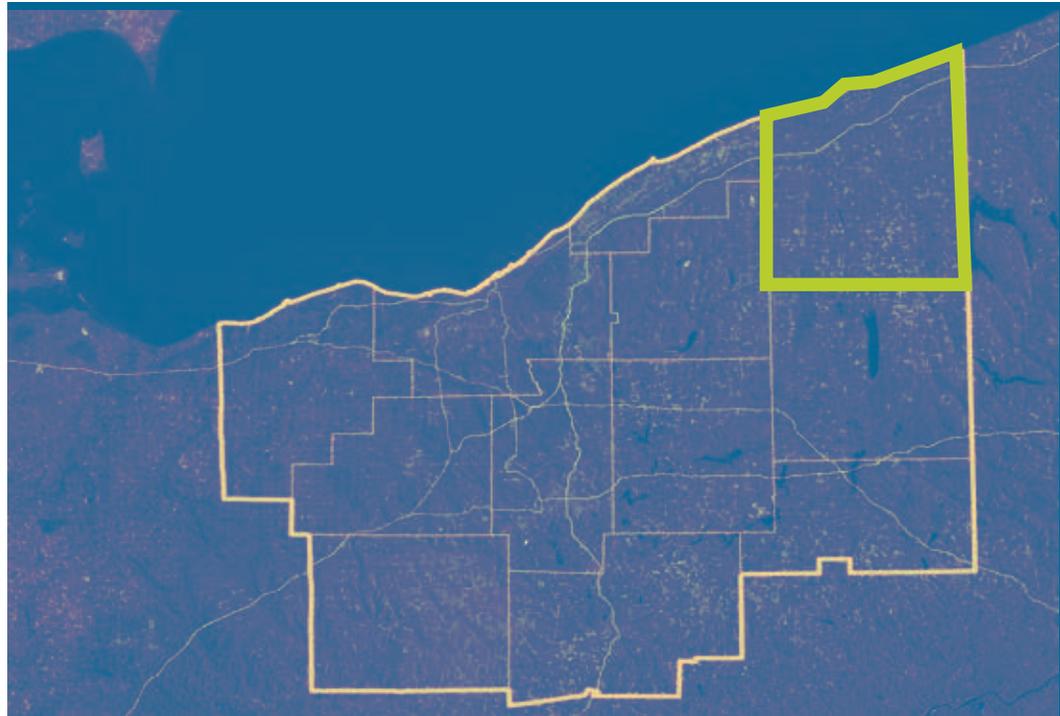




VibrantNEO.org

*For a more
vibrant, resilient,
and sustainable
Northeast Ohio*



Vibrant NEO 2040

A Vision, Framework, and Action Products for Our Future

NEO Sustainable
Communities
Consortium

S A S A K I

ASHTABULA COUNTY

FRAMEWORK REPORT **OCTOBER 23, 2015**

THIS PAGE IS INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	5
TREND SCENARIO	8
PUBLIC FEEDBACK ON TREND SCENARIO	15
ALTERNATIVE SCENARIOS	18
SCENARIO THEMES AND PUBLIC FEEDBACK	28
CROWDSOURCED PRIORITIES: IMAGINEMYNEO	37
REGIONAL VISION	41
RECOMMENDATIONS	54
ACTION PRODUCTS AND INDICATORS	58

THIS PAGE IS INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

INTRODUCTION

WHERE COULD OUR REGION AND ASHTABULA COUNTY GO?
WHAT ARE OUR OPTIONS, CHOICES, AND KEY TRADE-OFFS?

This county report is an extract of the *Vibrant NEO 2040 – A Vision, Framework, and Action Products for Our Future* report that was published by the Northeast Ohio Sustainable Communities Consortium (NEOSCC) in February 2014. All data was collected between 2010 and 2014. This county excerpt reflects data collected and analyzed by NEOSCC at that time. The Northeast Ohio Areawide Coordinating Agency (NOACA) reassembled the data presented by NEOSCC to focus on Ashtabula County. Details on the methodology used to develop the scenarios can be found in the NEOSCC technical appendix available online at <http://vibrantneo.org>. NEOSCC was started in 2010 when leaders who represented a 12-county region of Northeast Ohio launched the Vibrant NEO 2040 initiative to provide Northeast Ohio with three things: an analysis of possible future scenarios, an aspirational Vision for the future, and a set of tools to make it happen.

The scenarios show a range of possible futures for the region, which helps us understand key choices, trade-offs, and outcomes. The purposes of the scenarios are to learn about the range of options and spark reflection and discussion. This report highlights what the scenarios mean for Ashtabula County and the region.

Summary of Scenario Modeling Process

QUANTITATIVE PROJECTIONS: If current trends continue, how many people, jobs, and acres of conservation will the region have in 2040?

DEVELOPMENT MIX AND LAND USES: How many businesses and population will be lost if current trends continue? How many homes, businesses, and other structures will be needed to accommodate the new people and jobs in other scenarios? What style of development will these new buildings have? Will they be suburban subdivisions or more compact neighborhoods? How many more homes will be abandoned if current trends continue?

GEOGRAPHIC ALLOCATION OF NEW DEVELOPMENT: Where in the region will new construction occur? What areas are likely to lose population?

ANALYSIS: What are the fiscal, environmental, and quality-of-life impacts of these changes?

