



The Montrose Group, LLC

TRANSFORMING YOUR WORLD

# THE VILLAGE OF PLAIN CITY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIC PLAN

**ADOPTED: OCTOBER 2023**

**PRESENTED BY DAVID ROBINSON, HARRISON CRUME & NATE GREEN  
THE MONTROSE GROUP, LLC**

# ABOUT THE MONTROSE GROUP, LLC

The Montrose Group, LLC provides economic development planning, lobbying, marketing and public finance and incentive consulting services. The firm brings together some of the leading practitioners in economic development planning and strategy engaged in economic development planning at the state, local, and regional levels, and corporate site location. Together the team utilizes a Learn, Listen and Do approach to economic development planning that starts with fundamental economic development research to understand who a community or site is then listens to what the community wants the region or site to be and then develops a detailed action plan tied to local and outside funding sources centered on the business retention and attraction of high wage jobs and capital investment.

Nothing in this report should be considered legal advice as the Montrose Group LLC is not a law firm and does not provide legal advice. Competent legal counsel should be sought prior to relying on any strategy outlined in this report.



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	4
Executive Summary	5
Economic, Demographic, Industry Cluster & Workforce Analysis	12
Quality of Life Analysis	16
Village of Plain City Economic Development & Action Plan Tactics	24
Endnotes	50

# THE MONTROSE GROUP STRATEGIC PLAN PROCESS

In December of 2022 the Village of Plain City partnered with The Montrose Group to conduct the Plain City Economic Development Strategic Plan. The philosophical approach of Montrose is to focus on the creation of high-wage jobs and private sector capital investment at targeted development sites through the creation and implementation of a comprehensive economic development strategic plan. Montrose utilizes a Learn, Listen and Do approach for its economic development planning services. This process creates a thorough examination of Plain City's current economic development activities and programs; benchmarks Plain City amongst its peers in Central Ohio, the state of Ohio, and throughout the United States; identifies existing and future opportunities for development sites; evaluates Plain City's reputation with the corporate and development community in Central Ohio; and presents a comprehensive roadmap to guide future economic development priorities of Plain City. Montrose will utilize our proven Learn, Listen and Do approach for economic development strategic planning services.

Learn Phase: January - March 2023	Listen Phase: April - May 2023	Do Phase: June - August 2023
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Montrose will learn who plain City is through research from primary economic and demographic data sources</li> <li>• Learn Elements:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Industry cluster analysis</li> <li>- Demographic analysis</li> <li>- Macroeconomic analysis</li> <li>- Incentive analysis</li> <li>- Site development and infrastructure analysis</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Montrose will then listen to community, political, education, and business leaders to understand how these leaders view Plain City from an economic development standpoint.</li> <li>• Montrose will use these sessions to set a vision for what Plain City wants to be in the future.</li> <li>• Listen Elements               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- SWOT Analysis</li> <li>- One-on-one key stakeholder briefings</li> <li>- Focus group discussions</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Montrose will develop an action plan that recommends how Plain City should implement an economic development strategy</li> <li>• Do Elements               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Economic development tools and processes analysis</li> <li>- Site development and infrastructure analysis</li> <li>- Analyze growing and emerging sectors &amp; financial impacts</li> <li>- Development of a five-year economic development strategic plan</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

**Learn.** Montrose will conduct base line economic research on Plain City that provides a macroeconomic, industry cluster, demographic and workforce analysis that define the village's economy, assesses various assets within the community, defines Plain City's position within Madison County, and identifies future economic challenges and opportunities for Plain City.

**Listen.** Through a series of one-on-one interviews, focus group meetings with business and community leaders, and utilizing public surveys, the Montrose Team will gain a greater understanding of community needs, the current state of economic development efforts in Plain City, targeted business sectors Plain City community and business leader would like to attract (retail, residential, industrial, distribution), how these leaders view the future of the village, where they see it growing, and the areas of focus for not just the "what" Plain City focuses on for an economic development program but "how" they should implement that program. Additionally, the Montrose Team will use the Listen Phase as a means to collect input from stakeholders as part of the Comprehensive Land Use Plan Update. Based upon the research in the Learn Phase, Montrose will develop a brief presentation to guide discussions with these audiences and lead the discussions in a SWOT-style format.

**Do.** The *Learn* and *Listen* steps of the Montrose approach are all designed to build action steps for Plain City to define and implement a transformational economic development program. The action plan aspect of the report will be based not just upon the prior research and business and community input but also on best practices and benchmarking of communities located in similar regions in the United States.



# PLAIN CITY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIC PLAN & INFRASTRUCTURE ANALYSIS

## Executive Summary

Plain City, Ohio is a charming village that is conveniently located within both Madison and Union County, Ohio. Plain City embodies the essence of a close-knit, rural community with a rich agricultural heritage while simultaneously transitioning into a fast-growing modern city. Its strategic location near Columbus, along with its friendly atmosphere, excellent educational facilities, and diverse economic landscape, has made the village an attractive place to call home for developers and citizens over the past few years. Plain City is currently undergoing significant residential growth leading to fast growing population for the village. Plain City is also currently making efforts to transform its downtown and local economy into a more progressive status. In order to achieve continued prosperity in the future, manage the growth throughout the area, capitalize on emerging industry sectors, and diversify the Plain City economy, the Village of Plain City needs to enact the following strategic plan goal, strategies, objectives, and tactics:

### Plain City Strategic Plan Goal

- Plain City will be a community of choice where residents can live, work and play

### Plain City Strategic Plan Strategies

- Plain City should plan for economic growth focused on developing a diversified blend of residential, commercial and retail projects
- Plain City should be focused on economic development that will retain its small town roots while driving the creation of high-wage jobs in the city

### Plain City Strategic Action Plan Objectives

- Double the number of net new jobs created in Plain City
- Double the number of residents living and businesses operating in Uptown Plain City

### Plain City Strategic Action Plan Tactics

- Create a Community Improvement Corporation to focus on larger economic development projects such as Uptown Plain City, operation of the Plain City Future Fund, and the development of the Plain City Industrial Park
- Launch an aggressive redevelopment campaign for Uptown Plain City.
- Create the Plain City Industrial Park to capture high-wage manufacturing jobs..
- Define CEDA agreements for Plain City and the neighboring townships to shape the growth on the edges of Plain City.
- Create a Grow Local Campaign that helps retain the agricultural history of Plain City.



# VILLAGE OF PLAIN CITY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIC PLAN & INFRASTRUCTURE ANALYSIS

## PLAIN CITY ECONOMIC, DEMOGRAPHIC, INDUSTRY CLUSTER, AND WORKFORCE ANALYSIS

Plain City was founded in the early 1800s by Dr. Isaac Bigelow, who first travelled to the area on foot from Pennsylvania. The original name for this early community was Pleasant Valley, although there were at least four other communities throughout Ohio named Pleasant Valley during this time. Deliveries including mail and other perishable goods were often shipped to the wrong Pleasant Valley, which became a growing problem for the residents living in what is now known as Plain City. This led the residents to petition their state representative, William Morrow Beach, to introduce a bill in the legislature to change the name of the town to Plain City. Today, Plain City is uniquely located on the western edge of the central Ohio region on the border of Madison County and Union County, Ohio. Located roughly 18 miles from downtown Columbus, Ohio, Plain City benefits from its proximity to the Columbus urban and suburban markets while also enjoying rural characteristics and a diverse landscape. These characteristics are seen in the economic, demographic, and industry clusters represented throughout Plain City. Like the economic and demographic assets, Plain City also benefits from its proximity to a variety of quality educational institutions that provide opportunities for youth, adult, and workforce education. Plain City is encompassed within the boundaries of the Jonathon Alder School District and is serviced by the esteemed Tolles Career & Technical College, conveniently situated around four miles to the south of the Village. There are a multitude of revered institutions of higher learning within proximity to the village of Plain City such as Columbus State Community College, Ohio State University, Ohio University, and more. These establishments offer a diverse range of educational and certification programs, effectively equipping the present and prospective workforce with the necessary skills and knowledge to meet the demands of local employment opportunities.

### VILLAGE OF PLAIN CITY ASSET INVENTORY

- Located within the rapidly expanding central Ohio region
- Available supply of infrastructure resources
- No significant physical or development boundaries
- Quality schools, including K-12, technical, and colleges and universities in proximity

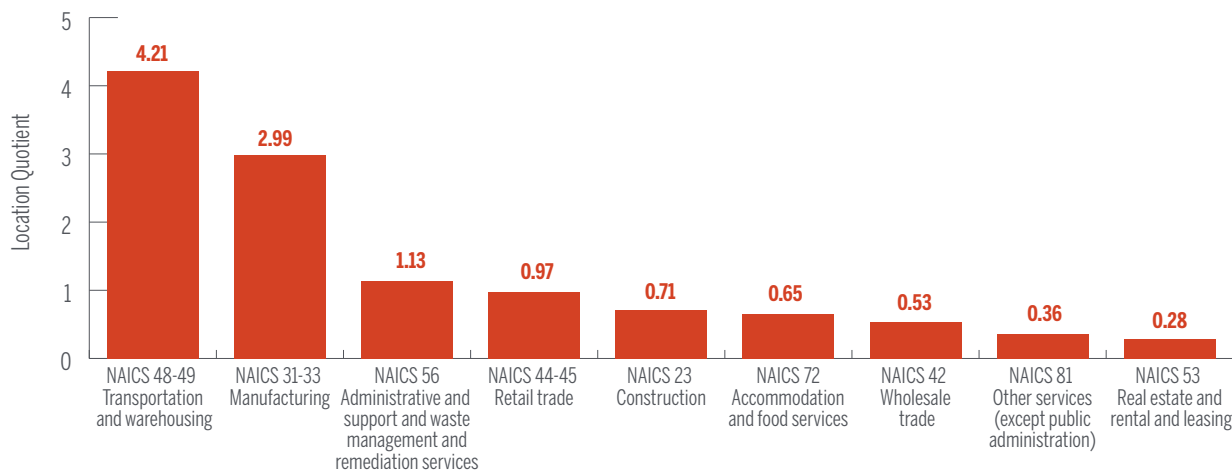
## INDUSTRY CLUSTER ANALYSIS

The village of Plain City sits in a unique location on the border between two central Ohio counties, Madison County and Union County. For purposes of this economic development strategic plan, both counties will be analyzed for context. To that end, Madison and Union counties are analyzed relative to the industry location quotient strengths of the surrounding area. A location quotient is a method of using federal industry cluster data to identify the economic concentration of a certain industry in a state, region, or county compared to a base economy, such as a state or nation. A location quotient greater than 1 indicates that a locality, in this case Madison County and Union County, has a higher concentration of companies in a specific industry sector than does the rest of the nation. For this analysis, data was gathered on the ten industry sectors with the highest location quotient, which are reflective of many of the two counties major employers and the counties' location within the central Ohio region. While these industry sector strengths represent the broader county landscape, economic and community development priorities for the village of Plain City should take these sectors and their potential for growth into account. Transportation and warehousing have a location quotient score of **4.21**, meaning the two-county area has a **4.21** times greater concentration of transportation and warehousing operations than does the rest of the country. Manufacturing has a location quotient of **2.99**, while Administrative and support and waste management and remediation services has a score of **1.13**. The location within the central Ohio region is a contributing factor to a higher concentration of these industry sectors. Franklin County, located to the east, is experiencing significant



growth, and providing new employment opportunities for the outside region in the transportation, warehousing, and manufacturing sectors. Although Madison County is still largely an agricultural community, with approximately 88% of the total land area being utilized for agricultural uses, this area has seen significant growth in emerging industry sectors like Transportation and Warehousing due to major infrastructure assets such as Interstates 70 and 71, which cross through the entire county.

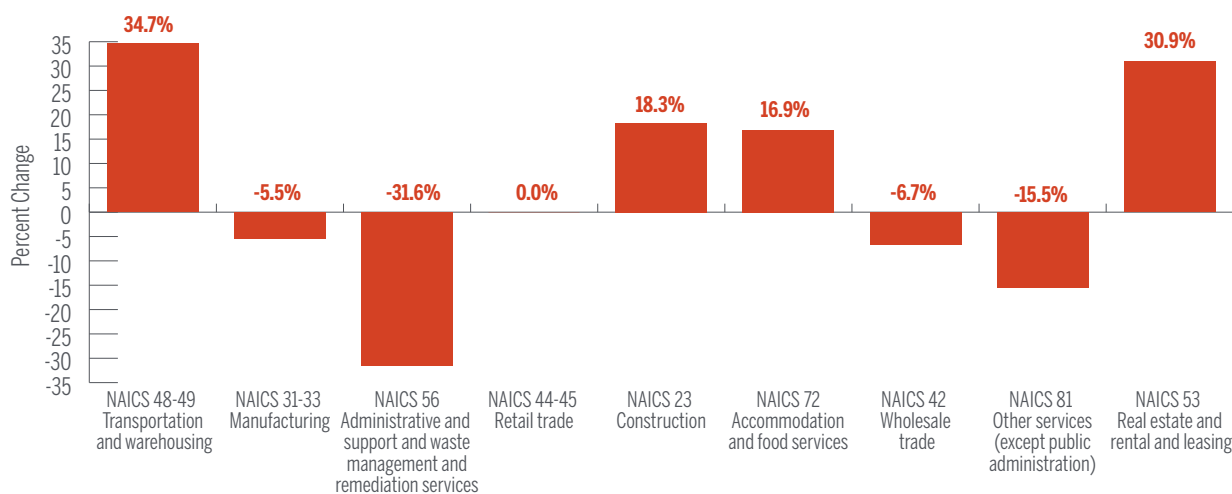
**Union + Madison County Industry Location Quotient 2021**



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

From 2018 to 2021, Madison and Union counties experienced major shifts amongst their industry strengths. The largest increase in location quotient score over this period was in the NAICS 48-49 Transportation and warehousing sector, which increased by 34.7%. This growth is likely attributed to large logistics and distribution facilities located along the Interstate 70 corridor in Madison County, including Amazon, FedEx, Mars, and Target located west of West Jefferson. This is followed by NAICS 53 Real estate and rental and leasing which increased 30.9%, and NAICS 23 Construction. The sector that experienced the largest decrease in location quotient score was NAICS 56 Administrative and support and waste management and remediation services, which decreased by 31.6%. Following this was NAICS 81 Other services, which decreased 15.5%, and NAICS 42 Wholesale trade which decreased by 6.7%.

**Location Quotient Percent Change 2018-2021**



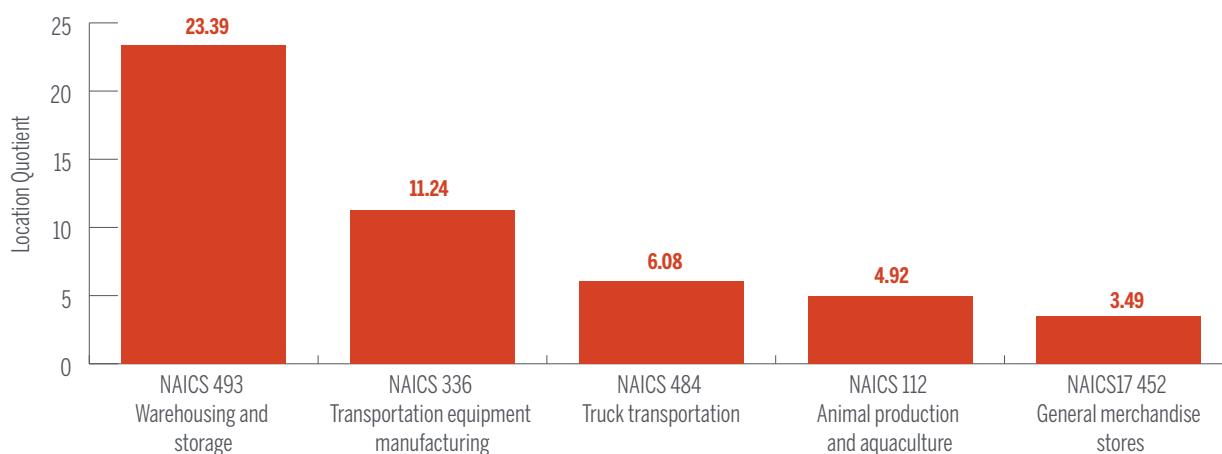
Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

When further analyzing leading industry sectors by top NAICS sub-sector location quotient scores for the two-county region, see more profound industry strengths can be seen within each region. Madison County's top five sub-sector location quotient industries are NAICS 493 Warehousing and storage with a score of 23.39;



NAICS 336 Transportation and equipment at 11.24; NAICS 484 Truck transportation at 6.08; NAICS 112 Animal production and aquaculture at 4.92; and NAICS 452 General merchandise stores at 3.49. The elevated location quotient score in NAICS 493 Warehousing and storage can again be attributed to the significant increase in new investments along the Interstate 70 corridor near West Jefferson. Due to the rise of industries like e-commerce throughout the United States, this sector has seen extreme growth over the years. Madison County's location on the western edge of central Ohio and having access to major highway infrastructure makes this area a prime location to develop this type of industry sector. The total number of employees across the United States within this sub-sector has increased from 715,900 average employees in 2013 to 1,938,900 employees in 2022.<sup>1</sup> NAICS 493 Warehousing and storage was only recently added as a primary industry sub-sector and, as a result, was not listed in the top 25 largest industries by location quotient in 2018. By 2021, this industry sector was added to the NAICS codes and features the highest location quotient score in Madison County by a wide margin. The activity in this industry has been a focal point of growth in Madison County, while three of the five strongest sectors conversely experienced decreasing location quotients from 2018 to 2021. Only NAICS 484 Truck transportation increased in location quotient, growing by 5.43%, which is likely attributed to growth in the logistics activity along Interstate 70.

