



Fairfield Soil and Water Conservation District

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To: Steering Committee and Planning Team Members
From: Fairfield Soil and Water Conservation District
Date: May 11, 2023
From: Fairfield County Economic Development Strategic Plan and Update to the 2018 Comprehensive Plan.

The Fairfield Soil and Water Conservation District believes the Land Use Plans of years 1977, 2002 and 2018 in conjunction with the year 2000 Farmland Preservation Plan conducted under the Land Evaluation Site Assessment (LESA) process still hold core principles that should guide Fairfield County for the next 20 years.

The 2023 Land Use Plan Update underway should:

1 Sustain the goal of the 2002 Fairfield County Land Use Plan of 115,000 acres of “Critical Resource” protection such as floodplains, stream corridors, wetlands, woodlands and steep terrain. *Prioritizing lands for Critical Resource Protections improves landowner ranking for State and Federal grants for parks, greenways, trails, conservation easements improving public health, safety and welfare. Capitalizing on Current Agricultural Use Value (CAUV) recoupment when land is removed from agricultural production could locally fund programs to implement this portion of the land use plan.*

2 Sustain the goal of the 1977 and 2002 Fairfield County Land Use Plans in encouraging population growth around existing sewer and water capacity. Dedicate long-term efforts into water and wastewater upgrades throughout the villages to encourage the development of higher density workforce housing. *Urban Land Institute (ULI) defines **Workforce Housing** as housing affordable to households earning between 60 and 120 percent of area median income (AMI). Walkable communities where active transportation like bicycles improves public health, safety and welfare.*

The installation of central sewer and water to the agricultural landscape should be driven by the desire to reduce the risk of pollution from Home Septic Treatment with Aerator Treatment Units. These systems are typically failing at any given moment at a rate of 25-30% directly polluting nearby streams. Infill along the path of these utilities for workforce housing should be considered but not drive decision making until the Village and City growth areas have been maximized.

3 Sustain the core principles of the year 2000 Farmland Preservation Plan developed through LESA to support the protection of public health, safety and welfare through science and engineering. *It should be noted that these lands support the agricultural industry and currently the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency holds permits to apply biosolids as fertilizer on approximately 18,000 acres. This is the human population’s waste stream and the loss of land application options exhausts landfills quickly and burdens the Fairfield County Utilities, City of Lancaster, City of Pickerington, City of Newark, green energy biodigesters and the City of Columbus in identifying sites to apply the biosolids in a manner that will protect public health, safety, and welfare.*

4 Sustain the goal of the year 2002 Fairfield County Land Use Plan maintaining 100,000 acres in “Agricultural Preservation” to support this critical industry. Areas designated for development in 1977 and 2002 that have not been developed due to a lack of incentives to build around the villages. *Prioritizing lands for Agricultural Preservation improves landowner ranking for State and Federal grants for conservation easements and agricultural easements improving public health, safety and welfare. Capitalizing on Current Agricultural Use Value (CAUV) recoupment when land is removed from agricultural production could locally fund programs to implement this portion of the land use plan.*

The Fairfield Soil and Water Conservation District would like to echo the 1977 Land Use Plan and remind all involved of the consequences we must all consider:

The proposed land use pattern for Fairfield County has been based, in part, upon the natural capabilities and limitations of the environment in the County. In the development of the plan, factors such as floodplains, ground water, slopes, erosion potential, prime farmland, presently forested areas, local wildlife, and water quality are all major considerations in the proposed location of residential, commercial, industrial, public and open space uses.

It is believed that only through just consideration of such factors can the health, safety and welfare of any future society be preserved.

As in 1977, 2002 and 2018 we recognize that continuous growth of the county continues with the present low level of incentives to prioritize the protection of floodplains, groundwater, slopes, erosion potential, prime farmland, presently forested areas, local wildlife, and water quality that the long-term effects would include, but not be limited to;

- 1 The contamination of groundwater resources in specific areas of intense concentration of septic tank usage.
- 2 The loss of vast amounts of prime agricultural land to large lot residential use.
- 3 The possibility of more intense frequent flooding of low-lying areas due the filling of floodplains and prior converted wetlands through unmaintained subsurface tile.
- 4 The loss of natural areas and resident flora and fauna.
- 5 The reduction in groundwater recharge and erosion impacts to streams and water bodies from increased impervious areas.