The Four Scenarios

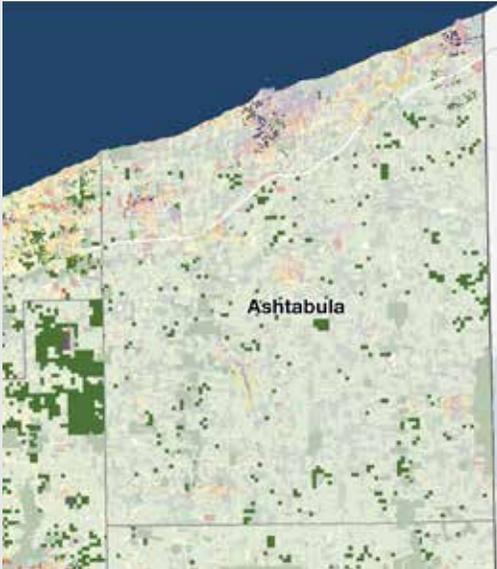


EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: IMPLICATIONS OF SCENARIOS

A significant difference among the scenarios is the location of new development. Like the Trend Scenario, Grow the Same continues the region’s current pattern of putting new development on previously undeveloped farmland or in natural areas at the edges of established communities. Grow Differently and Do Things Differently emphasize reinvestment and infill in established communities.

TREND SCENARIO

The Trend Scenario asks this question: what is likely to happen if the region’s rate of population and employment growth continue to be modest AND the region’s communities choose to continue using the land and infrastructure development policies of the past 20 years (1990-2010)?



Policy Actions

- There are no changes in the region’s current land use and infrastructure development policies.

Development Implications

- Ashtabula County experiences modest growth in jobs and population.
- Ashtabula County experience high loss of farmland and environmentally sensitive areas as well as significant abandonment of existing residential, commercial and industrial properties due to new construction outside of places with existing infrastructure.
- Ashtabula County’s communities experience growing imbalance between their costs and revenues resulting in diminished ability to provide basic public services.

see pages 8 to 27 for details

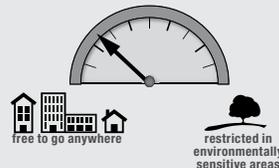
Transportation Investment



Investment in Communities



Land Development



Community Character



GROW THE SAME SCENARIO

The Grow the Same Scenario asks this question: what is likely to happen if the region’s jobs and population grow at a rate equivalent to the nation’s rates AND the region’s communities choose to continue using the land and infrastructure development policies of the past 20 years (1990-2010)?



Policy Actions

- No changes in the region’s current land use and infrastructure development policies.

Development Implications

- Ashtabula County experiences high growth of jobs and population.
- Ashtabula County experience significant loss of farmland and environmentally sensitive areas due to new construction inside and outside of places with existing infrastructure.
- Ashtabula County experiences a quintupling of new residential construction and a reduction in rates of residential, commercial and industrial abandonment.
- Ashtabula County communities experience a growing imbalance between their costs and revenues due to significant cost increases.

see pages 18 to 27 for details

DO THINGS DIFFERENTLY SCENARIO

The Do Things Differently Scenario asks this question: what is likely to happen if the region's population and employment growth continue to be modest AND the region's communities make different choices about using land and developing infrastructure?



Policy Actions

- New investment is focused in established communities with already-developed infrastructure.
- Infill development and compact mixed-use land development are encouraged.
- Priority is given to maintaining and improving existing infrastructure systems rather than extending and expanding them.
- Priority is given to providing a wider range of transportation choices.

Development Implications

- Ashtabula County experiences modest growth in jobs and population.
- Ashtabula County is able to preserve farm land and environmentally sensitive areas.
- Infill development revitalizes existing communities.
- Ashtabula County's communities are able to balance their budgets.

see pages 18 to 27 for details

Transportation Investment



Investment in Communities



Land Development

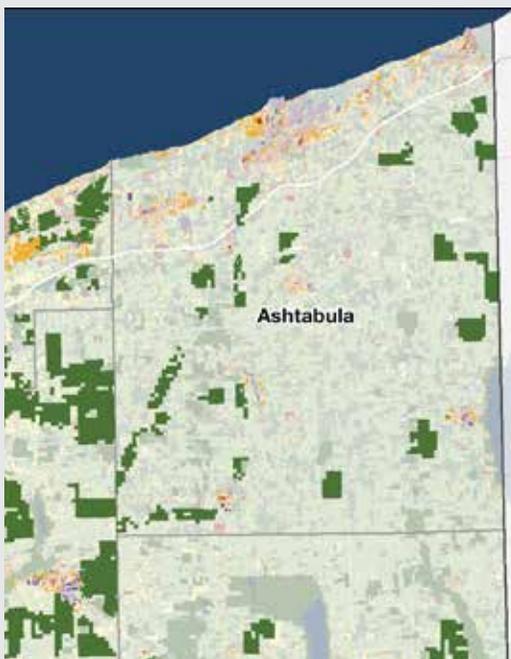


Community Character



GROW DIFFERENTLY SCENARIO

The Grow Differently Scenario asks this question: what is likely to happen if the region's jobs and population grow at a rate equivalent to the nation's rates AND the region's communities make different choices about using land and developing infrastructure?