**Madison County Sub-Sector Location Quotient 2021**



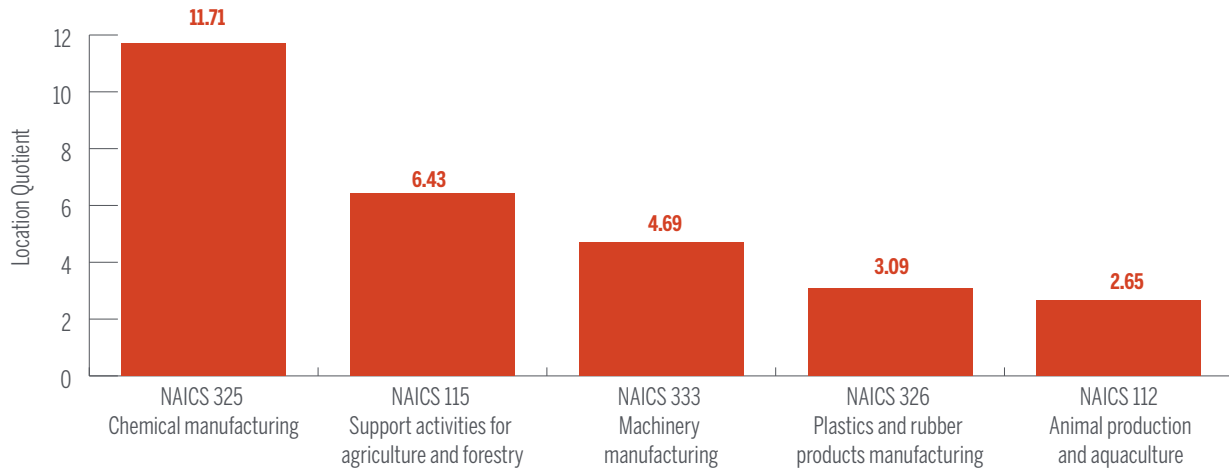
*Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics*

The top NAICS sub-sector strengths for Union County are as follows: NAICS 325 Chemical manufacturing with a location quotient score of 11.71; NAICS 115 Support activities for agriculture and forestry at 6.43; NAICS 333 Machinery manufacturing at 4.69; NAICS 326 Plastics and rubber manufacturing at 3.09; and NAICS 112 Animal production and aquaculture at 2.65. Union County has a significant manufacturing base within the county, with three of the top five industries being in the manufacturing sector. This is a noticeable change from the location quotient scores in Union County in 2018. Only one manufacturing industry, NAICS 326 Plastics and rubber products manufacturing, was in the top five industries for Union County in 2018. NAICS 325 Chemical manufacturing and NAICS 333 Machinery manufacturing have both experienced profound increases in location quotient score from 2018 to 2021 and represent approximately 2,067 employees in Union County. Union County is home to major national and international companies that contribute to industry sector strengths, including Honda of America Mfg., Nestle, Select Sires, Scotts Miracle-Gro Company, and Univenture.<sup>2</sup>





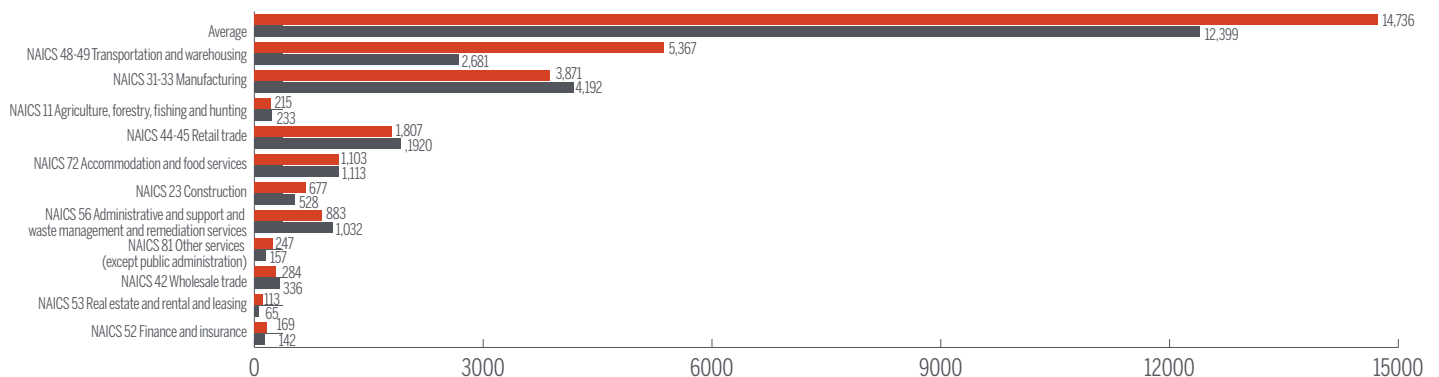
### Union County Sub-Sector Location Quotient 2021



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

When evaluating the change in the number of employees for Madison County over the span of 2018 to 2021, the county has seen an increase in employment of 2,337 jobs, although only five of the top ten industries have experienced growth. The largest increase comes from NAICS 48-49 Transportation and warehousing, which doubled in size from 2018 to 2021. The industry which experienced the second largest growth in employment was in NAICS 53 Real estate and rental and leasing which increased by 73.8%, followed by NAICS 22 Construction which increased by 28.2%. The industry which experienced the largest decrease in overall employment from 2018 to 2021 was NAICS 42 Wholesale trade, which decreased by 52 employees or -15.5%. The Wholesale Trade sector comprises establishments engaged in wholesaling merchandise, generally without transformation, and rendering services incidental to the sale of merchandise.<sup>3</sup> The merchandise described in this sector includes the outputs of agriculture, mining, manufacturing, and certain information industries, such as publishing. The wholesaling process is an intermediate step in the distribution of merchandise. Wholesalers are organized to sell or arrange the purchase or sale of (a) goods for resale (i.e., goods sold to other wholesalers or retailers), (b) capital or durable non consumer goods, and (c) raw and intermediate materials and supplies used in production.<sup>4</sup> NAICS 56 Administrative and support and waste management and remediation services experienced employment decrease of 14.4%, followed by NAICS 31-33 Manufacturing, and NAICS 11 Agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting which both decreased by 7.7%.

### Madison County Employment Change 2018-2021

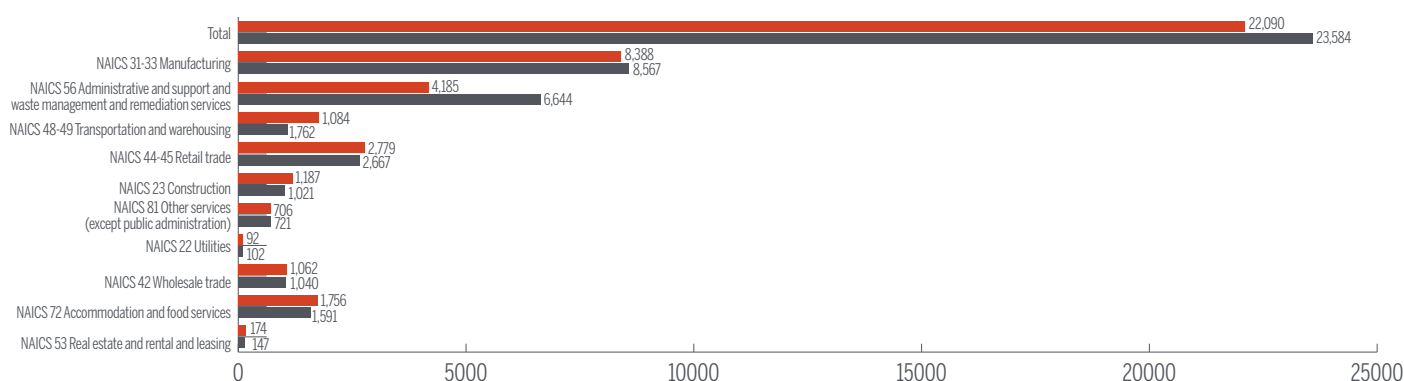


Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics



When evaluating the change in the number of employees for Union County over the span of 2018 to 2021, county employment has decreased by 1,494 jobs. While only four of the top ten industries lost employment over this time frame, the losses in NAICS 56 Administrative and support and waste management and remediation services accounted for a significant number of job losses, totaling approximately 2,459 employees. This industry is defined by the Bureau of Labor Statistics as performing routine support activities for the day-to-day operations of other organizations. These essential activities are often undertaken in-house by establishments in many sectors of the economy. The establishments in this sector specialize in one or more of these support activities and provide these services to clients in a variety of industries and, in some cases, to households. Activities performed include office administration, hiring and placing of personnel, document preparation and similar clerical services, solicitation, collection, security and surveillance services, cleaning, and waste disposal services.<sup>5</sup> Following a similar trend to Madison County, the NAICS 48-49 Transportation and warehousing sector experienced the largest increase in employment, growing by 62.5%. It is important to note that the economic repercussions of COVID-19 are still being felt, and Madison and Union County will likely require a considerable amount of time to transition to their "new normal."

**Union County Employment Change 2018-2021**

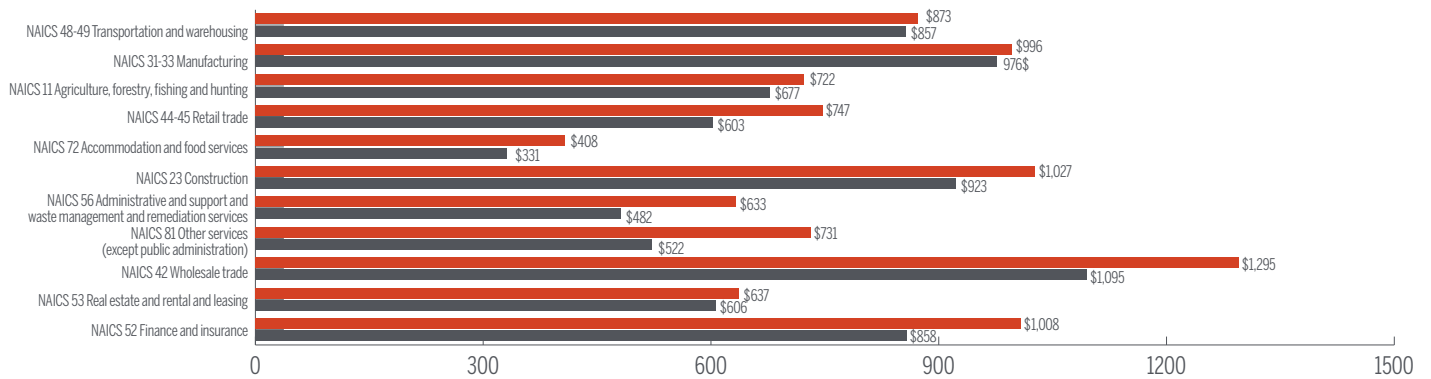


*Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics*

When analyzing trends in employee wages across all industry sectors, Madison County experienced an overall wage growth of 12.6% in the three-year period of 2018 to 2021. When looking specifically at individual industry sector trends of employment, similar wage growth over the same period can be seen. Wages in the NAICS 81 Other services sector saw the largest growth in wages over this period, increasing by 28.6%. NAICS 56 Administrative and support and waste management and remediation services saw the second largest weekly wage increase of 23.8% and the NAICS 44-45 Retail trade sector saw the third largest weekly wage increase over the three-year period of \$19.3%. In total, all average weekly wages in the top ten industry sectors saw increases over this period. Increases in wages over the three-year period point to increased wealth and buying power of employees working in Madison County, which ultimately will benefit the businesses and tax base as employees are able to increase spending and consumption habits across all sectors, including residential housing buying power.



### Madison County Industry Wages Trend

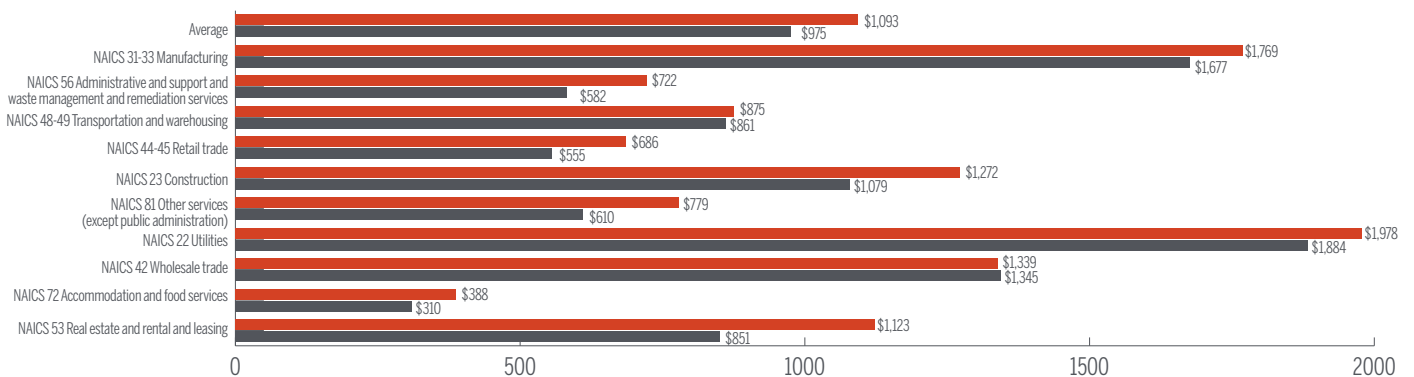


Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

When analyzing Union County trends in employee wages across all industry sectors, the county experienced wage growth of 10.8% in the three-year period of 2018 to 2021. When looking specifically at individual industry sector trends of employment, similar wage growth over the same period can be seen. Wages in the NAICS 53 Real estate and rental and leasing sector saw the largest growth in wages over this period, increasing by 24.2%. NAICS 81 Other services saw the second largest weekly wage increase of 21.6%, and NAICS 72 Accommodation and food services saw the third largest weekly wage increase over the three-year period of 20.1%. Only one industry, NAICS 42 Wholesale trade, decreased in average weekly wages, declining by .4%. All other industries within Union County saw an increase in wages over this time.

The increase in wages in both Madison and Union counties, which both include the village of Plain City, provides a variety of positive quality of life impacts. When wages increase, people who earn low wages can be lifted out of poverty, improving their standard of living and overall well-being. Residents and employees gain new skills and companies often have better employee retention rates. Municipalities also see a rise in consumer spending as residents have more disposable income to spend on goods and services, which can stimulate economic growth and create jobs and benefit small businesses and local Main Street districts. Higher wages can also help people afford better healthcare, which can lead to improved health outcomes and a reduced burden on the healthcare system.

### Union County Industry Wages Trend



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics



# DEMOGRAPHIC, LABOR MARKET, AND WORKFORCE ANALYSIS

A region's workforce is a critical measure of its economic success. The retirement of the Baby Boom generation, private industry undergoing swift transformations, a decline in college enrollment among young individuals, and a general reconfiguration of partnerships between the education and industrial sectors are creating widespread shortages in qualified workforce even in times of high unemployment. Regions that are successful with the retention of a high-quality workforce start with a strategy of targeting good jobs using initial upfront training and job-matching services and create support structures for workers such as childcare and transportation networks plus financial incentives for companies that take such an approach.<sup>6</sup> An examination of a community's workforce includes a review of its size, unemployment rate, education level, occupations, and earnings levels.

Regional Comparison				
Area of Study	Plain City	Madison County	Union County	Ohio
2022 Population	4,383	43,852	65,728	11,820,906
Population Growth 2010 - 2022	9.38%	0.95%	20.43%	2.41%
Population 65+	16.90%	17.10%	13.50%	15.80%
Owner-Occupied Housing Units	68.90%	73.80%	81.20%	67.20%
Median Household Income	\$80,357	\$72,811	\$96,634	\$62,262
Poverty Rate	5.3%	10.2%	4.7%	13.3%

*Source: ESRI Demographics, U.S. Census Bureau*

The village of Plain City had an estimated population of 4,383 in 2022 according to ESRI Demographics. The population of Plain City has increased 10.3% from 2010 to 2022 and is projected to increase another 10.3% from 2022 to 2027, when the population will reach 4,835 residents. It is important to note that our findings indicate that the existing estimates fail to account for various demographic factors and emerging trends that significantly contribute to population growth. These factors have collectively contributed to an increased influx of individuals into the area, leading to a sustained growth trajectory that is not accurately reflected in the current population estimates. Moreover, it is important to recognize the impact of developmental projects and annexations, economic opportunities, and improved infrastructure that have been successful in attracting individuals to the area. These factors have contributed to a heightened demand for housing, services, and amenities, further supporting the notion that the population estimates are unduly conservative.

The median age of Plain City residents is 38.1 and is projected to decrease to 36.5 years of age by 2027 which is a positive projected trend for the community showing younger residents will look to stay or move into the village, setting down roots and becoming an important part of the village demographics. By comparison, the median age of Ohio residents in 2022 was 40.6 and is projected to increase to 41.3 by 2027. Plain City benefits from being a part of the central Ohio region, which is the fastest growing region in the state that is projected to see an increase in population of 2.4% by 2027.

