Why Does Hilliard Need a Vision?

In order to successfully compete in today's marketplace, a city must have a strong and identifiable image or brand. Cities are no longer competing on a purely local level, but a regional, national, and even global level. They are competing for attention, investment, visitors, shoppers, talent, events, and the like, making it critical that they stand out in the crowd.

Historically, like many towns and cities, Hilliard has not clearly defined its desired brand, image, or perception. Although the city has many good things to offer, these offerings have never been

packaged into a single message that could serve as a point of pride for residents and serve as a beacon that attracts new and desirable businesses, visitors, and residents.

Like many communities that are now suburbs of Columbus, Hilliard was once a small farm town. While some of those small-town roots are still visible, many have been replaced with more typical suburban elements over the past 50 years. These varying attributes and many more, combine to create an unclear perception of the city for residents and visitors alike. This lack of a consistent perception or image provides an opportunity for Hilliard to embrace a new, refined vision for the city.

Benefits of Visioning

Far more than producing a tagline for the Plan and the City, the visioning process helps leaders and residents to evaluate and outwardly express their perceptions and aspirations for Hilliard. The Hilliard Comprehensive Plan's vision offers many lasting benefits if embraced by the community and City leadership. This vision:

- Provides continuity
- Identifies direction and purpose
- Alerts stakeholders to needed change
- Encourages and builds confidence
- Builds loyalty through involvement (ownership)
- Results in efficiency and productivity

The Plan Vision

The Hilliard vision was created by distilling the results of the broad public input gathered during the planning process. The results were reviewed and major themes identified. These themes are illustrated in the Plan's vision.

The vision for Hilliard is composed of four elements: the vision, the essence, the promise statements, and the vision strategy. Collectively these vision elements served as the basis for shaping the Plan's goals, and ultimately the policies and recommendations contained herein.

The Vision

The new vision for Hilliard is a statement of what the community wants to be, what it will offer, to whom it will serve, and how it will offer it better than the competition. The statement developed for the Comprehensive Plan is as follows:

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



The Essence

The essence is the experiential and emotional statement that sums up what Hilliard is all about.

“ *Hilliard is all about connecting real people.* ”



The Promise Statements

The Hilliard Promise Statements are what you say to different audiences to convey the vision and how it applies to them.

Promise to current and potential residents:

“ *When you live in Hilliard, you will feel and be connected to the entire community.* ”

Promise to current and potential businesses:

“ *When you do business in Hilliard, you will be connected.* ”

Promise to current and potential visitors:

“ *When you come to Hilliard, you will make a positive connection.* ”



The Vision Strategy

The vision strategy is the “how to” for implementing the vision. The following three strategies are reinforced through the recommendations in each element of the plan:

“ *Embrace the authentic nature of the city* ”

“ *Accentuate the differences in character between Hilliard and other Central Ohio suburbs* ”

“ *Create enjoyable experiences that are attractive to a wide audience group* ”

The Plan Goals

Building on public input and Plan vision, goals were developed for the Plan. While still sufficiently broad to relate to all components of the Plan, these goals focus the Plan and its recommendations on six key areas that will help fulfill the vision.



Become a better connected community.
The plan will improve physical connections through a better mix of land uses in close proximity to one another, development of a multi-modal transportation network, and reduced impact of physical and geographical barriers. It will also inspire a more passionate and engaged citizenry by providing increased opportunities for social, philanthropic, and political participation.



Grow into a truly sustainable city.
Through its actions and policies, the City will promote development that uses and preserves its economic, natural, and social resources in a responsible manner. This will create balanced growth and ensure that future citizens and generations have the same opportunities and resources that currently exist.



Promote active and healthy lifestyles.
Through increased recreation choices, alternative transportation options, healthy business programs, and healthier food options, Hilliard will become a community of healthier, more active citizens.



4

Define and reinforce the character of Hilliard.

Hilliard will create a pervasive sense of community that strengthens its appeal to both people and business to locate and stay in Hilliard. The vision and essence of Hilliard will be realized primarily through the built environment, public spaces, and community events.

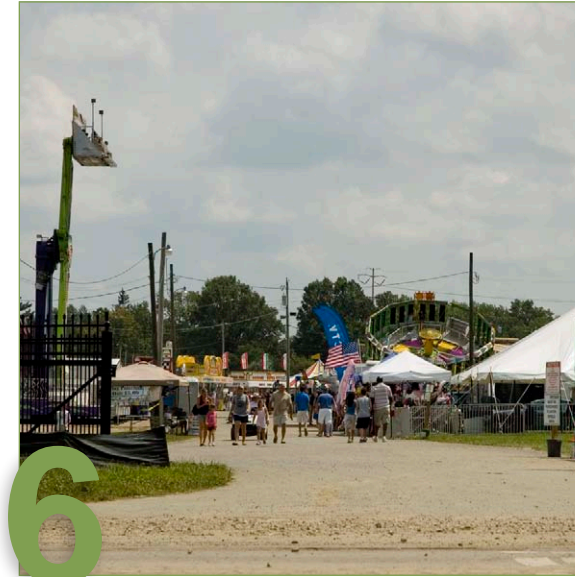


5

Optimize development potential in ways that benefit current and future citizens.

Optimizing key development and re-development areas can improve Hilliard's finances and the perceived image of the community. Areas include:

- **Old Hilliard** – the city's premier destination where one can live, work, shop, and play;
- **I-270 Corridor** – walkable, mixed-use development providing new housing, jobs, and retail;
- **Retired Railroad Corridor** – eclectic, mixed-use center southeast of Old Hilliard;
- **Big Darby** – conservation development that allows the restoration and protection of the area's natural beauty.



6

Collaborate with surrounding communities and local stakeholders.

To fully execute and experience the benefits of this plan, Hilliard must initiate and actively participate in collaborative efforts with officials of surrounding communities, as well as private and public stakeholders within Hilliard, including the Hilliard City School district, Franklin County Fair Board, large employers, Chambers of Commerce, and Destination Hilliard.