Policy Actions

- New investment is focused in established communities with already-developed infrastructure.
- Infill development and compact mixed-use land development are encouraged.
- Priority is given to maintaining and improving existing infrastructure systems rather than extending and expanding them.
- Priority is given to providing a wider range of transportation choices.

Development Implications

- Ashtabula County experiences high growth of jobs and population.
- Ashtabula County is able to preserve farm land and environmentally sensitive areas.
- Infill development revitalizes existing communities.
- Ashtabula County communities experience a growing imbalance between their costs and revenues due to significant cost increases.

see pages 18 to 27 for details

TREND SCENARIO

WHERE ARE WE GOING TOGETHER?

SUMMARY OF QUANTITATIVE TRENDS: POPULATION, EMPLOYMENT AND LAND USE

The foundation of the trend scenario is a series of projections that estimate how many people, jobs, households, housing units and acres of conservation will be in the region by 2040 if current trends continue. The 2040 projections are based on county-level trends over the past two decades. This time period was selected as the best representation of the region as “stabilized yet challenged” and was long enough to capture several market cycles, a critical factor for long-range estimates. For each county, annual rates of change from 1990 to 2010 were extrapolated through 2040. For a more detailed discussion about the process of calculating these numbers, please refer to the NEOSCC Technical Appendix on the Vibrant NEO 2040 website at <http://vibrantneo.org>.

Region-wide, population and employment growth have been virtually flat. Population is on track to increase by slightly less than 100,000 across the region, from 3.82 million in 2010 to 3.91 million in 2040. Employment is also on track to increase by about 100,000 region-wide, from 1.56 million in 2010 to 1.65 million in 2040. These increases translate to annual regional growth rates of 0.08 percent for population and 0.25 percent for employment.

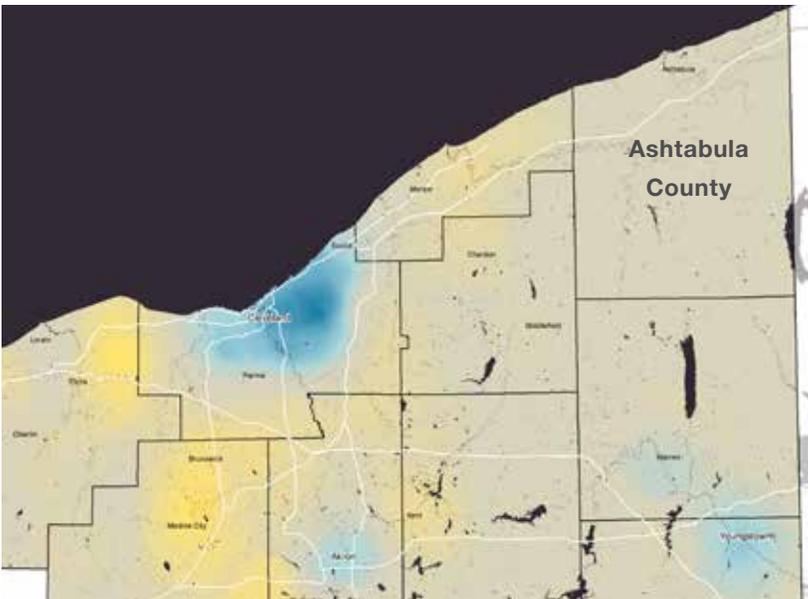
At first, these flat region-wide totals may suggest that the region will not see much change over the next few decades. A closer look at the county-wide numbers, however, provides a more complete story. Some counties are growing rapidly while others are shrinking. The new residents are largely moving from Cuyahoga, Mahoning, and Trumbull counties. The growth of some counties in the region is linked to, and a result of, decline in others, as people and jobs move away from legacy cities. The following pages illustrate the outward migration (Trend 1), abandonment (Trend 2), and fiscal impact (Trend 3) for Ashtabula County.

TREND 1—OUTWARD MIGRATION

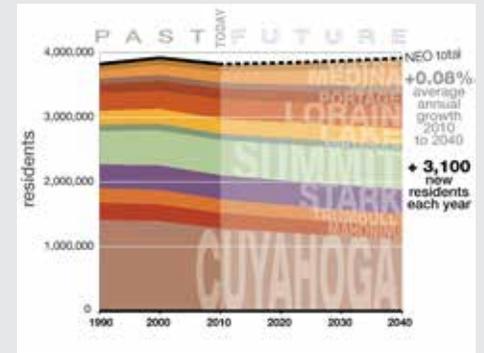
Under the Trend Scenario, “growth” in some parts of the region is largely a result of movement from elsewhere in the region. The movement tends to be away from legacy cities and some first-ring suburbs and toward developing communities on the fringes of existing urbanized areas. This trend of “outward migration” has significant impacts on the region.

New development outside already established communities requires new infrastructure, including roads, sewers, and other utilities. Building and maintaining this infrastructure creates significant additional costs for local and county governments, which must then maintain more infrastructure to support the same population.