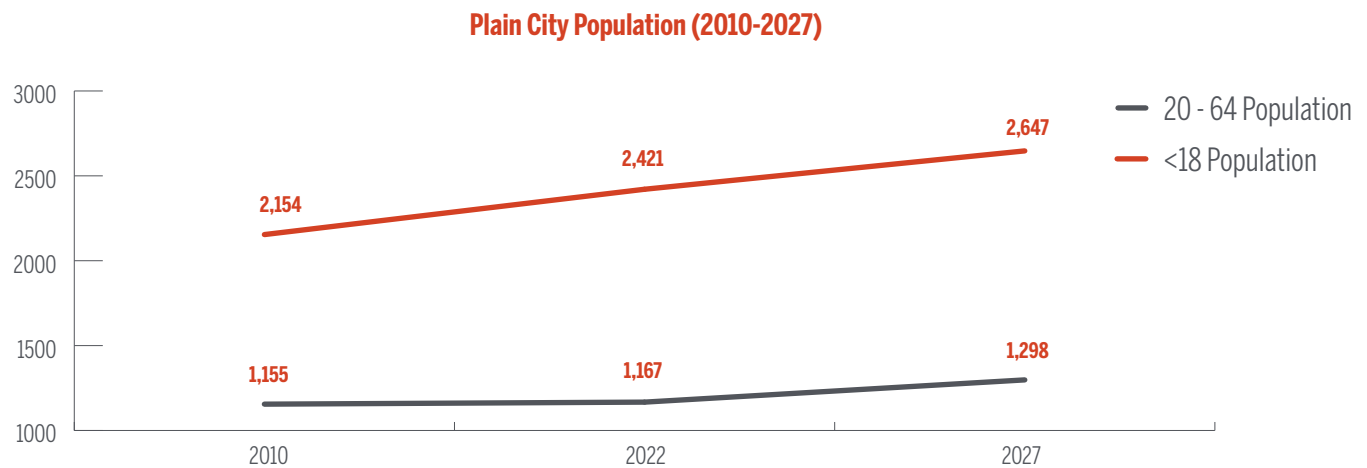


Plain City Population by Age								
2010			2022			2027		
Age Bracket	Number	Percent	Age Bracket	Number	Percent	Age Bracket	Number	Percent
0 - 9	682	17.2%	0 - 9	636	16.0%	0 - 9	709	17.8%
10-19	552	13.9%	10-19	655	16.5%	10-19	714	18.0%
20 - 24	156	3.9%	20 - 24	230	5.8%	20 - 24	279	7.0%
25 - 29	195	4.9%	25 - 29	287	7.2%	25 - 29	287	7.2%
30 - 34	226	5.7%	30 - 34	233	5.9%	30 - 34	346	8.7%
35 - 39	365	9.2%	35 - 39	247	6.2%	35 - 39	274	6.9%
40 - 44	305	7.7%	40 - 44	253	6.4%	40 - 44	267	6.7%
45 - 49	279	7.0%	45 - 49	354	8.9%	45 - 49	266	6.7%
50 - 54	240	6.0%	50 - 54	299	7.5%	50 - 54	353	8.9%
55 - 59	196	4.9%	55 - 59	277	7.0%	55 - 59	303	7.6%
60 - 64	192	4.8%	60 - 64	241	6.1%	60 - 64	272	6.8%
65 - 69	133	3.3%	65 - 69	201	5.1%	65 - 69	234	5.9%
70 - 74	150	3.8%	70 - 74	176	4.4%	70 - 74	185	4.7%
75 - 79	130	3.3%	75 - 79	110	2.8%	75 - 79	156	3.9%
80 - 84	109	2.7%	80 - 84	95	2.4%	80 - 84	91	2.3%
85+	62	1.6%	85+	89	2.2%	85+	99	2.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,972</b>		<b>Total</b>	<b>4,383</b>		<b>Total</b>	<b>4,835</b>	
<18	1,155	29.1%	<18	1,167	26.6%	<18	1,298	26.8%
18+	2,817	70.9%	18+	3,213	73.4%	18+	3,539	73.2%
21+	2,704	68.1%	21+	3,041	69.4%	21+	3,354	69.3%
Median Age	37.4		Median Age	38.1		Median Age	36.5	

Source: ESRI Demographics

A region's workforce is a critical measure of its economic success. Children will become the future workforce, and a growing population ensures a steady supply of labor for the economy. Children represent the future human capital of an area. Investing in their education, healthcare, and overall development ensures a skilled and productive workforce in the long run. By providing quality education, the youth gain knowledge, skills, and abilities that contribute to economic growth and innovation. This means that the economy can continue to grow and produce goods and services that people need. Children also play a significant role in consumer spending. Families with children traditionally purchase more goods and services than those without children, which can stimulate economic growth. Children also have their own preferences and desires, which can influence what products are produced and marketed in a community and region. As the population ages, there will be fewer people of working age to support the growing number of retirees. Having children ensures that there will be a larger pool of taxpayers to support social security and other government programs. Approximately 26.6% of the Plain City population is under the age of 18, which is higher than Union County, 24.5%, Madison County, 19.8%, and the state of Ohio, 20.9%. This percentage of residents is projected to increase in Plain City by 11.2% by 2027. Plain City also has a base of residents that are in the prime working age of 20-64 with 2,421 residents falling in the 20-64 years old age cohort. The number of residents in their prime working years in Plain City is projected to increase by 9.3% by 2027.





*Source: ESRI Demographics*

The educational attainment of a region is highly important as it relates to the availability of a skilled workforce that is aligned with major employers both within a community and within a labor shed. Those regions with a high concentration of college educated workers are primed to retain and attract high-wage, white collar jobs in financial services, information technology, health care and professional service firms that drive many successful economies. Furthermore, education also plays a pivotal role in promoting social cohesion and inclusivity. It serves as a catalyst for fostering understanding, empathy, and respect among diverse individuals and cultures. Educational institutions provide platforms for collaboration, dialogue, and the exchange of ideas, promoting social integration and creating a sense of belonging within the community. Overall, an educated citizenry is better equipped to address societal challenges and drive positive change. Education cultivates critical awareness of societal issues, encourages active civic engagement, and fosters a sense of responsibility towards the community. Well-educated individuals are more likely to participate in democratic processes, volunteer for community initiatives, and contribute to the overall well-being of the community.

95.4% of Plain City residents are high school graduates which is above the averages in Madison County, 88.4%, Union County, 94.4%, the Columbus MSA, 92.4%, and the state of Ohio, 91.7%. Plain City also has a high rate of residents that have obtained a bachelor's degree or higher at 34.6%. This is above the rate in Madison County, 20.0%, and Ohio, 30.7%, but slightly below the rate in Union County at 37.8%, and the Columbus MSA at 39.0%.

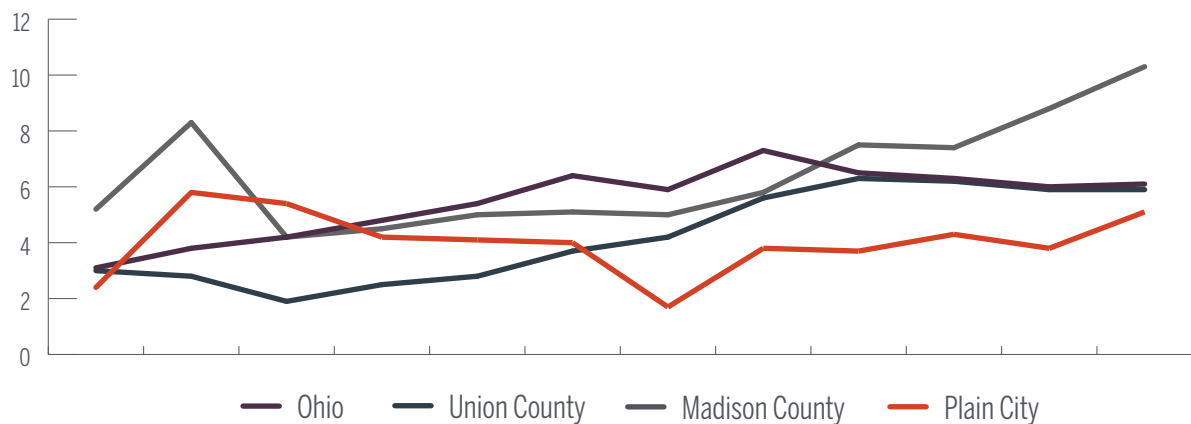
Plain City Educational Attainment Comparison					
Year	Plain City	Madison County	Union County	Columbus MSA	Ohio
Less than 9th grade	0.3%	2.7%	1.2%	2.8%	2.7%
9th to 12th grade, no diploma	4.3%	8.9%	4.5%	4.8%	5.5%
High school graduate (includes equivalency)	31.2%	40.6%	30.7%	26.5%	32.8%
Some college, no degree	24.5%	20.5%	18.8%	19.0%	19.2%
Associate's degree	5.1%	7.3%	7.1%	7.8%	9.0%
Bachelor's degree	19.5%	13.4%	24.7%	24.4%	18.9%
Graduate or professional degree	15.1%	6.6%	13.1%	14.6%	11.8%
High school graduate or higher	95.4%	88.4%	94.4%	92.4%	91.7%
Bachelor's degree or higher	34.6%	20.0%	37.8%	39.0%	30.7%

*Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2022*



While no single number captures all the distinctions in the health of the labor market, the unemployment rate is considered one of the most important economic indicators. Low unemployment rates are often an indication of a growing economy. When more people are employed, there is more demand for goods and services, which can stimulate economic growth. High unemployment rates can lead to social instability and dependence on governmental assistance, as people who are unable to find work may require various unemployment and social assistance needs or become frustrated and turn to crime or other anti-social behaviors. Low unemployment rates can help promote social stability by ensuring that people have the resources they need to support themselves and their families. When more people are employed, there is a decrease in poverty rates as people can earn a living wage and support themselves and their families. This can lead to a reduction in the need for social welfare programs and other forms of government assistance. Except for mid-2018 to mid-2019, Plain City has had a lower unemployment rate compared to the state of Ohio every year since 2010. More importantly, Plain City and the surrounding region of Madison County and Union County fared better than the state in the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. The state of Ohio's unemployment rate nearly doubled from 2019 to 2020, increasing from 4.2% to 8.3%, while Plain City's unemployment rate only increased 0.4% during this same period. The resiliency of the Plain City economy during this recessionary period can be attributed to businesses deemed necessary to operate during the pandemic and a workforce that was engaged in sectors that remained open during the pandemic, such as healthcare, or those that remained employed via remote work models. Regardless, the types of jobs held by residents of Plain City are also resilient and are highly sought after in today's economy.

**Regional Unemployment Rate Comparison (2010-2021)**



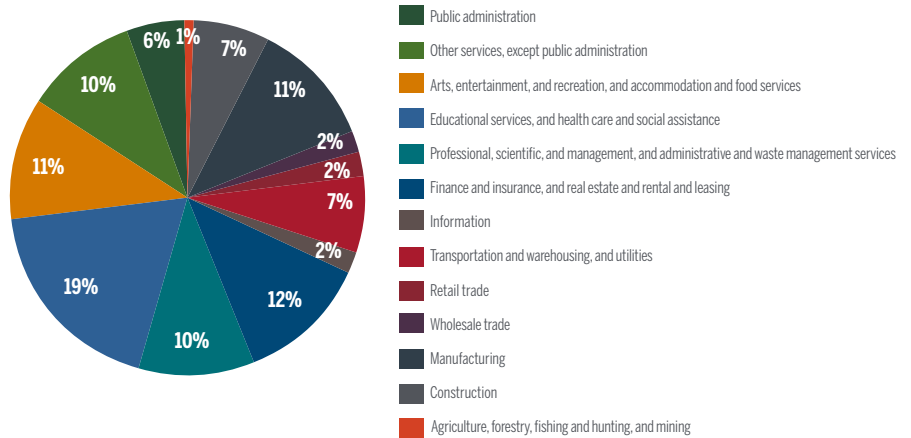
Source: U.S. Census Bureau

According to the United States Census Bureau, Industry is the type of activity at a person's place of work. The major employment sectors of Plain City residents are concentrated in Educational services, and Health care and social assistance, with 18.9% of the workforce in these top sectors. Finance and insurance, and Real estate and rental and leasing represent 12.1% of the workforce; Manufacturing, 11.4%, and Arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services, 11.0%. These top industries represent a 53.0% share of the Plain City industry employment composition. The smallest three industry sectors are in the Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining, 0.8%, Information, 1.7%, and Retail trade, 2.1%.





### Plain City Industry Breakdown



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

## QUALITY OF LIFE INDEX

Montrose Group's quality of life index (QLI) relies less on traditional cost of doing business measures such as occupational wage rates, construction and real estate costs and other traditional costs of doing business measures that drive larger manufacturing, logistics and industrial or technology based corporate site location projects. Instead, Montrose focuses on aspects regarding social well-being, access to healthcare, educational attainment, and more to display the status of a community. These aspects play an important role in creating a healthy community which in turn produces an impact on the economic status of an area. Many companies are more focused on the long-term prospects for a region to succeed and to be attractive to their workers to live. Overall, the quality of life within a community encompasses various interconnected factors that influence the well-being, happiness, and satisfaction of its residents. By prioritizing physical well-being, fostering social cohesion, promoting economic opportunities, and ensuring environmental sustainability, communities can create an environment where individuals can thrive, fostering a sense of pride and belonging. Recognizing the importance of a high quality of life is pivotal in shaping policies, investments, and initiatives that lead to the overall betterment and success of the community.

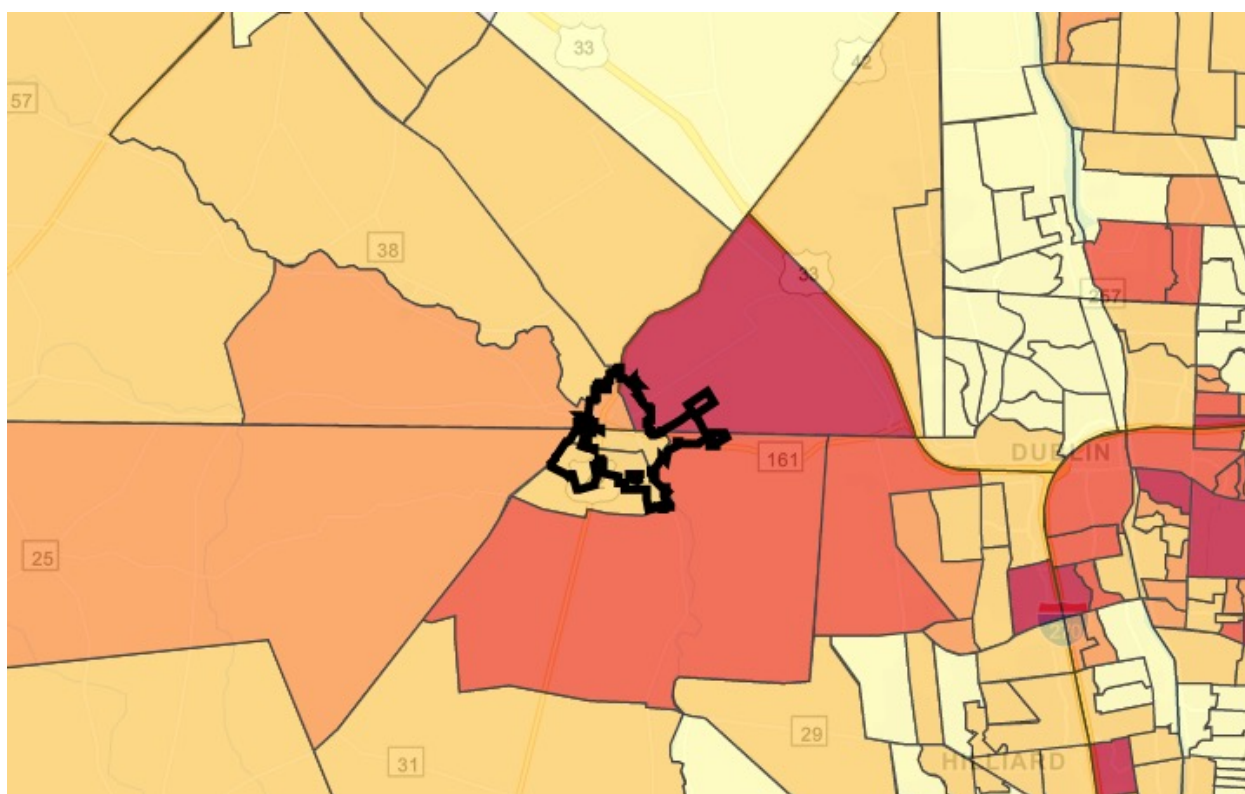
<b>Crime</b> Assesses relative risk of crime in seven major crime areas including personal crime, murder, rape, robbery, assault, burglary, larceny, and motor vehicle theft	<b>Housing</b> Ratio of rental cost compared to income, breakdown of home prices by income, eviction rates, and cost of homeownership	<b>Commute Times</b> Average commute times as defined by U.S. Census Bureau compared to state averages
<b>Walkability</b> U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Walkability Index	<b>Healthcare</b> Analyzes premature deaths, adult obesity, uninsured residents, and Primary Care Physicians per resident	<b>Education</b> Assesses statewide performance index rating, high school graduation rate, high school degree or higher attainment, and Bachelors degree or higher attainment
<b>Wealth</b> Measures per capita income, poverty rate, personal savings, and per capita retail sales		



The Montrose Group Quality of Life Index is a multidimensional analysis that scores key aspects of a community and can be thought of as an analysis of a range of objectively measurable community and social wellbeing conditions in seven key areas that are measured nationally and at the statewide level. Federal, state, and proprietary data sources are used to collect and analyze Quality of Life data which are weighted to generate a community Quality of Life score that is then compared to a baseline score of 100. Communities with a baseline score of 100 or higher have a ranking that meets or exceeds federal and state statistics, a score between 60-80 indicates a good ranking, and so on. Much like the federal location quotient statistic, communities with a higher QLI score have an exceptional competitive advantage over other areas. The QLI analysis should be used to understand strengths and weaknesses and identify opportunities to drive change via community development strategies, private sector engagement, and multi-jurisdictional cooperation. This wide scope makes QLI research a powerful, practical, and effective measure of socioeconomic development policies and actions.

### Plain City Crime Index

#### Plain City Crime Score



Source : ESRI Demographics

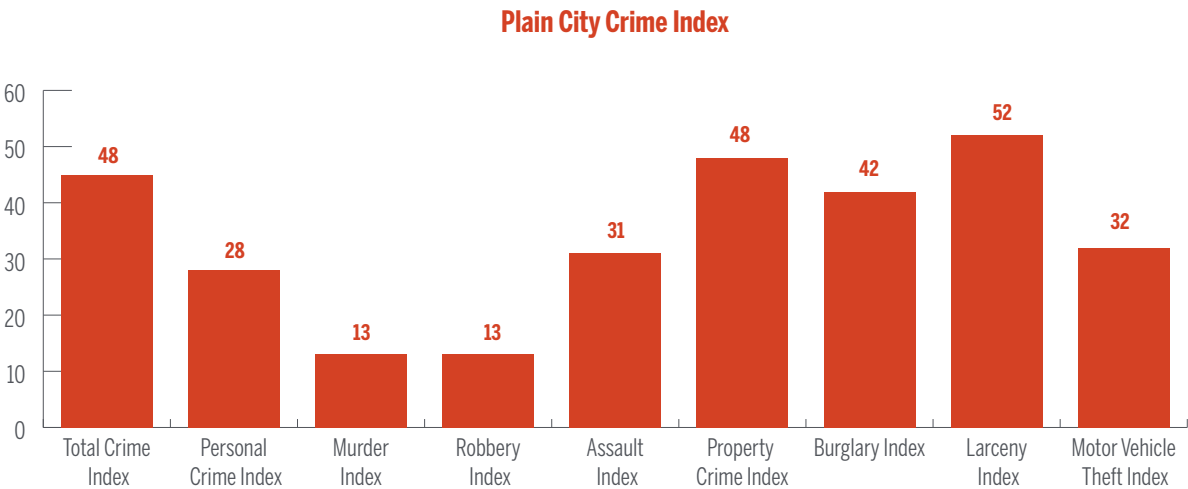
A **Crime Index** provides a view of the relative risk of crime in a community as compared to the rest of the nation using data from resources such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Uniform Crime Reporting system. According to economic theory, crime should decrease as economic growth and opportunity improve. Communities with lower crime indexes suggest higher labor force participation rates, stable wage rates, and lower risk for business operations. The Crime Index is an indication of the relative risk of a crime occurring and is measured against the overall risk at a national level. Values above 100 indicate the area has an above average



risk of occurring compared to the US. Values below 100 indicate the area has a below average risk of occurring compared to the US.