Trend 1: Outward Migration 2010-2040

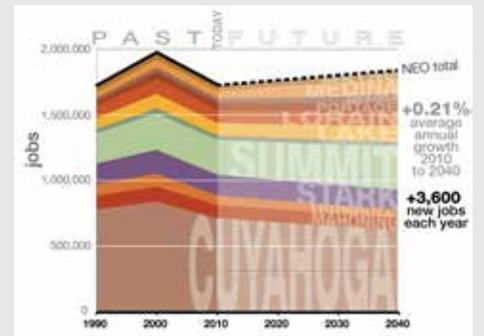


Population Trends by County



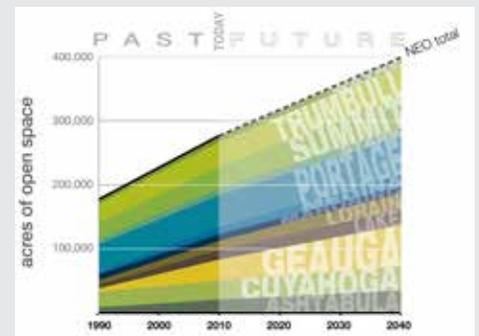
Ashtabula County:
+ 85 new residents
each year
+0.1% average annual
growth 2010 to 2040

Employment Trends by County



Ashtabula County:
+145 new jobs
each year
+0.4% average annual
growth 2010 to 2040

Conservation Trends by County



Ashtabula County:
Trend and Grow the Same:
14,645 acres conserved
Do Things Differently:
34,460 acres conserved

TREND 2—ABANDONMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE

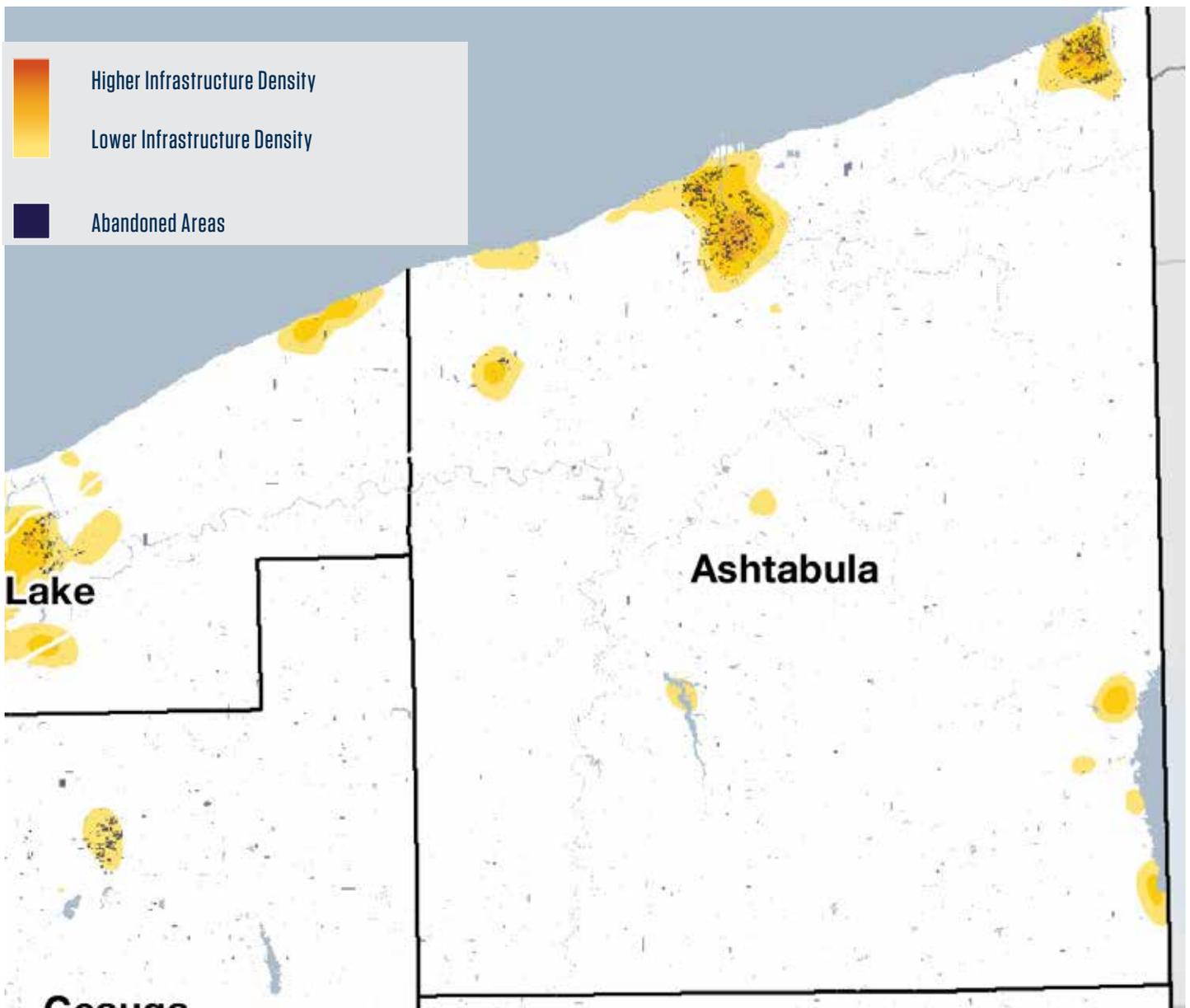
Abandonment is one of the most significant effects of outward migration. Outward migration coupled with low regional population and employment growth results in abandonment. If current residents and jobs move away from established communities to new homes, shopping centers, office buildings, hospitals, and places of worship, and if no one moves in to occupy the houses, stores, and businesses they leave behind, abandonment occurs. Abandonment tends to be highest in older neighborhoods in legacy cities and

some first-ring suburbs and established towns.¹ Small-lot single-family and multifamily structures are the most common types of housing abandoned.

Abandonment is occurring in places with significant infrastructure investments. This leaves behind not only homes and other buildings but also roads, sewers, and utilities that could still provide valuable service and that taxpayers must pay to maintain, regardless of whether they are being used to capacity.

¹ Predominately pre-1960 housing stock

Trend 2: Ashtabula County in 2040



TREND 3—FISCAL IMPACTS

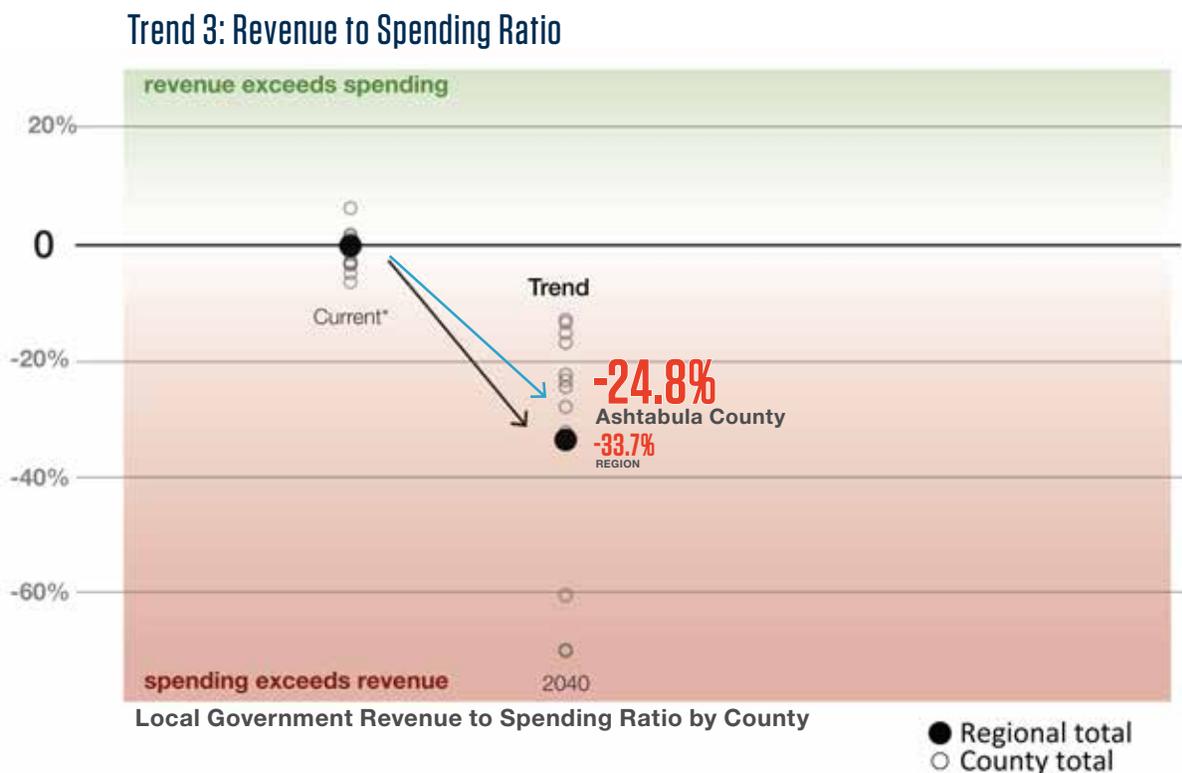
The Fiscal Impact Tool measures the fiscal outcomes of the scenarios and helps us understand the impacts of today’s development on the long-term fiscal health of our communities. Development affects local budgets by generating both new costs and new revenues. On the cost side, supporting development in communities requires constructing new infrastructure (roads, water and sewage pipes, and other utilities) if it does not already exist. In addition to these one-time capital outlays, communities must pay to maintain infrastructure and provide services. The ongoing operating and maintenance costs tracked in the scenarios include education, hospitals, police, fire, parks, roads, sewerage, solid waste, and other utilities. On the revenue side, new development generates income from property, income, and sales taxes, as well as utility fees.

In the Trend Scenario, development exceeds regional demand; outlying communities grow, while legacy communities shrink. The fiscal impacts of this trend are significant. Region-wide, the revenue-to-cost ratio is projected to fall to -33.7 percent in 2040, reflecting