CrimeRisk is intended to provide an assessment of the relative risk of seven major crime types and their summarization to the block group scale. Relative crime rates are especially important in real estate applications, insurance underwriting, shopping center and stand-alone retail facilities. CrimeRisk is a block group and higher-level geographic database consisting of a series of standardized indexes for a range of serious crimes against both persons and property. It is derived from an extensive analysis of several years of crime reports from most law enforcement jurisdictions nationwide. The crimes included in the database are the “Part 1” crimes and include murder, rape, robbery, assault, burglary, theft, and motor vehicle theft. These categories are the primary reporting categories used by the FBI in its Uniform Crime Report (UCR), except for Arson, for which data is very inconsistently reported at the jurisdictional level.

Crime Indexes provide a view of the relative risk of specific crime types. It is not a database of actual crimes, but rather the relative risk in an area compared to the United States in its entirety. Updated semiannually, the database includes indexes for several categories of personal and property crime. Plain City has a total crime index score of 45, which registers as an Excellent index rating and demonstrates the low relative risk of crime and the overall safety and well-being of the community. An excellent crime index score will be important to the health and wealth of the city, maintaining property values, and the attraction of private sector investment into targeted development areas within Plain City. This score is significantly lower than the state of Ohio’s total crime index score of 97. Overall, Plain City has significantly lower rates of crime in every single measured category in comparison to the state of Ohio averages and the national average.



Source : ESRI Demographics



**Housing** is an essential sector of the economy and makes up the largest component of an individual's wealth at almost a third of the total assets.<sup>7</sup> Quality housing must not only be reflected in the structural aspects of a home, but also in average prices. For individuals, the lower the price, the better. For communities, the higher

the price of housing, the better as property values translate into tax base. However, adequate housing across multiple price points can also facilitate labor mobility within an economy and as communities grow, corresponding growth of residential housing options must also keep pace. When looking at building a better community, housing affordability and availability is key to ensuring mobile talent considers your community as a viable community to live in and there is adequate housing stock to choose from. Plain City residents are spending a lower percentage of overall earnings on housing costs compared to the state averages. On average, Plain City residents spend 24.8% of their monthly income on their mortgage costs. This figure is lower compared to the state average of 26.5%. Renters within Plain City also spend less compared to statewide averages. The Plain City residents spend approximately 15.7% of their yearly income on rent compared to the statewide average of 17.0%. The vacant property rate in Plain City is 7.3%, which is well below the state average of 8.3%. This can be attributed to the high percentage of homeownership in Plain City (68.9%), which is 2.6% higher than the state of Ohio average of 66.3%. Overall, Plain City excels in housing when compared to the state of Ohio averages in all four measured metrics. Housing continues to be a top priority for municipalities around Ohio and especially in central Ohio. Plain City is positioned to obtain a significant amount of residential growth in the coming years.

Housing affordability in Plain City has emerged as a pressing concern, particularly in terms of attracting a diverse workforce from different backgrounds and industries. As the village seeks to foster economic growth and development, it becomes crucial that Plain City addresses this issue and ensures that housing remains affordable for both residents searching for single-family and multi-family housing. Monitoring the affordability of housing options is essential to understand the challenges faced by residents and workers in the area. By recognizing the importance of accessible housing, Plain City can take proactive steps to maintain a healthy balance between supply and demand, implement policies that promote affordable housing initiatives, and collaborate with developers and community stakeholders to find sustainable solutions. Ensuring affordable housing options not only helps attract a diverse range of workers but also contributes to the overall well-being and socioeconomic stability of the community.

Housing Comparison		
Area of Study	County	State
Rent As a Percentage of Income	15.7%	17.0%
Home Cost as a Percentage of Income	24.8%	26.5%
Vacancy Rate	7.3%	8.3%
Owner-Occupied Home Percentage	68.9%	66.3%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

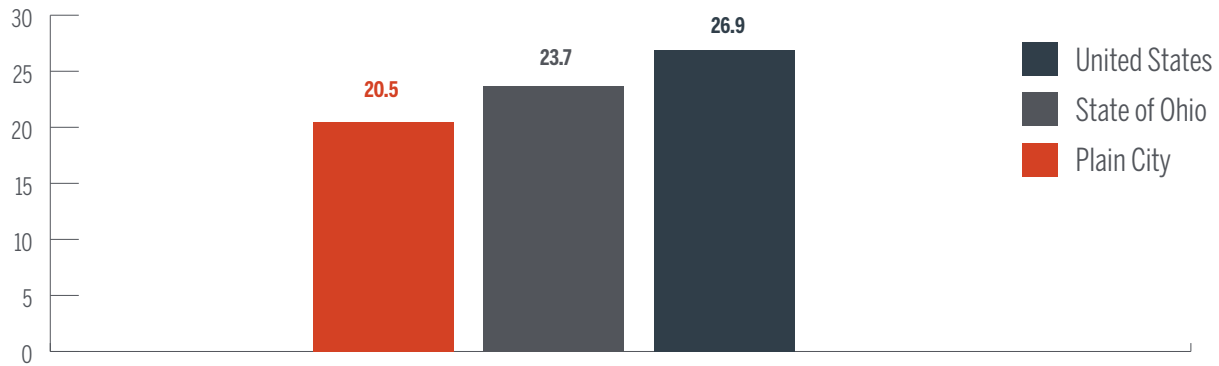
Plain City Commute Index

Plain City Commute Score



**Commuting Times** vary depending on the geographic locations and access to multiple modes of transportation. A diverse transportation network shortens commute times, increases company productivity and competitiveness, and increases access to a broader pool of talent. Arduous commutes may deter talent from considering jobs in each location.<sup>8</sup> As businesses look to communities with quality-of-life features, convenient locations, and ease of travel to work by car, bike, or foot should be considered. Plain City has a significantly lower average commute time in comparison to the state of Ohio and national averages. During an average five-day work week, Plain City residents will spend 32 minutes less commuting to work than the average Ohio resident. Assuming the average citizen works five days a week for 49 weeks out of the year, the average Plain City resident will save 26.13 hours in commuting to work compared to the rest of the state.

### Mean Commute Time Analysis



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Total Commuters by County			
Madison County		Union County	
County Name	Commuters	County Name	Commuters
Madison County	8,427	Union County	15,304
Franklin County	8,320	Franklin County	8,557
Union County	823	Delaware County	1,669

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

### Plain City Walkability Index

#### Plain City Walkability Score

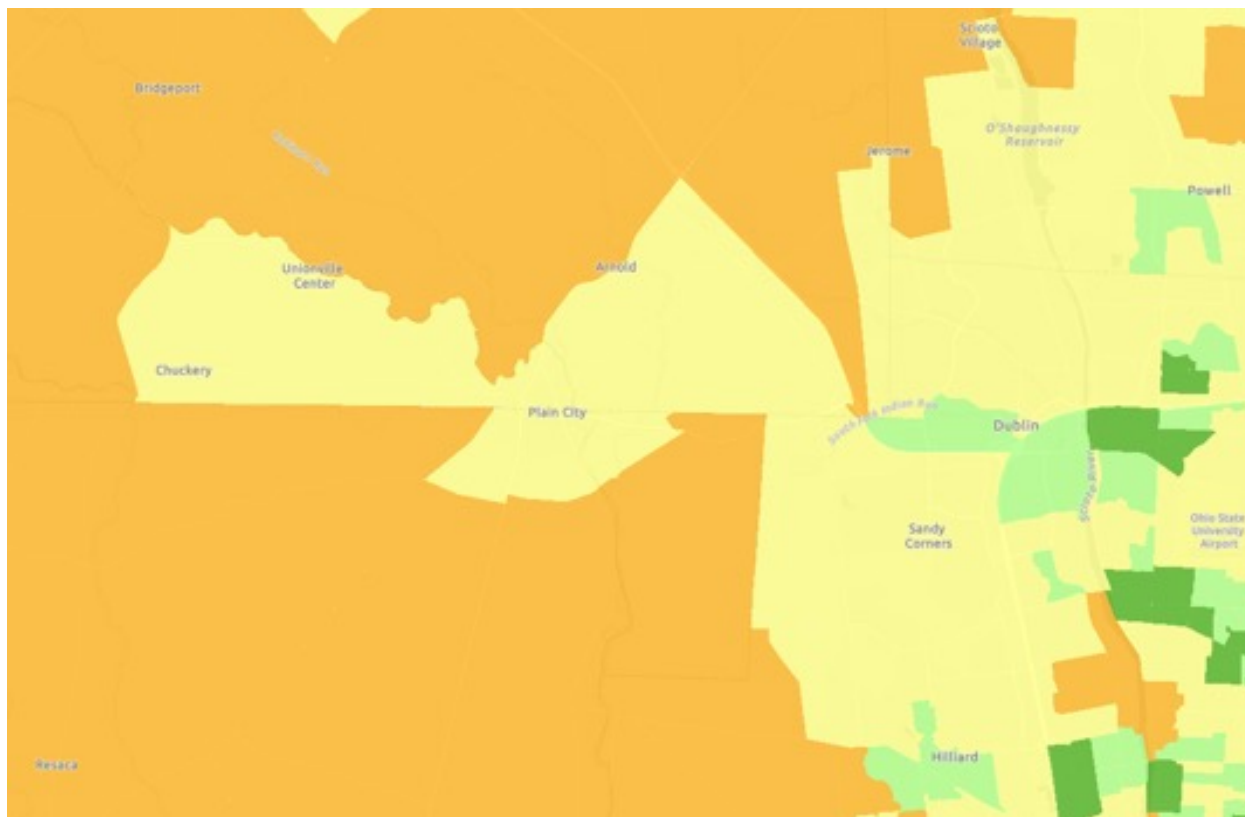


A **Walkability Index** is a nationwide geographic ranking system led by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. The Walkability Index uses selected variables on density, diversity of land uses, and proximity to transit to calculate the ease of walking around. Walkable communities vary depending on population and land mass (urban, suburban, rural) and consider access to public transit. The EPA's Walkability Index covers every census block group in the nation, providing a basis for comparing walkability from community to community. Selected variables incorporated into this index include:

- Intersection density - higher intersection density is correlated with more walk trips.
- Proximity to transit stops – distance from population center to nearest transit stop in meters where shorter distances correlate with more walk trips.
- Diversity of land uses:
  - o Employment mix – the mix of employment types in a block group (such as retail, office, or industrial) where higher values correlate with more walk trips.<sup>10</sup>
  - o Employment and household mix – the mix of employment types and occupied housing such that a block group with a diverse set of employment types (such as office, retail, and service) plus many occupied housing units will have a relatively high value and higher values correlate with more walk trips.



In recent years, Plain City has proactively undertaken measures to enhance its walkability. The village's leadership has recognized the importance of walkability as a key aspect of development and acknowledges the profound impact it can have on the overall well-being of the municipality. To ensure sustained progress, it is strongly advised that Plain City continues to prioritize and prioritize further improvements in walkability in the years to come.



Source: Environmental Protection Agency

### Plain City Education Index

Plain City Education Score  
56



The strategy for communities looking to attract talent and grow population should include an analysis of **Education**. Educational attainment has long been a cornerstone for business retention, expansion, new business attractions, and entrepreneurship. The level of education and occupational skills found in communities traditionally correlates to demonstrated economic growth and stability. Approximately half (51.4%) of all entrepreneurs hold at least a bachelor's degree.<sup>11</sup> From an individual's perspective, higher educational attainment is generally linked to better employment prospects, higher income, and a better quality of life. And from a Placemaking and QLI standpoint, communities should maximize opportunities to attract a skilled workforce that will not only fill existing jobs but will attract new employers and generate entrepreneurial activity that will draw in new entrepreneurs and business start-ups.



The Performance Index is a calculation that measures student performance on the Ohio Achievement Assessments/Ohio Graduate Tests at the 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th and 8th grade levels and English I, English II, Algebra I, Geometry, Integrated Math I, and Integrated Math II.<sup>12</sup> The average performance index school score for Ohio schools in 2022 was 77.1. Jonathan Alder Local Schools was awarded a higher performance index score than the state average with a score of 92.4. In 2021, the statewide four-year graduation rate for the class of 2021 in the state of Ohio was 93.5%, while Jonathan Alder Local Schools reported a graduation rate of 95.6%. Plain City residents are also significantly more educated than the average across the state of Ohio. The percentage of residents in Plain City that have obtained a high school diploma or higher is 4.6% higher than the state of Ohio. While the percentage of residents in Plain City holding a bachelor's degree or higher is 5.6% higher than the state of Ohio average.

Education Comparison		
	Jonathan Alder	Ohio
PI Ranking	92.4	77.1
Graduation Rate	95.5%	93.8%
HS or Higher	95.4%	90.8%
Bachelor's degree or Higher	34.6%	29.0%
Per Pupil Expenditure	10,017.60\$	\$10,289.32

Source: Ohio Department of Education, U.S. Census Bureau

### Plain City Wealth Index

Plain City Total Score



**Wealth** in a QLI analysis considers education and income, however it also looks at the wealth of a community. Is a community's tax base growing? Are property values increasing? Are homeownership rates rising? Are residents actively engaged in the workforce? While these factors are analyzed individually, collectively they paint a picture for the future of a community. Plain City is comparatively better than Ohio and the nation in terms of per capita income, population in poverty, and personal wealth. These factors show that Plain City can create a healthy ecosystem for economic and social growth. Plain City should leverage these elevated population statistics when attracting prospective business opportunities. Low poverty rates and high per capita incomes are two of the main foundations for maintaining a healthy community. These aspects have impacts on a community that help promote small business growth, attract large private investment, and create healthy social interactions. Overall, Plain City is excellent in standing and should continue efforts to generate high-wage jobs and generate wealth in the community.

Wealth Comparison		
Area of Study	Plain City	Ohio
Per Capita Income	\$37,253	\$32,465
Poverty Rate	5.3%	13.4%
Assets	\$218,321.43	\$171,362.32
Earnings	\$1,941.17	\$1,591.09
Liabilities	\$34,484	\$26,057

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, ESRI Demographics





Quality of life is a dynamic concept that ranges over evolving objective and subjective measures. Determining quality of life is crucial to understand a community's overall contentment. Increasing quality of life measures impacts both the social and financial standings of residents. In today's rapidly growing world, it is crucial for Plain City to continue investing in initiatives, capital, and various endeavors that enhance the quality of life for its residents. The reasons for this are twofold: to prevent falling behind as a consequence of this rapid growth and to compete effectively in the region's highly competitive labor market. First, as Plain City experiences significant growth, it is essential to invest in initiatives that improve the quality of life for its residents. Rapid growth can bring about various challenges, such as increased traffic congestion, strain on infrastructure, and decreased access to amenities and services. By investing in initiatives that address these issues, Plain City can ensure that its residents continue to enjoy a high standard of living. Furthermore, by prioritizing capital investments, Plain City can seize the opportunities that rapid growth presents. Infrastructure projects and urban development initiatives can stimulate the local economy, attract businesses, and create jobs. This not only boosts the city's economic competitiveness but also provides employment opportunities for its residents. By investing in capital projects, Plain City can establish itself as an appealing destination for businesses, entrepreneurs, and investors, further driving economic growth and prosperity.

Considering all these factors Plain City can be regarded as having a high quality of life. The village excels in several key areas, including a very low crime rate, a high wealth index, short commute times, and an excellent supply of housing stock. Plain City stands out for its lower crime rates compared to surrounding areas and the state, establishing it as a safe community. The high housing index reflects the affordability of homes, low vacancy rates, and a homeownership rate that surpasses neighboring communities and the state as a whole. It is important to acknowledge that the affordability of housing in Plain City is undergoing a rapid change. While housing has generally been affordable throughout much of Plain City's history, that narrative is shifting. Specifically, Plain City will be required to focus on creating more affordable housing options within the village limits. Despite this challenge, Plain City outperforms the state of Ohio in all measured aspects of quality of life. Presently, Plain City is an excellent place to live from multiple perspectives.