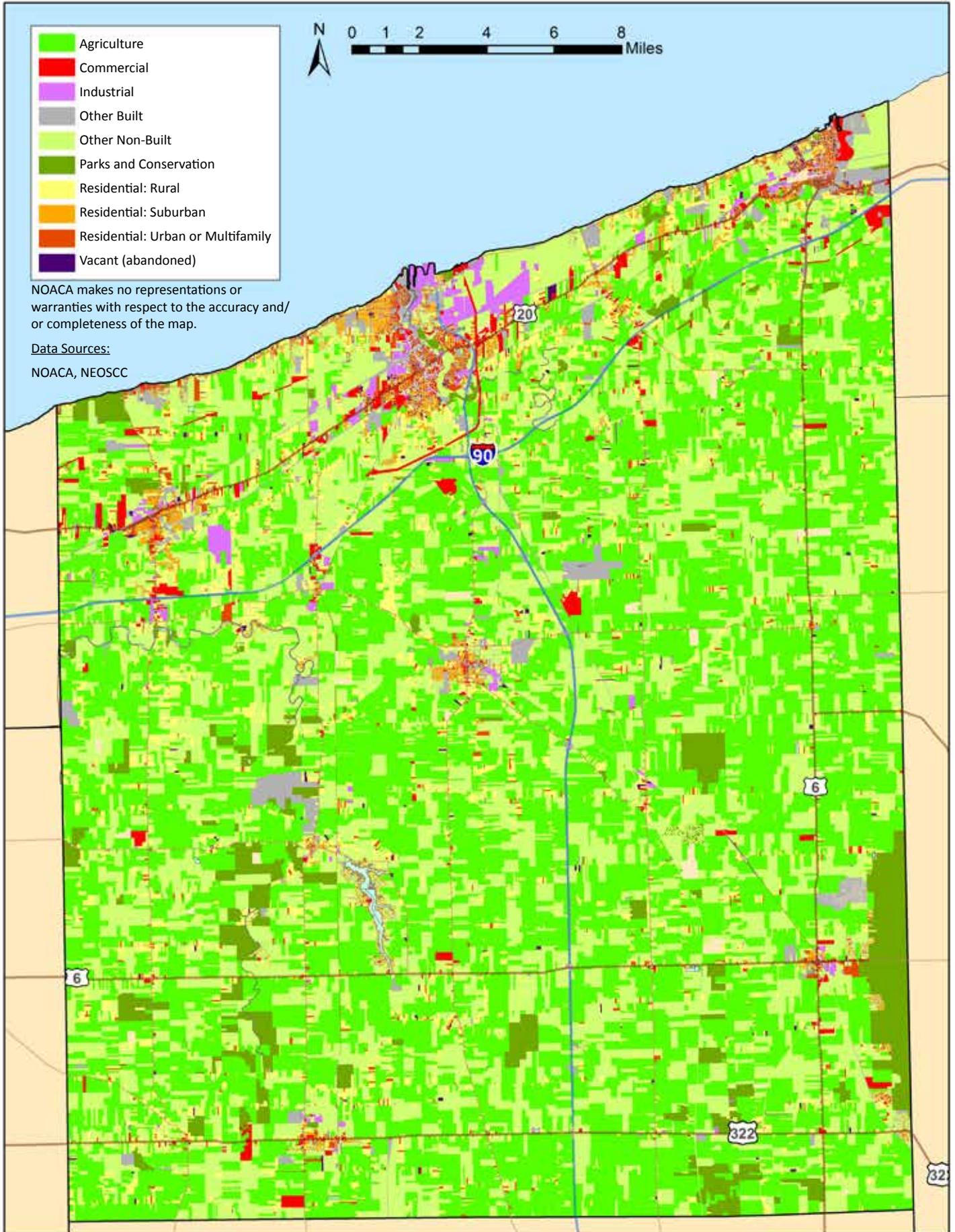
high levels of spending with insufficient revenue to support it. Ashtabula County will experience a 24.8 percent budget deficit. Furthermore, it’s not just a few counties that will perform poorly over the next three decades that pull down the regional balance sheet; all counties will experience declining revenues compared to costs.

Factors Considered:

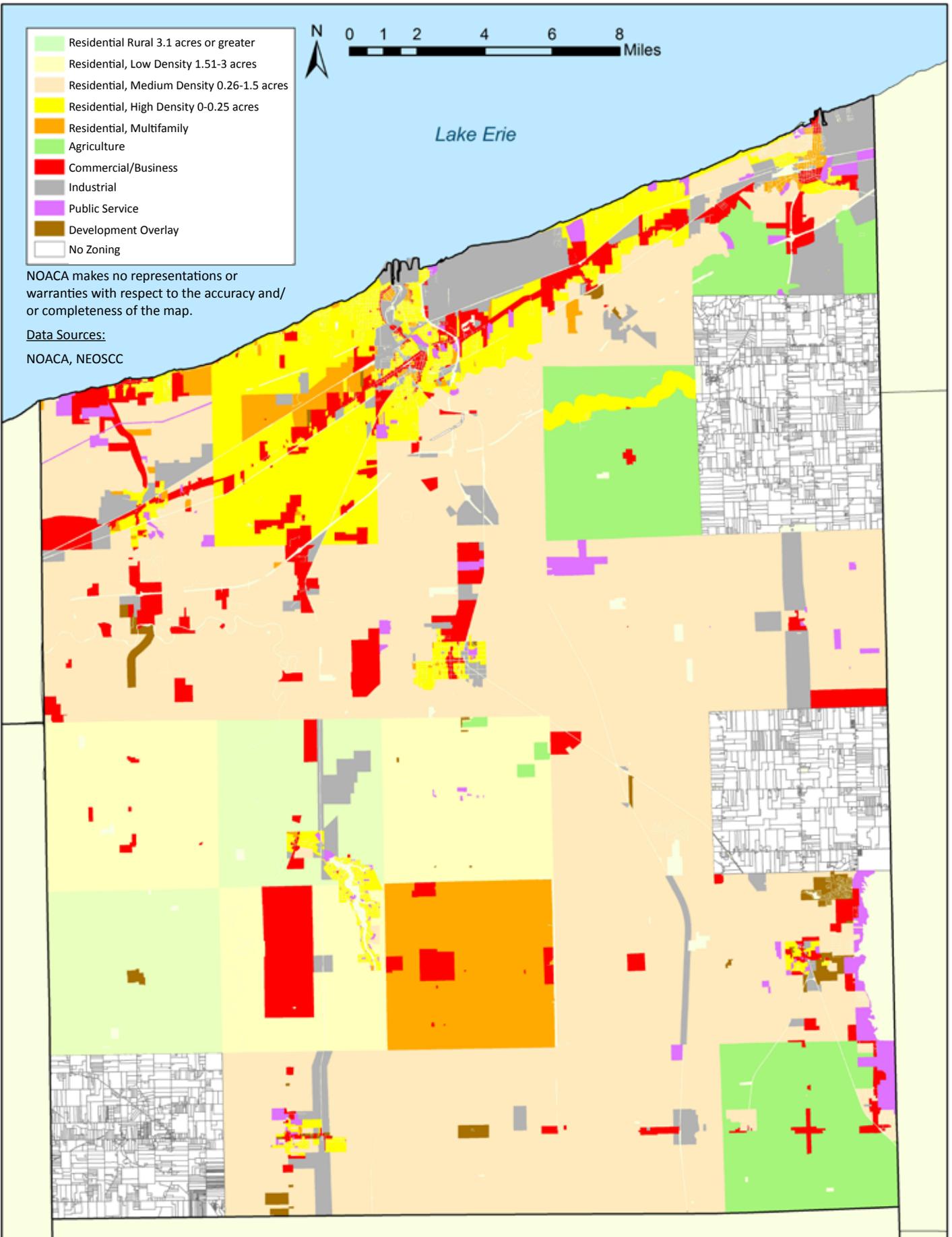
- Number of residents and housing units
- Mix of building types and uses
- Number and density of jobs per sector
- Real estate value
- Linear feet of roads, water, sewer, and utility lines
- Tax rates
- Construction costs
- Cost-share between public and private entities
- Regional levels of service and costs for education, hospitals, police, community facilities, and parks



CURRENT LAND USE IN ASHTABULA COUNTY



CURRENT ZONING IN ASHTABULA COUNTY



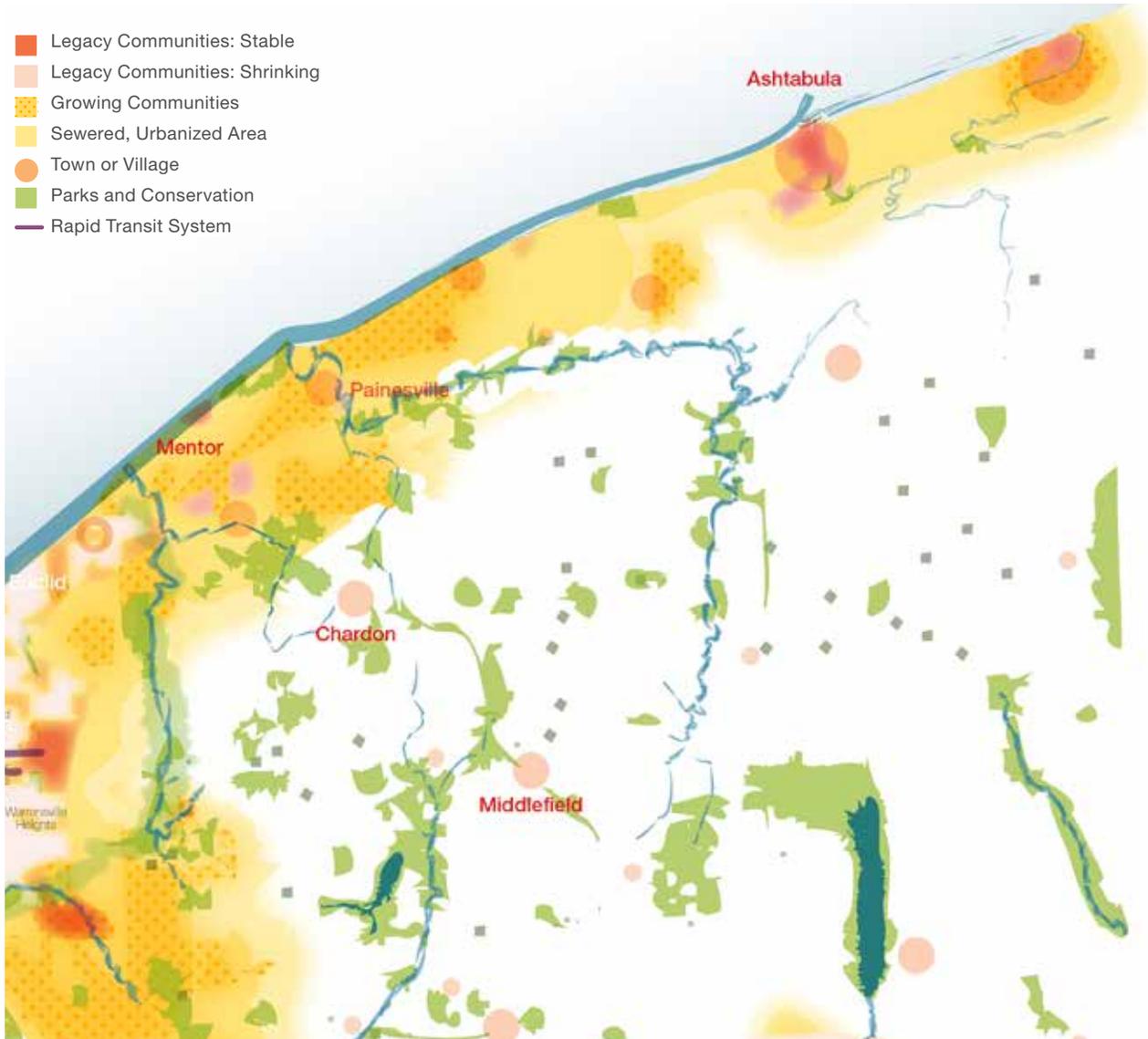
NOACA makes no representations or warranties with respect to the accuracy and/or completeness of the map.