Village of Plain City SWOT Analysis	
<p><b>Strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jonathan Alder is a great resource for attracting business and developers.</li> <li>• Tolles Career &amp; Technical Center is very successful and provides residents with different employment opportunities.</li> <li>• Plain City is going to continue to grow at a significant rate.</li> <li>• The community's current mindset is more open to change, and growth compared to the past.</li> <li>• Plain City government is supportive of new opportunities.</li> <li>• Local businesses are highly successful.</li> <li>• The Big Darby Creek and local parks are a strong asset already in Plain City.</li> <li>• There is strength in being a small town. There is a real local community aspect and feel.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Weaknesses</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is limited infrastructure in Plain City, which is a hindrance to growth capabilities.</li> <li>• There is a lack of services within Plain City <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Professional Services</li> <li>o Childcare</li> <li>o Grocery store</li> <li>o Mechanics</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Plain City has limited resources for new local businesses, which makes it difficult to deal with zoning, permitting, and other aspects of business formation.</li> <li>• There is limited parking within Uptown Plain City.</li> <li>• There is very limited affordable housing options for younger residents. New housing is very expensive.</li> <li>• Increase the connectivity throughout Plain City and the new residential developments.</li> <li>• Plain City is dependent on neighboring municipalities for utilities, land use, services, and more.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Utilize the Big Darby Creek as an attraction and for residents and outdoor enthusiasts.</li> <li>• Plain City should develop and beautify the downtown into a premier destination.</li> <li>• Expand the actual physical boundaries of Uptown Plain City.</li> <li>• Plain City should create a local business directory to provide residents with better access to local businesses.</li> <li>• Create a new identity for Plain City that is different from the old stereotypes.</li> <li>• Embrace what is unique about Plain City.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Threats</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plain City has missed out on business development opportunities due to a lack of readily available land and buildings.</li> <li>• New developments and growth will strain the police and fire districts.</li> <li>• The community is growing faster than the local government. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Plain City needs a local building department.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Plain City is competing with surrounding townships and municipalities.</li> <li>• Falling into the trap of becoming another typical suburb.</li> <li>• There is a threat of uncontrolled growth within Plain City.</li> </ul>



# LISTEN SESSIONS REPORT

In the Spring of 2023, Montrose and the village of Plain City conducted four listen sessions with representatives and leadership in the community. The four groups represented stakeholders from education, government, community members, and business leaders within Plain City. The listen sessions were conducted via one-on-one discussions and stakeholder group discussions and included individuals from various sectors including business, utilities, development, education, real estate, government, elected office, not-for-profit organizations, and residents. Each participant was given a questionnaire ahead of time, included as Appendix A, and asked to provide feedback around each of the questions. The listening sessions were instructive and provided the village of Plain City and Montrose with the opportunity to understand the strengths and weaknesses that exist in the area and what the community wants to see by way of economic development. The challenges and opportunities identified in the listen sessions are outlined in the chart below.

## Village of Plain City Listen Session Challenges & Opportunities

- Live. Work. Play. Village needs to have amenities for all.
- Village lacks professional services. Attorneys, day care, dry cleaner, accountants.
- Be mindful of rural character with future growth.
- Keep downtown historic district in place and attract new investment.
- Need to conserve the Big Darby watershed and use it as a natural resource to attract visitors.
- Economically sustainable with a mix of uses. Light Industrial, Medical, Office.
  - Do not want to attract big box warehouses.
  - Target economic incentives to specific uses.
- Education is key to attracting new residents and businesses.
  - Jonathan Alder, Fairbanks, and Tolles are all actively taking steps to improve educational and facility outcomes.
- Enhance relationships with neighboring townships
- Need a cohesive clear vision that can be communicated to residents.
  - Communicate plan to residents through Village social media and newsletters.
- 10 years from now want people to look back and say this was a well planned, deliberate, pragmatic approach to growth and development.

# THE VILLAGE OF PLAIN CITY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ACTION PLAN

“Do” steps in the Montrose economic development strategic planning report include the creation of an Economic Development Action Plan that outlines specific goals, strategies, and tactics that Plain City should follow to achieve additional economic prosperity outlined in short-term, near-term, and long-term goals tied to specific funding sources. Typical “Do” action steps focus on the creation of industry targets, workforce development strategies, site development strategies, economic development organizational models, and business retention and expansion programs. The Plain City Economic Development Action Plan focuses on how the Village of Plain City implements its economic development strategy, retention, and attraction of a new generation of workers and a diverse industry base to continue the economic success of the city through the adoption of a goal, numerically based outcomes, broad strategies, and specific tactics. Comprehensive economic development plan objectives are numeric measures of success that need to be used annually to determine the success or failure of the plan. These objectives need to align not just with the goal of the plan but also with the strategies and tactics. Metrics are essential to measuring the success of an economic development strategic plan. Reviewing simple measures of success in a silo such as unemployment rate, poverty, and personal income without comparing a region’s economy to others creates a weak measure of success. Successful economic development is not redeveloping a community “eyesore” but creating additional community wealth. The recommended Plain City Goals, Strategies, Objectives, and Tactics for the Montrose Group’s Plain City Economic Development Strategic Plan are in the graphic and discussion below.





## Plain City Strategic Plan Goal

- Plain City will be a community of choice where residents can live, work and play

## Plain City Strategic Plan Strategies

- Plain City should plan for economic growth focused on developing a diversified blend of residential, commercial and retail projects
- Plain City should be focused on economic development that will retain its small town roots while driving the creation of high-wage jobs in the city

## Plain City Strategic Action Plan Objectives

- Double the number of net new jobs created in Plain City
- Double the number of residents living and businesses operating in Uptown Plain City

## Plain City Strategic Action Plan Tactics

- Create a Community Improvement Corporation to focus on larger economic development projects such as Uptown Plain City, operation of the Plain City Future Fund, and the development of the Plain City Industrial Park
- Launch an aggressive redevelopment campaign for Uptown Plain City.
- Create the Plain City Industrial Park to capture high-wage manufacturing jobs.
- Define CEDA agreements for Plain City and the neighboring townships to shape the growth on the edges of Plain City.
- Create a GrowLocal Campaign that helps retain the agricultural history of Plain City.

**Plain City Strategic Plan Goal.** The goal of the Plain City Economic Development Strategic Plan should not be to encourage growth anywhere or to embrace efforts to limit growth. Instead, Plain City should strive to use the creation of high-wage jobs and capital investment to spur investments that make Plain City a community of choice where residents can live, work and play.

**Plain City Strategic Plan Strategies.** For Plain City to be a community of choice where residents live, work, and play, Plain City's Economic Development Strategic Plan needs strategies that help the community focus on economic growth with a diversified blend of residential, commercial, and retail projects in the parts of the village that the community wants the development. This strategy will help Plain City focus on economic development that will retain its small-town roots while driving the creation of high-wage jobs in the city.

**Plain City Strategic Action Plan Objectives.** Plain City's objectives that measure the success of the Plain City Economic Development Strategic Plan should not be based upon population growth- that is coming one way or the other. Instead, Plain City's economic objectives should center on doubling the number of net new jobs and the number of residents living and businesses operating in Downtown Plain City over five years. These objectives will ensure Plain City focuses on the creation of high-wage jobs and capital investment while retaining its small-town character.

**Plain City Strategic Action Plan Tactics.** To achieve the goal, strategies, and objectives of the Plain City Economic Development Strategic Plan, Plain City should implement the following action steps:

1. Create a Community Improvement Corporation to focus on larger economic development projects such as Uptown Plain City, the operation of the Plain City Future Fund, and the development of the Plain City Industrial Park;
2. Launch an aggressive redevelopment campaign for Uptown Plain City;
3. Create the Plain City Industrial Park to capture high-wage manufacturing jobs;
4. Negotiate CEDA agreements for Plain City and the surrounding townships and municipalities to shape the growth on the edges of Plain City; and
5. Create a Grow Local Campaign that helps retain the agricultural history of Plain City.



**Action #1 Plain City should create the Plain City Community Improvement Corporation to create a greater focus on economic development projects.**

Plain City Action Plan Tactics Timeline							
Strategy / Action Items / Projects		Priority	Timeline				
Description		L   M   H	0-12 mos.	1-3 yrs.	3-5 yrs.	5+ yrs.	On-going
Action #1	Establish a Community Improvement Corporation	HIGH					
Item							
1.1	File Articles of Incorporation		X				
1.2	Adopt a Code of Regulations		X				
1.3	Recruit a Board of Directors		X				
1.4	Allocate \$100,000 annually from Village			X			X

How a community operates its economic development program is just as important as what that community's strategy is. The growth of Plain City, Union and Madison Counties, and the Central Ohio region demand that Plain City enhance the operation of their economic development program. One tool that can enhance the operation of Plain City's economic development program is the creation of a Community Improvement Corporation (CIC).

A Community Improvement Corporation is a not-for-profit corporation authorized by the State of Ohio for the purpose of advancing, encouraging, and promoting the industrial, economic, commercial, and civic development of a community or area. The State of Ohio Legislature enacted the ability to form a CIC over forty years ago, and there are now over 235 CICs active statewide.<sup>13</sup> An Ohio CIC can have the following powers if designated by a municipality or village: borrow money for any purpose of the corporation; acquire, convey, dispose of, hold, lease, purchase, receive, sell, sublease, and/or transfer real and personal property; acquire associations, business, corporations, firms, goodwill, joint stock companies, other assets of any persons, partnerships, real and personal property, rights, and trusts, to acquire improved or unimproved real estate for the purpose of constructing industrial plants or other business establishments thereon or for the purpose of disposing of such real estate to others in whole or in part for the construction of industrial plants or other business establishments, to do all acts and things necessary or convenient to carry out the powers especially created in Chapter 1724 of the Revised Code, and to serve as an agent for grant applications and for the administration of grants. CICs are established by filing Articles of Incorporation with the Secretary of State of Ohio. The Articles must designate a Statutory Agent, location, and purpose. The Attorney General of Ohio reviews and approves the Articles of Incorporation. The CIC must also adopt a Code of Regulations. A CIC is governed by a Board of Directors and Officers. There is no limit to the size or manner of appointment of members to the Board of Directors, except that if the CIC is a "designated agency" for a local government, then at least 40% of the Board must be elected or appointed by officials of the political subdivision(s) which established the CIC. Typically, CICs are established so that they can act as "designated agents" for local governments, and perform and provide economic development programs and assistance on their behalf.



## Powers of Ohio CICs

- To prepare an Economic Development Plan for industrial, distribution, and research development in conformance with the Plan
- To insure mortgage payments
- To incur debt, mortgage property and issue obligations for the purpose of obtaining, constructing and approving buildings, properties and sites. The debt is not the debt of the township
- To promote and encourage growth of industrial, commercial, distribution, and research facilities
- To buy or sell land at or below fair market value without advertising or bidding
- To convey public property to a CIC without advertising or bidding

As mentioned above, a wide range of smaller communities created CICs to support and not necessarily to replace their local economic development program. The logos below illustrate just a few smaller Ohio communities that have formed CICs.



Plain City should take the following steps to create the Plain City CIC:



- File Articles of Incorporation with the Secretary of State of Ohio to create the Plain City CIC that designate them as a Statutory Agent for Plain City with a focus on economic development in Plain City and its purpose is to focus on leading the redevelopment of Uptown Plain City, develop and operate a Plain City revolving loan fund for small businesses, develop a Plain City Industrial Park and other economic development duties as assigned;
- The Plain City CIC needs to adopt a Code of Regulations that outline the operation of the CIC, board makeup, the process to appoint officers, strategic focus, and other operational aspects of the organization;
- The Plain City CIC should recruit a Board of Directors that reflects the community's commitment to economic development but does not create a conflict of interest for the board members related to their personal or business interests. 100% of the Plain City CIC Board members should be appointed by the Village of Plain City.
- The Plain City CIC should be funded with a budget allocation of \$100,000 annually that will permit the Plain City CIC to hire staff and begin its operation.

Establishing and providing financial support to the Plain City CIC (Plain City Community Improvement Corporation) will bolster the village's capacity to execute the Plain City Economic Development Strategic Plan while minimizing the impact on the already limited resources of the current village staff. The primary emphasis of the Plain City CIC should be on prioritizing initiatives that foster economic development and job creation. Furthermore, it is crucial for the Plain City CIC to actively collaborate with neighboring townships. By taking on this responsibility, the CIC alleviates the workload of the current village staff while driving economic growth. Additionally, fostering collaboration with neighboring townships enables a collective approach towards regional development. Through these actions, the Plain City CIC can contribute significantly to the realization of the village's economic potential and the betterment of its community.

## Action #2: Revitalize Uptown Plain City into a welcoming neighborhood that supports residential and business growth.

Plain City Action Plan Tactics Timeline							
Strategy / Action Items / Projects		Priority	Timeline				
Description		L   M   H	0-12 mos.	1-3 yrs.	3-5 yrs.	5+ yrs.	On-going
Action #2	Revitalize Uptown Plain City into a welcoming neighborhood that supports residential and business growth.	MODERATE					
Item							
2.1	Create a Main Street Program				X		
2.2	Create a TIF District		X				
2.3	Create a Downtown Redevelopment District (DRD)		X				
2.4	Create a Revolving Loan Fund			X			

Plain City's goal of retaining its small-town roots starts with the redevelopment of its downtown (known as the Uptown District). A revitalized Uptown Plain City is a vital strategy for the village to unlock its full economic potential while retaining its small-town feel. With a comprehensive revitalization approach, Plain City can harness the power of urban transformation to drive economic growth, foster community engagement, and cultivate a vibrant and livable urban environment. By investing in downtown redevelopment, Plain City can reimagine its Uptown District as a thriving location for commerce, culture, and social activity. There are currently more than 40 businesses and organizations located within Uptown Plain City. Over the next five to ten years, Plain City should aim to double the number of businesses to 80.



Here are several compelling reasons why downtown redevelopment is crucial for the overall well-being and prosperity of a city:

- **Economic Growth and Job Creation:** Revitalizing downtown areas offers tremendous economic opportunities. By attracting new businesses, retail establishments, and cultural institutions, municipalities can spur job creation and generate increased tax revenue. Redeveloped downtowns become magnets for entrepreneurs, startups, and established businesses alike, fostering an environment of innovation and business growth. The influx of new businesses also stimulates additional economic activities, such as increased tourism, hotel occupancy, and dining options, further bolstering the local economy.
- **Increased Property Values and Tax Base:** Downtown redevelopment often leads to a surge in property values, benefiting both property owners and the city's tax base. As neglected or underutilized properties are revitalized and repurposed, property values tend to rise, attracting new investments and encouraging private development. The subsequent increase in property tax revenue provides municipalities with additional resources to invest in essential public services, infrastructure upgrades, and community projects, ultimately benefiting all residents.
- **Enhanced Quality of Life:** A vibrant downtown contributes significantly to the overall quality of life for residents. By creating walkable and bike-friendly neighborhoods, mixed-use developments, and public gathering spaces, downtown redevelopment fosters a sense of community and social connectivity. Revitalized downtowns often feature parks, plazas, cultural venues, and entertainment options, serving as focal points for residents to gather, engage in cultural activities, and build lasting connections. Additionally, the presence of diverse businesses and amenities within a compact area makes downtowns convenient and accessible, reducing the need for long commutes and promoting a sustainable lifestyle.
- **Preservation of Historic and Cultural Heritage:** Many downtown areas boast rich histories and architectural heritage that reflect a city's identity and cultural roots. Redevelopment projects often prioritize the preservation and adaptive reuse of historic buildings, blending the charm of the past with modern functionality. By safeguarding and promoting historic and cultural assets, cities can foster a unique sense of place, attracting visitors and instilling community pride. These revitalized spaces serve as living history, cultural hubs, and educational resources that contribute to a city's cultural tourism and identity.
- **Sustainable Urban Development:** Downtown redevelopment aligns with principles of sustainable urban development. By focusing on revitalizing existing urban areas rather than expanding into greenfield sites, cities can mitigate urban sprawl, conserve natural resources, and reduce carbon emissions. Compact and mixed-use developments in downtown areas promote energy efficiency, reduce transportation demands, and encourage public transit usage. Moreover, adaptive reuse of existing buildings minimizes waste and promotes sustainable building practices, further enhancing a city's environmental stewardship.

Plain City should take four distinct steps to redevelop the Uptown that include: assist with the creation of a Plain City Main Street Program to provide leadership and programming to redevelop Uptown Plain City; create a Tax Increment Financing (TIF) District to fund essential public infrastructure such as parking; create a Downtown Redevelopment District (DRD) to support the redevelopment in and around certified historic structures; simplify Plain City zoning codes to simplify the process to develop residential development above storefronts and other first story uses of building in Uptown Plain City; create a small business revolving loan fund to act as a recruiting tool for retail and office/co-working space in Uptown Plain City.

### Uptown Plain City Redevelopment Action Steps

- Main Street Program Creation
- TIF Creation
- DRD Creation
- Revolving Loan Fund Development





- Create a Main Street Program.** To support the redevelopment of Uptown Plain City, a Main Street Program should be created modeled after the program operated by Heritage Ohio. The Ohio Main Street Program, administered by Heritage Ohio, works with communities across the state to revitalize their historic or traditional commercial areas.<sup>14</sup> Based in historic preservation, the Main Street approach was developed by the National Trust for Historic Preservation to save historic commercial architecture and the fabric of American communities'-built environment but has become a powerful economic development tool as well.<sup>15</sup> The Plain City Main Street program should be designed to improve all aspects of the downtown or central business district, producing both tangible and intangible benefits. Improving economic management, strengthening public participation, honoring historic preservation and beautification, and making downtown a fun place to visit are critical to recruiting new businesses and residents. Building on Uptown Plain City's inherent assets — rich architecture, personal service, traditional values, and most of all, a sense of place— the purpose behind the Plain City Main Street Program should rekindle entrepreneurship, downtown cooperation, and civic concern. The Plain City Main Street Program should be built upon four key points to create a total image for the community: engaging in investing opportunities that physically expand the footprint of the current downtown, providing the retail/professional area with its necessary market niche, creating a cohesive visual identity unique to the community, and nurturing a cultural ambiance associated with the community's location, appearance, and way of life. The Plain City Main Street Approach should build on existing resources and fostering improved community leadership and support of the Uptown District for the long term. It should focus on building a downtown organization, enhancing the design elements of Uptown Plain City to ensure a consistent theme, promoting of the area to shoppers, investors, and visitors, expanding and diversifying the economic base, converting underutilized space into productive space, and further enhancing the competitiveness of local businesses. In the past, the Uptown Plain City Organization (UPCO) operated as a successful entity with the goal of promoting Uptown Plain City. Unfortunately, due to insufficient funding, lack of Village support, and volunteer burnout, the organization ceased operations in 2021. Therefore, it is crucial to extend the necessary level of support to the newly established Plain City Main Street Program to ensure the success of this new group moving forward. Funding should be provided to retain staff to operate the Plain City Main Street Program.
- Create an Uptown Plain City TIF District.** TIF is an economic development mechanism available to local governments in Ohio to finance public infrastructure improvements and, in certain circumstances, residential rehabilitation.<sup>16</sup> TIF works by locking in the taxable worth of real property at the value it holds at the time the authorizing legislation was approved, and payments derived from the increased assessed value of any improvement to real property beyond that amount are directed toward a separate fund to finance the construction of public infrastructure defined within the TIF legislation.<sup>17</sup> A TIF District may be comprised of specific parcels or an "Incentive District." An Incentive District TIF is defined as (a) an aggregation of individual parcels of real property comprising an area no larger than 300 contiguous acres, and (b) exhibits one or more characteristics of economic distress, as listed in § 5709.40(A)(5) of the Ohio Revised Code. Municipalities, townships, or counties may establish these Incentive Districts.<sup>18</sup> The service payments collected through an Incentive District TIF can be used to fund public infrastructure improvements anywhere within the district, even if the public infrastructure does not directly benefit every parcel within the district.<sup>19</sup> Local governments may authorize Incentive District TIFs to fund a number of public infrastructure needs including public roads and highways, water and sewer lines, remediation, land acquisition, demolition, the provision of gas, electric, and communications service facilities, and the enhancement of public waterways.<sup>20</sup> Along with public infrastructure improvements previously noted, service payments generated from private improvements in an Incentive District TIF may be used to fund residential housing renovation projects as long as the TIF includes a public infrastructure component.<sup>21</sup> A taxpayer whose operations are located within an Incentive District TIF continues to make payments to the jurisdiction in an amount equal to the real property tax liability that otherwise would have been due had the property not been exempted.



These payments in lieu of taxes, or service payments, are collected by the county treasurer in the same manner as real property taxes, but are deposited into separate public improvement tax increment equivalent funds.<sup>22</sup> A local political jurisdiction may exempt the value of private improvements from real property taxes up to 75 percent for a term of up to 10 years without authorization of the impacted school board (s).<sup>23</sup> In those municipalities that levy their own income taxes, if the respective project receiving assistance generates annual payroll for new employees of \$1,000,000 or more, legislatively authorized Incentive District TIFs must be accompanied by revenue sharing agreements with the affected city, village, and/or exempted school board(s).<sup>24</sup> If a municipality and the impacted school board(s) fail to execute an acceptable compensation agreement within six months following the passage of the legislation, the municipal income tax revenues generated from the new employees be divided on a 50/50 basis between the two parties.<sup>25</sup> Municipalities create TIFs must notify their county commissioners of the plans for the TIF. The county may accept or object, through legislation, to the rate and/or term of the exemption proposed under the Incentive District TIF and certify this legislation to the local jurisdiction within 30 days of notice receipt.<sup>26</sup> If the county does not object, the municipality or township may adopt the Incentive District TIF and no compensation is thereafter payable to the county. If the county objects to the rate and/or term, a negotiation between the county and local jurisdiction may be made that will provide compensation to the county.<sup>27</sup> The compensation may not exceed the property taxes foregone by the county as a result of the exemption, and, if following an objection no compensation agreement is reached, the legislation creating the Incentive District TIF must provide compensation to the county in the 11th and subsequent years of the exemption period.<sup>29</sup> The compensation will be equal to 50% of the county's foregone taxes or, if the objection was to the exemption percentage in excess of 75%, the compensation will be equal to not more than 50% of the county's property taxes foregone that are in excess of the 75% exemption.<sup>30</sup>

Plain City should create an Uptown TIF to support the development of public infrastructure and housing needed for the redevelopment of the Uptown District. Plain City should take the following steps to create the Uptown Plain City TIF:

- a) Complete a fiscal analysis to determine the amount of revenue a TIF could generate;
- b) Identify potential public infrastructure improvements;
- c) Determine the appropriate term of the TIF;
- d) Notify local school districts and meet to gather their support;
- e) Negotiate compensation agreements between the Village and school districts;
- f) Provide notice to impacted property owners;
- g) Notify the county commissioners at least 45 days prior to acting on the TIF; and
- h) Adopt appropriate authorizing legislation.

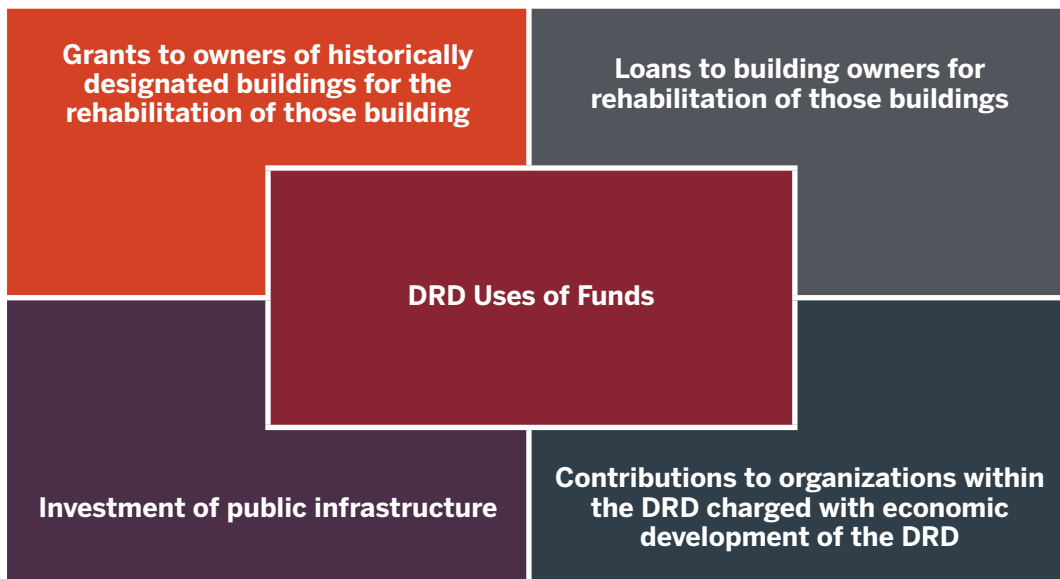
- **Create Plain City DRD.** Plain City needs to utilize historic preservation economic development tools in Uptown Plain City to spur investment but also to preserve the character of the community that redeveloped historic structures provide. Ohio's Downtown Redevelopment (DRD) program is an important historic preservation redevelopment tool.



## Ohio Downtown Redevelopment District Process



Ohio's DRD law permits municipalities to redirect up to 70% of future property tax growth in a 10-acre continuous district that includes a certified historic structure or buildings in a historic district. DRDs do not raise property taxes, but rather redirect a portion of revenues to support future growth. DRDs encourage the preservation of historic properties and spur new capital investment and job growth in Ohio municipalities. DRDs redirect property tax revenue for one of four uses: grants to historic properties, loans to non-historic properties, public infrastructure, and operations of economic development organizations. DRDs can be used for the redevelopment of property for a range of uses including commercial, office, mixed-use, retail, and industrial, and for residential that is in a mixed-use area.



A DRD must be anchored by a historic property or a historic district. Uptown Plain City is home to one historic structure, the Farmers National Bank, located at the southwest corner of Main and Chillicothe Streets. The property was added to the National Historic Register on March 9, 1995. The national register reference number is 95000168. The significant dates for this building are 1902 and 1930, and the periods of significance are 1900 – 1924 and 1925 – 1949. DRDs have a maximum allowable area of ten acres. Plain City should use the historic Farmers National Bank building as the anchor property in its DRD. Three sample maps are provided below to illustrate the size and scope of a potential Plain City DRD.





### Sample Plain City Uptown Redevelopment District #1



### Sample Plain City Uptown Redevelopment District #2



### Sample Plain City Uptown Redevelopment District #3



- **Develop a Plain City Revolving Loan Fund.** Plain City should create a revolving loan fund to support the development of small businesses in the community. A revolving loan fund (RLF) is a type of financing mechanism that provides loans to borrowers for specific purposes, such as business development, community projects, or housing initiatives. It is called a "revolving" fund because typically the money repaid by borrowers is reinvested into the fund, allowing it to be continually recycled or "revolve" to provide loans to new borrowers.



The key characteristic of a revolving loan fund is that the principal and interest payments from previous loans are used to make new loans, creating a self-sustaining cycle of lending. As borrowers repay their loans, the funds become available for redistribution to other individuals or organizations in need of financing. Revolving loan funds are commonly used by governments, non-profit organizations, and financial institutions to support economic development, entrepreneurship, affordable housing, and other initiatives that aim to stimulate local or regional growth. These funds often target underserved communities or sectors that may have difficulty accessing traditional financing. The terms and conditions of revolving loan funds vary depending on the specific program or organization managing the fund. Interest rates, loan amounts, repayment periods, and eligibility criteria are typically defined by the fund administrators based on the fund's objectives and the financial viability of the projects or borrowers being considered.

There are numerous municipalities throughout the United States that have adopted a revolving loan fund program to assist their economic development efforts. The adoption of revolving loan fund programs was expedited due to the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. The profound impact that the pandemic had on small businesses created the opportunity for local governments to create new ways to support small business.

Ohio Revolving Loan Fund Benchmarking			
Area of Study	Loan Information	Loan Committee	Other Information
Delaware County	<p>\$3.25 million in total funds.</p> <p>4% interest rate with \$1,000 flat fee.</p> <p>Loans from \$10,000 to \$50,000 are available.</p> <p>Interest only payments are required for the first six months</p>	<p>The County has partnered with Powell-based Buckeye State Bank to administer the program.</p> <p>The County has partnered with the Delaware County Finance Authority to help manage the RLF process.</p> <p>The loans are administered through a six-member local Delaware County Economic Recovery Advisory Team.</p>	<p>The Delaware County Finance Authority, Orange Township, and Liberty Township all contributed \$250,000.</p>
City of Bowling Green	<p>Interest rates will be fixed at 2/3 of prime interest as quoted by the Wall Street Journal on the day of closing for the duration of the loan.</p> <p>The only loans available are fixed asset loans to manufacturers, industry and commerce in Bowling Green, Ohio for acquisition of an existing business, inventory and equipment purchase and/or repair or working capital.</p> <p>At least one full-time permanent position or full-time equivalent (2,080 hours annually) must be created for every \$35,000 of program funds requested.</p> <p>The applicant must demonstrate that the proposed project is viable, and the business will have the economic ability to repay the funds.</p>	<p>A five-member Revolving Loan Approval Board (LAB) will administer the operation of the fund, review and approve applications.</p> <p>The loan board currently consists of four local business representatives from finance, real estate, and legal institutions as well as a Bowling Green Economic Development representative.</p>	<p>The area served by the RLF Program shall be the corporation limits of the city of Bowling Green.</p> <p>All RLF loan recipients must be private, for-profit enterprises located in the city or planning to locate within the city's limits.</p> <p>The city also offers micro loans for businesses seeking \$10,000 or less.</p> <p>The micro loan may be used for working capital, equipment purchase/repair, or inventory.</p>
City of Youngstown	<p>The standard maximum loan amount is \$150,000.</p> <p>Interest rates on loans will be fixed. The standard RLF interest rate on RLF loans will be determined based on the project and collateral. The standard rate will be two points below prime, but not less than 3%.</p> <p>Loans will be a minimum of five years preceded by a 12-month interest only period.</p>	<p>The fund is managed by the Economic Development Loan Committee comprised of at least five people chosen by the VP Board of Directors from the membership, community development stakeholders.</p> <p>Each member of the Loan Committee shall serve for a term of three years or until such organization shall cease to function.</p>	<p>The administrative support for the fund will be provided by VP's Lending Team Staff. VP uses Ventures+™, a loan management software program to manage its loan portfolio and administrative activity, including ACH loan payments.</p>



Plain City should create the Plain City Tomorrow Fund in partnership with local financial institutions. It should engage its CIC to operate the program. The Plain City Tomorrow Fund will be a gap financing measure primarily used for the development and expansion of small businesses located in Plain City. It will be a self-replenishing pool of money, utilizing interest and principal payments on old loans to issue new ones. The Plain City Tomorrow Fund should be established as a revolving loan fund that provides access to a flexible source of capital that can be used in combination with more conventional sources. The Plain City Tomorrow Fund will not replace traditional bank financing but will be a bridge between the amount the borrower can obtain on the private market and the amount needed to start or sustain a business. For example, a borrower may obtain 60 to 80 percent of project financing from other sources.

The Plain City Tomorrow Fund may issue loans at market or otherwise competitive and attractive rates with flexibility in collateral and terms and competitive interest rates. However, the Plain City Tomorrow Fund should be built on sound interest rate practices and not perceived as a free or easy source of financing. The fund must operate with a business model that generates enough of an interest rate return to replenish the fund for future loan allocations. With competitive rates and flexible terms, the Plain City Tomorrow Fund should provide access to new financing sources for the borrower, while lowering overall risk for participating institutional lenders.

The Plain City Tomorrow Fund could provide loans for the following uses:

- Operating capital
- Acquisition of land and buildings
- New construction
- Facade and building renovation
- Landscape and property improvements
- Machinery and equipment.<sup>31</sup>

The Plain City Tomorrow Fund could provide loan terms that vary according to the use of funds. A loan used for working capital, for instance, may range from 3 to 5 years, while loans for equipment are up to 10 years and real estate loans may last 15 to 20 years.<sup>32</sup> However, the Plain City Tomorrow Fund should focus on terms fixed to the useful life of the asset financed. The Plain City Tomorrow Fund could provide loan amounts that range from small (\$1,000 to \$10,000) to mid-sized (\$25,000 to \$75,000), with larger (\$100,000 to \$250,000 and up) amounts available when the borrower has secured a substantial sum from private lenders.<sup>33</sup>

Finally, the Plain City Tomorrow Fund could gain initial funding, or capitalization, from Plain City in partnership with local financial institutions and philanthropic organizations. Plain City Tomorrow Fund borrowers should be held to standard financial requirements in loan security. The critical steps that should be followed to set up the Plain City Tomorrow Fund include:

- Research existing RLFs and compile samples of application forms, program guidelines, and other materials;
- Invite lenders and potential borrowers to participate in the design process;
- Establish the purpose of the RLF including a needs assessment;
- Set the eligibility requirements for borrowers;
- Determine the allowed uses of funds as well as prohibited uses;
- Set a minimum and maximum amount for the loans;
- Decide if the loans must be matched by existing equity or other sources of funds;
- Determine the length of the loan term, which may vary based on the use of the loan;
- Establish an application fee, origination fee, and policies regarding closing costs;
- Define the default and delinquency terms;
- Decide if the interest rate will be variable or fixed and whether the rate will vary based on the project;
- Develop the loan application form and create a short pre-application form or checklist to help borrowers determine if they are eligible;
- Set up a committee to review loan applications;
- Determine the administrative duties and staffing needs associated with the program;
- Promote the RLF and capitalize with funds from grants and individual donations; and
- Provide loans and technical assistance to borrowers.<sup>34</sup>



Before a loan is issued, a business or prospective business should supply the following documentation:

- Business plan
- Business experience and management information
- Credit history and financial statements
- Sufficient collateral to repay bank and RLF funding
- Other personal or corporate guarantees on the project
- Cash flow projections.<sup>x5</sup>

Plain City Tomorrow Fund borrowers will need to report their economic growth and community revitalization through annual performance measure reports such as the number and type of jobs created or retained; increase in tax revenue; private funding relative to public investment; and benefits to low and moderate-income citizens, from business ownership to job opportunities.

### Action #3: Develop the Plain City Industrial Park.

Plain City Action Plan Tactics Timeline							
Strategy / Action Items / Projects		Priority	Timeline				
Description		L   M   H	0-12 mos.	1-3 yrs.	3-5 yrs.	5+ yrs.	On-going
Action #3	Develop the Plain City Industrial Park	MODERATE					
Item							
3.1	Initial Site Analysis Work			X			
3.2	Understand Potential Infrastructure Availability			X			
3.3	Negotiate Site Ownership Interest			X			
3.4	Advocate State and Local Incentives						X

Industrial parks provide a designated area where businesses from related industries can cluster together. Industrial parks are typically developed with robust infrastructure and tailored services to support industrial activities. They often have well-designed layouts, roads, utilities (such as water, electricity, and telecommunications), and transportation connections. This infrastructure enables efficient logistics, smooth operations, and cost savings for businesses within the park. Additionally, industrial parks may offer shared services such as security, waste management, maintenance, and administrative support, relieving individual companies of these burdens. Industrial parks have a significant impact on job creation and local economies. By attracting businesses, industrial parks generate employment opportunities for both skilled and unskilled workers in the surrounding areas. The establishment of new industries and the expansion of existing businesses within the park stimulate economic growth, increase tax revenue, and contribute to the development of ancillary businesses and service providers. Industrial parks often benefit from streamlined regulatory



processes and simplified permitting procedures. Local governments and authorities may establish expedited approval mechanisms or provide dedicated support to businesses within the park. This facilitates faster setup and expansion of industrial operations, reducing administrative burdens and enabling companies to focus on their core activities. Industrial parks can attract a diverse range of businesses, leading to a cluster effect that enhances regional economic diversification. By having multiple industries co-located, a region becomes less reliant on a single sector, reducing vulnerability to economic downturns. The presence of complementary industries within the park can also create a multiplier effect, where the success of one company or sector positively influences others, fostering overall economic resilience and stability. Developing an industrial park is part economic development strategy part real estate transaction and part local land use and entitlement and incentive process.

#### Industrial Park Development Steps

- Define the industrial growth potential in the region
- Define key industry sector strength of the site and region
- Identify potential sites aligned with key industry targets
- Identify availability of utilities located at the potential sites
- Understand the potential sites infrastructure capacity
- Define the sites skilled and available workforce
- Understand the site's geotechnical and environmental challenges
- Negotiate site ownership interest
- Advocate land use entitlements such as zoning and annexation
- Advocate for local and state economic development incentives

A couple of key indicators illustrate whether a market is growing for the industrial sector that creates demand for an industrial park. One is whether the industrial park is located in a region that is attractive to industry and has a growing population. Plain City has the good fortune to be in the growing Central Ohio marketplace that is highly attractive to industry.

#### Ohio's Strategic Location

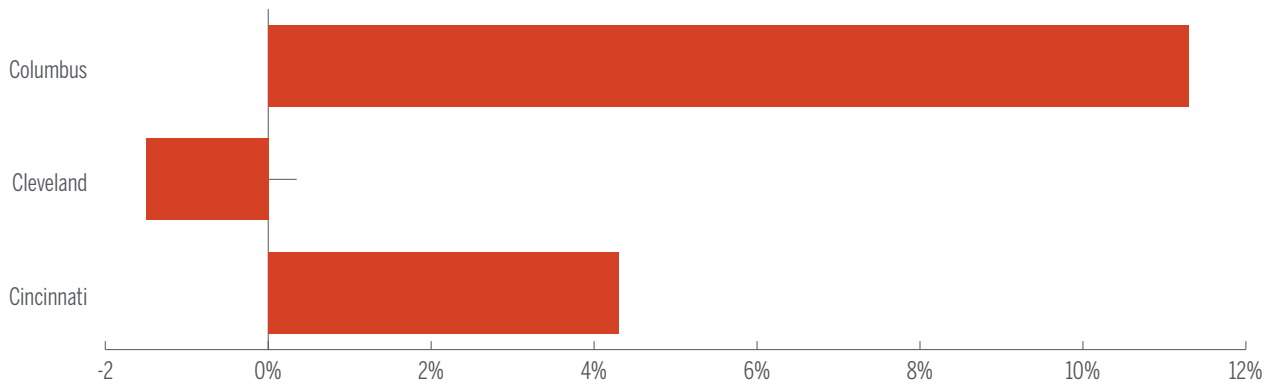
- Within 500 miles of half the U.S. Population
- Connected to largest fresh water source in the world
- Large population base spreadout in the state
- Substantial transportation and educational infrastructure
- Second largest state economic development incentive fund

Plain City is well positioned to attract industry in part because of its strategic location in Central Ohio, which is located within 500 miles of half of the U.S. population. The region has readily-available freshwater, a growing population, a highly developed transportation network, robust utilities, plentiful educational opportunities, and the second largest economic development incentive fund in Ohio. In addition, as the table below illustrates, Plain City not only benefits from its own growth, but its location in Central Ohio is a tremendous economic advantage. The Columbus Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) is the fastest growing of any region in the Midwest. A growing population creates a strong market for industry.



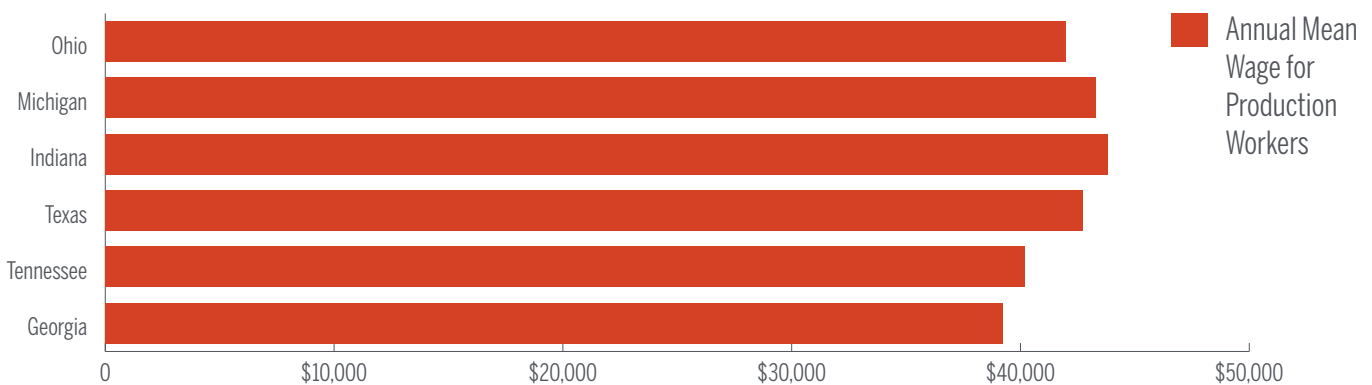


### Population Growth by MSA 2010-19



Central Ohio is also attractive to industry because the state has a competitive industrial wage rate as illustrated by the chart below. Wages are generally the largest cost of doing business factor that a company considers when looking at locations for a potential corporate site location project.

### Annual Mean Wage for Production Workers



While recent inflation and higher interest rates have created some vacancies in some of Central Ohio's larger industrial buildings (+1 million square feet), the region's industrial outlook remains very strong, driven by population growth and large-scale projects such as the Honda LG Electric Battery facility and the Intel "Fab" Chip manufacturing plant announced in 2022. In fact, national real estate brokerage Colliers identified Columbus as one of the hottest industrial markets in the United States. Colliers found Columbus a top 25 industrial market based on inventory, absorption, rent, supply, vacancy, and construction activity, among other factors. It tracked more than 75 industrial markets in the U.S., and noted that the top 25 are "heavily concentrated" in the Midwest.<sup>36</sup> Rent growth was a highlight for the Columbus region as it has seen almost 10% quarter-over-quarter industrial rent growth and more than 30% year-over-year industrial rent growth with both metrics ranked in the top three nationally.<sup>37</sup> Columbus was one of seven markets to post year-to-date new supply of more than 5 million square feet. It joined Dallas-Fort Worth, Texas; Greater Los Angeles; Chicago; Indianapolis; Houston; and Philadelphia, and each market also had more than 14 million square feet under construction at the end of the first quarter.<sup>38</sup> Columbus also was one of nine markets that recorded year-over-year inventory increases greater than 3.4% with Columbus and Houston the only two that saw double-digit increases. Year-over-year inventory growth totaled 17.2%, or 55.9 million square feet in Columbus.<sup>39</sup> The Colliers report also noted that Columbus was one of 15 markets to post year-over-year asking rent increases higher than 15%, and robust levels of speculative construction drove a quarter-over-quarter vacancy increase of 320 basis points in Columbus.<sup>40</sup> Most importantly, based on



the data Colliers' Columbus team is tracking, new construction starts are projected to slow significantly throughout the end of 2023 due to "difficulties developers are having getting necessary financing from lenders and capital partners."<sup>41</sup> The slowdown in private sector speculative industrial projects creates a substantial opportunity for communities seeking to develop their own industrial parks as construction costs and competition for end users with large private sector developers will lessen.

Based upon these economic and market conditions, Plain City should direct their soon-to-be-created CIC to develop the Plain City Industrial Park. The implementation steps for the Plain City Industrial Park include the following:

- Define the industrial growth potential in the region. The Plain City CIC should conduct a market survey through briefings with regional industrial brokers to determine the market opportunities for an industrial park in Plain City that impact not just the industry focus, but the size of the park, water, sewer, road, utilities, and other infrastructure needed at the site.
- Define key industry sector strength of the site and region. Plain City CIC should define the industry market that would find an industrial site in Plain City attractive based on the location of companies in a like industry through the completion of an industry cluster analysis.
- Identify potential sites aligned with key industry targets. The Plain City CIC should next identify potential sites that are available for purchase for use as an industrial park. This may involve land in Plain City or land that could be annexed into Plain City or be part of a joint economic development district.
- Identify the availability of utilities located at potential sites. Potential industrial park sites need to be reviewed to determine the availability, capacity, and cost of service for utility services, as well as the time needed to install these services.
- Define the site's skilled and available workforce. A workforce analysis will need to be completed that outlines the availability and cost of a skilled workforce.
- Understand the site's geotechnical and environmental challenges. Potential sites need to be reviewed for potential geotechnical and environmental challenges. This will require reviews by engineering consultants with expertise in these areas.
- Negotiate site ownership interest. Plain City must decide whether they want the CIC to own the Plain City Industrial Park or have a friendly third party own and develop the site. A private land speculator offers the advantage of gaining the experience of a real estate and development professional who can develop an industrial park. However, the agreement with the Plain City CIC and the land speculator or developer needs to establish the development plan for the site plus the price the land or speculative building will be sold for. Either party must then enter into a Purchase Service Agreement (PSA) to gain an option to purchase the land where the Plain City Industrial Park will be located.
- It is important to note that the opportunity exists for Plain City to partner with third party industrial developers for the development of a Plain City industrial park. In this case, it is crucial that Plain City be proactive in their zoning, permitting, and design regimen to ensure that the industrial park is feasible, successful, and in the best interest of the community.
- Advocate land use entitlements such as zoning and annexation. Plain City must enact the required land use entitlements such as annexation, if needed, and zoning as required.
- Advocate for local and state economic development incentives. As the last step prior to marketing the site, Plain City needs to gain local, and state economic development incentives as outlined below.
- Finally, when the Plain City Industrial Park is completed, a marketing campaign needs to begin that includes the development of a brand name for the park, a strong web site, social media campaign, promotion with regional industrial commercial brokers, One Columbus, county partners, and JobsOhio.



### **Ohio Enterprise Zone Tax Abatement**

- Local government negotiated real and personal property tax exemptions to businesses making investments that are in conjunction with a project that includes job creation

### **Ohio Community Reinvestment Tax Abatement**

- Local government negotiated real property tax exemptions to businesses making investments in targeted areas

### **Municipal Job Creation Tax Credit**

- Ohio municipal income tax credit competitively awarded based tax credit based upon company's job creation and capital investment

### **Ohio Job Creation Tax Credit**

- Refundable and performance-based tax credit calculated as a percent of created payroll and applied toward the company's commercial activity tax liability awarded to companies creating at least 10 jobs (within three years) with a minimum annual payroll of \$660,000 and that pay at least 150 percent of the federal minimum wage

### **JobsOhio Economic Development Grants**

- Grants for the improvement of worker skills and abilities in the state of Ohio awarded based upon a company's job creation, additional payroll, fixed-asset investment commitment, project return on investment, and project location

### **JobsOhio Workforce Development Grants**

- JobsOhio workforce grants competitively awarded based upon a company's job creation and capital investment

### **Ohio Data Center Tax Abatement**

- Data Center Tax Abatement provides a sales-tax exemption rate and term that allow for partial or full sales tax exemption on the purchase of eligible data center equipment. Projects must meet minimum investment and payroll thresholds to be eligible. Final approval of the tax exemption is contingent upon the approval of the Ohio Tax Credit Authority.

### **JobsOhio Revitalization Program**

- \$500,000 to \$5M in loans and \$1M in grants for redevelopment of sites create or retain at least 20 jobs for public or private sector applicants for site demo, environmental remediation, building construction, infrastructure and environmental testing

### **Joint Economic Development Districts**

- Joint Ohio townships and municipalities served territory and capture potential income tax at the site to fund its infrastructure and public services

### **Ohio 629 Roadwork Grants**

- Grants for public roadway improvements for manufacturing, research and development, high technology, corporate headquarters, and distribution projects that create jobs

### **Ohio Site Inventory Program**

- \$50M annually in JobsOhio grants for speculative office or industrial projects site development costs

### **Tax Increment Financing**

- Local governments program that defines districts to capture future assessed value of property tax for the use on public infrastructure





The use of economic development tax incentives is critical to the success of the Plain City Industrial Park. The findings of an audit of Union County's use of tax abatements from several years ago illustrated that the Union County EZ and CRA programs have been successful in meeting the goals of its Economic Development Incentive Policy. Union County and its municipalities over the past 20 years have adopted 20 Enterprise Zone (EZ) agreements that:

- created 470 jobs
- retained 1,128 jobs
- created over \$73M annually in payroll
- created \$7,437,819 in income tax
- created real property investment of \$165,462,745.34
- personal property investment of \$166,791,154.44
- abated property taxes of \$20,625,703.73
- created property taxes of \$6,844,197.63.

The Union County projects granted an EZ over the last two decades have created on average 23 new jobs, retained on average 56 jobs, created an average payroll of \$3.6 million, and an average capital investment of \$16.6 million. Of the projects where the tax abatement has expired, 6 of the 12 projects achieved their job commitment goal. Those that did not meet their job commitment goal were short by only 2-6 jobs. Only one company or 5% of the companies did not meet its payroll goal. All but 2 companies met their capital investment goal. Four projects were terminated before the end of their tax abatement term due to a lack of jobs, payroll, capital investment, or a change in economic conditions for the company.

Moreover, it is recommended that the Plain City Industrial Park be granted a 100% property tax abatement under the Community Reinvestment Area (CRA) for a period of 15 years, accompanied by a non-school Tax Increment Financing (TIF) agreement for 30 years. This arrangement would facilitate the funding of public infrastructure for the industrial park. By implementing this tax abatement and TIF strategy, the Plain City Industrial Park would be aligned with other industrial sites in Central Ohio, as demonstrated in the table below. To further support economic growth, Plain City should establish an Enterprise Zone (EZ) program and expand its existing CRA program. Additionally, the municipality should develop an incentive policy that promotes streamlined development processes while safeguarding the interests of tax-paying authorities. This comprehensive approach will stimulate development, attract investments, and foster a business-friendly environment in Plain City.

Tax Abatement Benchmarking					
Community	Type	Rate	Term	PILOTs	Companies
Morrow County	CRA, EZ, and TIF	50%-75% CRA & EZ 75%-100% TIF	10-15 years 10-30 years	TIF agreement policy under consideration	Dollar Tree, H&M, LSI, American Lumber, Alum Creek
Medina County	CRA and EZ, post-94 and pre-94	50%-100%	10-15 years	Income tax sharing with schools; 50% of all new income tax for abatements over 50%	Isomer, Atlantic Tool & Die, Blair Rubber Companies, MTD Group
Pickaway County, Rickenbacker	CRA, post-94	100%	15 years	School PILOT payment based on \$28/PSF building value 30% of non-tax abatement value to school; JEDD income tax pays for infrastructure	NorthPoint Development, Duke Realty, BASF, Goodyear, Amazon, Hyperlogistics
Licking County, Etna Township	CRA, post-94	100%	15 years	Income tax sharing with schools; 50% of all new income tax generated through JEDD	Kohl's Distribution, ProLogis Development, Amazon, Coty, Inc.
Delaware County	CRA, post-94, TIF	50%	15 years	Income tax sharing with schools; 50% of all new income tax in JEDD; 50% CRA in years 1-10, TIF for remaining 20 years	Mixed-use development, Ohio Health, OSU Medical Center, Evans Farms, Kerbler Farms



Tax Abatement Benchmarking					
Community	Type	Rate	Term	PILOTS	Companies
Butler County, West Chester Township	Enterprise Zone	55%-75%	6-10 years	Tax abatements secured without school board approval	Amylin, Republic Wire, DRT Medical
Butler/Warren County, Monroe	CRA, post-94 and pre-94	100%	10 years	Income tax sharing with schools, schools receive 50% of all new income tax	Kohl's Distribution, Home Depot, Presto Foods, Cornerstone Brands, Hayneedle, Blue Buffalo, Amazon
New Albany	CRA, post-94	100%	15 years	Income tax sharing: 30% to infrastructure; 26% to Columbus; 22% to Licking Heights Schools; 22% to New Albany	Google, VanTrust Development, Facebook, Amazon, Accel, Inc.
Whitehall	CRA, post-94	100%	15 years	Income tax sharing agreement with schools; 33% of new income tax	Heartland Bank, Wasserstrom, Rite Rug
Groveport	CRA, post-94 and pre-94	100%	15 years	Income tax sharing agreement with schools – 50% of new income tax	AEP, Gap, Wal-Mart Distribution, Opus Distribution, VanTrust Development

#### Action #4: Define CEDA agreements for Plain City and Darby Township.

Plain City Action Plan Tactics Timeline							
Strategy / Action Items / Projects		Priority	Timeline				
Description		L   M   H	0-12 mos.	1-3 yrs.	3-5 yrs.	5+ yrs.	On-going
Action #4	Define CEDA Agreements for Plain City and Surrounding Townships	HIGH					
Item							
4.1	Identify the Goals of Potential CEDA Agreements		X				
4.2	Identify the Townships and Establish Conversations		X				
4.3	Create CEDA Agreements		X				
4.4	Manage the Joint Services Between Municipalities		X				X

Plain City's economic future will not only be shaped from within its borders. Surrounding communities and townships are often equally primed for residential and commercial development. Growth is occurring in and around Plain City, and the village can strategically embrace that growth without fearing the loss of its small-town charm. However, this strategy will not succeed if the communities surrounding Plain City allows uncontrolled growth that conflicts with Plain City's aspirations. Thus, Montrose Group recommends that Plain City enter into a series of Community Economic Development Agreements (CEDA) with neighboring townships to create a common development strategy.



Ohio permits municipalities, townships, and counties to enter CEDA agreements. Information on the role CEDAs can play is listed below.

Community Economic Development Agreement (CEDA) - ORC 701.07	
Who may enter into the Agreement?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Municipal Corporations</li> <li>2. Townships</li> <li>3. County (with approval of 1 &amp; 2)</li> <li>4. Person or private entity (#10 below)</li> <li>5. State or State Agency - upon approval of the Governor and other parties to the agreement</li> </ol>
What can it contain?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The provision of Joint Services/Permanent Improvements in incorporated or unincorporated areas.</li> <li>2. The provision of services/improvements by municipalities in unincorporated areas.</li> <li>3. The provision of services/improvements by the township or county in the municipality.</li> <li>4. The provision of service fees from township/county to municipality</li> <li>5. The provision of service fees from municipality to township/county</li> <li>6. The issuance of notes and bonds and other debt obligations by a municipal corporation, county, or township for public purposes authorized by or under a cooperative economic development agreement and provision for the allocation of the payment of the principal of, interest on, and other charges and costs of issuing and servicing the repayment of the debt purposes in the CEDA.</li> <li>7. The issuance of industrial development notes, bonds, and debt obligations by a municipal corporation to finance projects in a territory located outside the municipal corporation but located within the territory covered by a cooperative economic development agreement and provision for the allocation of the payment of the principal of, interest on, and other charges and costs of issuing and servicing the repayment of the debt.</li> <li>8. The territory to be annexed to a municipal corporation when agreed to by the municipal corporation to which annexation is proposed and the township in which the territory to be annexed is located.</li> <li>9. Any periods of time during which no annexations will occur and any areas that will not be annexed during the period when agreed to by the municipal corporation and township affected by the annexation moratorium.</li> <li>10. Public service, facility, or improvement agreements with landowners or developers</li> <li>11. The application of tax abatement statutes within the territory covered by the cooperative economic development agreement.</li> <li>12. Change township boundaries under ORC 503 to exclude an annexed area from the old township and provide services in the area.</li> <li>13. A Municipality may earmark to its general fund a portion of utility charges collected from outside the municipality but in CEDA - if the CEDA does not cover annexation matters.</li> <li>14. Payments in lieu of taxes to a township from a municipality.</li> <li>15. Any other matter regarding annexation territory or development.</li> </ol>
Sharing of tax revenue	Any municipality may not share proceeds from tax levies, but such proceeds may be used to make payments authorized under the CEDA agreement to a township
Public Approval	A public hearing is required before entering the CEDA agreement. The agreement must be open to public for 30 days prior to hearing.
Changes	A CEDA may be amended at any time in the same manner as initially authorized.

The content and the focus of each CEDA agreement should be formed in close partnership with the Village and the township. Most importantly, before negotiating the CEDA, Plain City and the participating township need to compare land use plans to reach an agreement on where development should occur, and the type and scale of the development. Finally, Plain City and the township need to develop a public-private partnership model via an incentive policy that outlines the use tax abatements and their terms to ensure that impacted local governments see a Return on Investment (ROI) from the use of the incentive.



The Plain City CEDA may include the following provisions and should be topics of negotiation for the agreements:

- The provision of improvements;
- The provision of services;
- The payment of service fees;
- The issuance of industrial development and/or public infrastructure or revenue notes, bonds, and other debt obligations;
- The territory to annexation by Plain City and any limits;
- The provision and administration of tax incentives;
- The application of zoning, permitting, and design standards;
- Identify and agree upon the revised township boundaries to exclude newly annexed territory from the original township, ensuring the provision of services to the annexed area;
- Earmark of general revenue funds for utility charges collected in the territory outside the village but within the CEDA (only if the CEDA does not cover any matters relating to annexation);
- Payments in lieu of taxes, if any;
- TIF terms that will be used to develop public infrastructure;
- Local school district compensation agreements to be paid by developers;
- Any other matter pertaining to the annexation or development of the territory, whether the territory is owned by a governmental entity or a person or private entity; and
- General contract terms related to termination, term, operation, and other general contract terms.

A CEDA can be an important tool to create a common development framework that fosters opportunities for economic growth while protecting the character of the participating communities.

### Action #5: Create a Grow Local Campaign that helps retain the agricultural history of Plain City.

Plain City Action Plan Tactics Timeline							
Strategy / Action Items / Projects		Priority	Timeline				
Description		L   M   H	0-12 mos.	1-3 yrs.	3-5 yrs.	5+ yrs.	On-going
Action #5	Create a Grow Local Campaign that Helps Retain the Agricultural History of Plain City	LOW					
Item							
5.1	Understand the Potential of Grow Local Campaigns in Plain City			X			
5.2	Create a Brand that Represents Plain City		X				
5.3	Create a Local Food Guide for Plain City			X			
5.4	Develop Direct Markets Between Plain City and Agriculture Providers				X		



Honoring Plain City's agricultural history is important as it serves as a vital link to its roots and cultural identity. Preserving the area's agricultural heritage fosters a sense of connection and continuity with the past, reminding current residents of their ancestors' hard work that brought the village to where it is today. Additionally, preserving agricultural areas ensures that future generations have access to green spaces and other natural amenities. These spaces can be used to teach valuable lessons about food production, sustainable agriculture, and the importance of environmental conservation.

Plain City should take steps to foster a local food economy by launching a Grow Local Campaign. A local food economy refers to a system of food production, distribution, and consumption that primarily operates within a limited geographic area. Inside this local food economy, food is grown, processed, and sold locally, with a focus on supporting local farmers, producers, and businesses. The main goal of a Grow Local Campaign is to strengthen the connections between consumers and the sources of their food to foster sustainability, community resilience, and business opportunities. In order to create a successful local food economy, Plain City should take these seven steps:

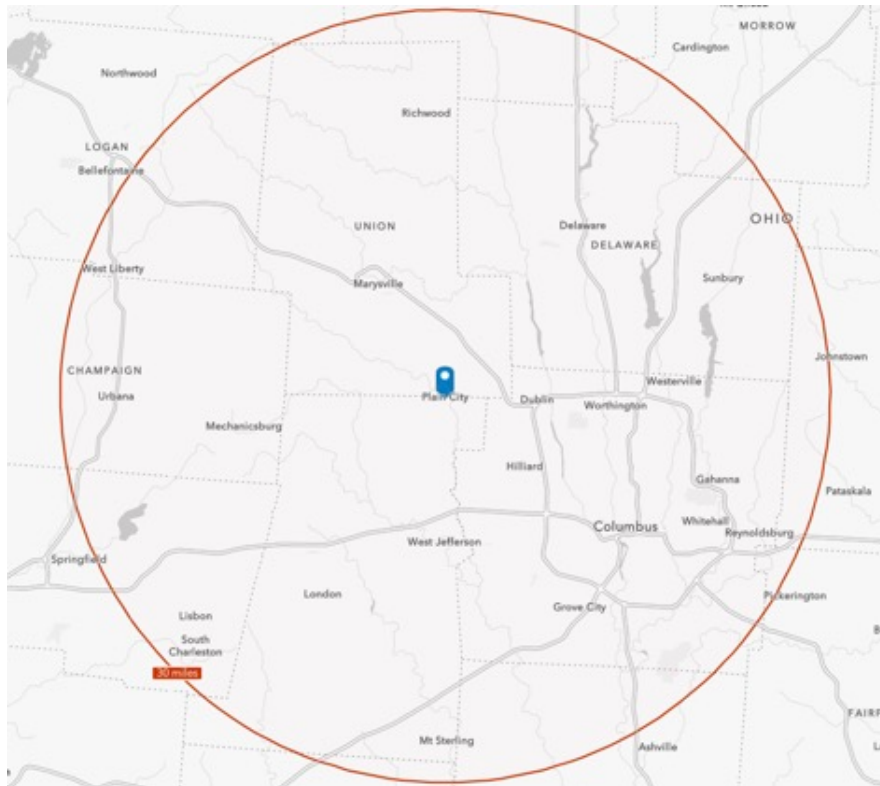


**Understanding the potential.** To effectively establish a Grow Local Campaign, it is essential to grasp the broader context encompassing farms, consumer trends, demographics, and market dynamics of the local agriculture industry. By analyzing this larger perspective, one can pinpoint the main obstacles and opportunities for cultivating a thriving campaign and chart a course of action tailored to the community's needs. An important tool in achieving this is a local food assessment, which improves the understanding of the existing local food system, clarifies the concept of "local", engages key community organizations and stakeholders, and identifies potential markets. Armed with this knowledge, Plain City can strategically select the most suitable and sustainable approaches to expand the availability and accessibility of local food within the community. These are the questions to consider when first creating a Grow Local Campaign:



- What are the primary economic drivers in the Plain City economy?
- What is the composition of rural vs. urban areas throughout Plain City and surrounding areas?
- What is the current dollar value of agricultural products sold/produced?
- What are the primary agricultural products sold/produced?
- What are the major trends in local agricultural production?
- What support for farmers and local markets currently exists in Plain City?
- What is the farm data throughout Plain City, Madison County, and Union County? Examples of this are size, number of farms, total land in farms, average size of local farms, crops produced, and agricultural trends.
- What is the current demand for local food in Plain City?
- What are the primary barriers to developing markets for local food?
- What, if any, processing facilities are in or accessible?
- How is food currently being distributed throughout Plain City?

**Create a Brand for Plain City Local Food.** The creation of a certified local food brand can help create and grow the Plain City Grow Local Campaign. A strong brand helps to distinguish your local food from competitors in a crowded market. A Plain City local foods brand will help create trust and credibility in the foods being provided. Strong brands have the power to evoke an emotional response that resonates with the customers purchasing them. Building a Plain City local foods brand provides an identity that aligns with your local residents' values and creates a deeper connection with the foods being grown here. One of the most important aspects of creating the Plain City Grow Local Campaign is defining what "local" means. While the definition of local can vary greatly depending on the context or specific industry, generally when applied to food and agriculture, "local" means food that is produced and sold within a certain radius from where it is consumed. The distance may differ based on the region or country, but the idea is to promote food systems that reduce the carbon footprint associated with transportation, support local farmers, and provide fresher, seasonal produce to consumers. The Plain City Grow Local Campaign should establish that their food comes from a specific set of local counties. These local counties should be Madison, Union, Franklin, Delaware, and Champaign County. Or the Plain City Grow Local Campaign should establish a set boundary from which the food provided comes from. For example, a 30-mile radius around Plain City would allow agriculture from the areas provided in the picture below.





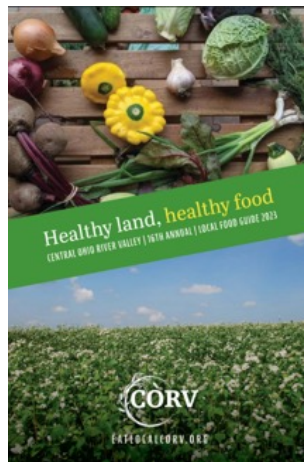
*Utilizing Social Media to Build the Plain City Grow Local Campaign.* There is no new initiative that can succeed in the modern business era without a presence on social media. As the Plain City Grow Local Campaign develops the goal will be to spread the word to local residents. Here are a few tools to consider:

- **Website:** A website provides an easy way for the public and media to find and contact the Plain City Grow Local Campaign. It's also a great place to announce local events, recent accomplishments, share photos, and more.
- **Blog:** Much like a website, a blog is a great way for the public and the media to learn about new activities and find information about the campaign. If updated regularly, it's also a great way for them to find short articles about local food products, contests, and events that they can reprint or also include on their blogs. The Plain City Grow Local Campaign should partner with local farmers, food processing employers, and the Ohio State College of Food, Agriculture and Environmental Sciences to produce high quality content.
- **Social media:** Sites like Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter/X provide a great opportunity to reach local residents and provide information. The main benefit in using these platforms is the quick and easy process to update these sites on a daily basis, put out new announcements, like contests and events, and to garner general excitement about your campaigns and initiatives.
- **E-newsletters:** E-newsletters offer an excellent platform to effectively communicate your message and share organizational news that may not fit well on blogs or social media sites. By crafting weekly or monthly newsletters, you can keep your audience informed about the seasonal availability of local foods, farmers market updates, exciting local food and farm events, contests, and other relevant happenings. The advantage of sending e-newsletters only to those who have expressed interest is that it creates an engaged audience, presenting an ideal opportunity to seek support, whether through volunteer assistance or donations.

*Creating a Local Food Guide.* A local food guide, which is also known as a food directory or food map, is a resource that provides information about locally produced food and where to find it. It typically highlights local farmers, farmers' markets, local food producers, food co-operatives, farm-to-table restaurants, and other businesses that offer or support locally sourced products. The main purpose of a local food guide is to connect consumers with local food options and support the local agricultural economy. A local food guide is a valuable tool for residents and visitors to explore the diverse range of fresh and seasonal produce available in their region. A few examples of successful local food guides are:

### **Central Ohio River Valley Local Food Guide**

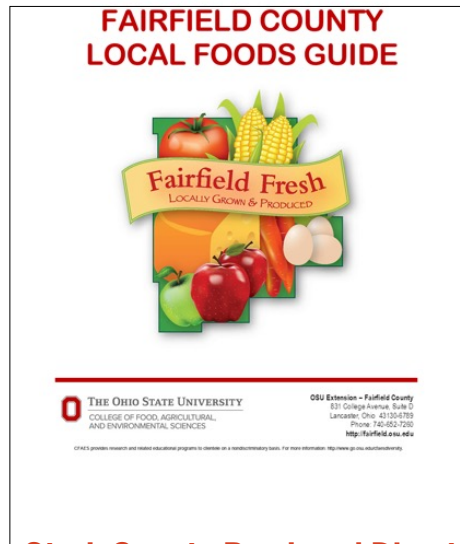
<https://www.eatlocalcorv.org/>





## Fairfield County Local Food Guide

<https://localfoods.osu.edu/sites/localfoods/files/imce/pdf/FairfieldLocalFoodsGuide.pdf>



## Stark County Buy Local Directory

<http://www.starkfb.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/Buy-Local-Directory-3-1.pdf>



**Utilizing the "Farm to Community" Approach.** Connecting farms to the community provides educational opportunities, particularly for children and young adults, to learn about farming practices, sustainable agriculture, and the importance of food security. Farm to Chef is an important piece of building a successful grow local campaign. Incorporating chefs and restaurants into a local food campaign offers multiple advantages, including increased visibility for locally grown food, opportunities for chefs to engage in community education through cooking demonstrations in schools, and enhanced branding for participating restaurants. By supplying marketing materials showcasing the use of locally sourced food in these establishments, you can also promote your campaign's mission. Introducing a farm-to-chef directory proves to be a valuable resource in cultivating successful relationships between farms and restaurants. This directory, equipped with product lists, contact information, and cross-referencing indexes, streamlines the process of forming mutually beneficial partnerships between growers and buyers. Additionally, providing growers with advice, highlighting farmers' market locations, and spotlighting the seasonal availability of local food further smoothens the path from farm to chef. **The Farm to School** initiative aims to foster positive experiences with nutritious foods, emphasizing four key components: farm field trips, nutrition education, school gardens, and incorporating local food into school cafeterias.



By implementing Farm to School programs, the initiative creates new market opportunities for local producers while simultaneously providing health, nutrition, and educational benefits to students and teachers. For communities interested in connecting farms to schools, the National Farm to School Network serves as a valuable resource. With active participants in at least 40 states, the network offers opportunities to learn more and collaborate in advancing Farm to School efforts. The Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project (ASAP) created a farm to school program to assist communities in building these programs. ASAP's Growing Minds Farm to School Program defines farm to school as giving children opportunities to learn about local food and farms in the classroom, cafeteria, and community. While farm to school programs serve K-12 students, farm to preschool serves children in Pre-K, childcare centers, and family homes.<sup>42</sup>

*Creating a Farm Tourism Attraction.* The Plain City Grow Local Campaign should partner with local farmers and agricultural centers to create a farm tourism program. Farm tourism has emerged as a burgeoning economic prospect for many regions, enriching the experience for both tourists and locals. The Plain City Grow Local Campaign can capitalize on this trend by showcasing farms through a range of engaging activities such as farm tours, farm stays, food festivals, and various local food experiences. These initiatives not only attract visitors but also offer a valuable platform to celebrate the essence of local agriculture and foster a deeper connection between consumers and the sources of their food.

*Developing Direct Markets for Farmers and Local Residents.* The Plain City Grow Local Campaign should help foster a direct connection between local farmers and residents. Direct markets include farmers' markets, farm stands, u-pick farms, and Community Supported Agriculture (CSA). These direct markets between the consumer and farmer helps to cultivate customer loyalty and advocacy for local farms and food. These direct markets also provide a higher return to farmers when compared to other traditional markets. They provide an easy starting point for farmers new to marketing because of the minimal cost required for entry.

The Village operates a seasonal farmers' market that it inherited from the Uptown Plain City Organization (UPCO). This existing market provides a robust foundation upon which a grow local campaign can be constructed. As Plain City continues to grow and evolve, sustained support for the farmers' market is important.

To ensure the impact of the farmers' market within the Plain City Grow Local Campaign, some strategic repositioning should occur. This includes the appointment of a paid or volunteer market manager. The market's date and hours of operation should be reviewed to ensure convenience for market vendors and patrons. Moving the market to a permanent off-street location for the market may better accommodate vendors and visitors while providing increased support for local businesses.



# ENDNOTES.

- <sup>1</sup> [https://data.bls.gov/timeseries/CES4349300001?amp%253bdata\\_tool=XGtable&output\\_view=data&include\\_graphs=true](https://data.bls.gov/timeseries/CES4349300001?amp%253bdata_tool=XGtable&output_view=data&include_graphs=true)
- <sup>2</sup> <https://www.growunioncountyohio.com/industries>.
- <sup>3</sup> <https://www.naics.com/naics-code-description/?code=42#:~:text=42%20%2D%20Wholesale%20Trade&text=The%20Wholesale%20Trade%20sector%20comprises,to%20the%20sale%20of%20merchandise>.
- <sup>4</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>5</sup> <https://www.bls.gov/iag/tgs/iag56.htm>
- <sup>6</sup> Robert P. Giloth, "Learning from the Field: Economic Growth and Workforce Development in the 1990's," *Economic Development Quarterly*, 14, 4 (November 2000) 340–359, 345.
- <sup>7</sup> <https://www.medinacounty.org/medina-county-economic-development-corporation/about-mcedc-rev/mcedc-impact-on-medina-county/>.
- <sup>8</sup> <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-07-01/invest-in-transportation-for-economic-growth>.
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>10</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>11</sup> [https://www.kauffman.org/entrepreneurship/reports/educational-attainment-of-business-owners/#:~:text=Highlights%20include%3A,among%20Asian%20entrepreneurs%20\(29.6%25\)](https://www.kauffman.org/entrepreneurship/reports/educational-attainment-of-business-owners/#:~:text=Highlights%20include%3A,among%20Asian%20entrepreneurs%20(29.6%25)).
- <sup>12</sup> [https://education.ohio.gov/lists\\_and\\_rankings](https://education.ohio.gov/lists_and_rankings).
- <sup>13</sup> <https://northcantonohio.gov/205/Community-Improvement-Corporation-CIC>
- <sup>14</sup> <https://www.heritageohio.org/ohio-main-street-program/>
- <sup>15</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>16</sup> [https://development.ohio.gov/static/business/stateincentives/TIF\\_IncentiveDistrictsSummary.pdf](https://development.ohio.gov/static/business/stateincentives/TIF_IncentiveDistrictsSummary.pdf)
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>18</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>19</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>20</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>21</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>23</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>24</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>27</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>28</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>29</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>30</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>31</sup> <https://www.cdfa.net/cdfa/cdfaweb.nsf/pages/revolving-loan-funds.html>
- <sup>32</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>33</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>34</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>35</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>36</sup> <https://www.bizjournals.com/columbus/news/2023/07/05/colliers-report-markets-that-move-america-columbus.html>
- <sup>37</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>38</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>39</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>40</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>41</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>42</sup> <https://growing-minds.org/about-growing-minds-and-farm-to-school/>