Data Sources:

NOACA, NEOSCC

CURRENT TRAJECTORY OF ASHTABULA COUNTY

Northeast Ohio is changing. Central cities that were historically the centers of the region are experiencing abandonment. Once-dense urban neighborhoods now struggle with high rates of vacancy. Outside the cities, working farmland and undeveloped landscapes are being converted to new subdivisions, office parks, and shopping centers as people and jobs move to expanding and newly created suburbs. The distances between jobs, schools, homes, stores, and parks are increasing, and transportation options are increasingly limited to personal vehicles. What will the region be like in 2040 if these trends continue?



What does Sewered Urbanized Area Mean?

The yellow region on the map is labeled as the “Sewered Urbanized Area.” It is “sewered” because the area within this boundary is served by sewer lines. It is “urban” because it is defined as such by the U.S. Census Bureau. The Census Bureau definition does not mean that places within the boundary are urban in the sense that they have tall buildings, feel like cities, or even that they are heavily developed; it is a technical definition that means places with a minimum of 2,500 residents and their surrounding territories.¹

¹ The full definition can be found at <http://www.census.gov/geo/reference/usa/urban-rural-2010.html>

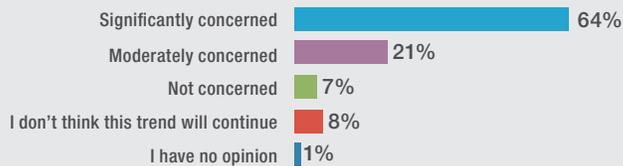
PUBLIC FEEDBACK ON TREND SCENARIO

The first series of scenario planning public engagement sessions was a set of workshops framed around exploring regional trends. Six Trend Scenario Workshops were held throughout the region and attended by 589 people. Workshops were held in: Cleveland East, Warrensville Heights, Oberlin, Warren, Akron, and Canton. The first engagement meeting for the Eastgate metro-area was held in Warren and attracted participants from the three counties.

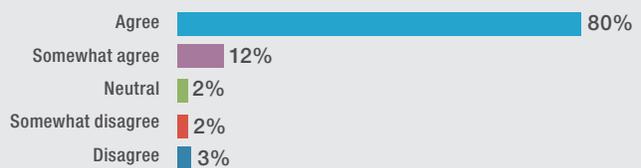
Workshops started with an introduction at which multiple choice questions were posed intermittently to gauge participants' opinions about topics such as outward migration, abandonment, and desirable neighborhood amenities.

Workshop in Warren for Eastgate Region: Polling Questions

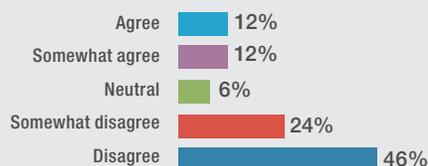
How concerned are you about the level of abandonment seen in the Trend Scenario?



How much do you agree or disagree? We should reinvest in existing communities to create new jobs and housing.



How much do you agree or disagree? We should continue to grow outward to create new jobs and housing.





Participants worked in groups at tables during the six Trend Scenario Workshops to create 73 maps.¹ Several common themes emerged out of these maps. Many tables were dissatisfied with the increasingly dispersed development in outlying areas and significant new abandonment in urban areas. Groups frequently chose to trade game pieces that represented dispersed development for additional compact development, reinvestment, and reinforcement game pieces. These trades reflect dissatisfaction with the trend development mix and a desire for reinvestment in and adjacent to legacy communities. The majority of groups did not trade all their dispersed development pieces, however, reflecting the importance of a diverse range of housing options and balancing auto-oriented development with communities with densities that support walking, biking, and public transportation. Many tables sketched additional public transit and greenway connections between communities or to link communities with parks, natural resources, and Lake Erie. Protecting agriculture and natural resources was also important to the majority of tables. Most tables distinguished between areas that should be protected as farmland versus areas that should be protected for other conservation purposes.

¹ Map images are available online at <http://vibrantneo.org/>.

TREND WORKSHOP GAME PIECES



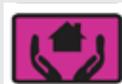
DISPERSED DEVELOPMENT: Low-density mix of single-family homes on larger lots, shopping centers, and office parks. Uses are typically separate from one another and require a car to travel between destinations.



COMPACT DEVELOPMENT: Development of moderate density, including a mix of housing types and job locations.

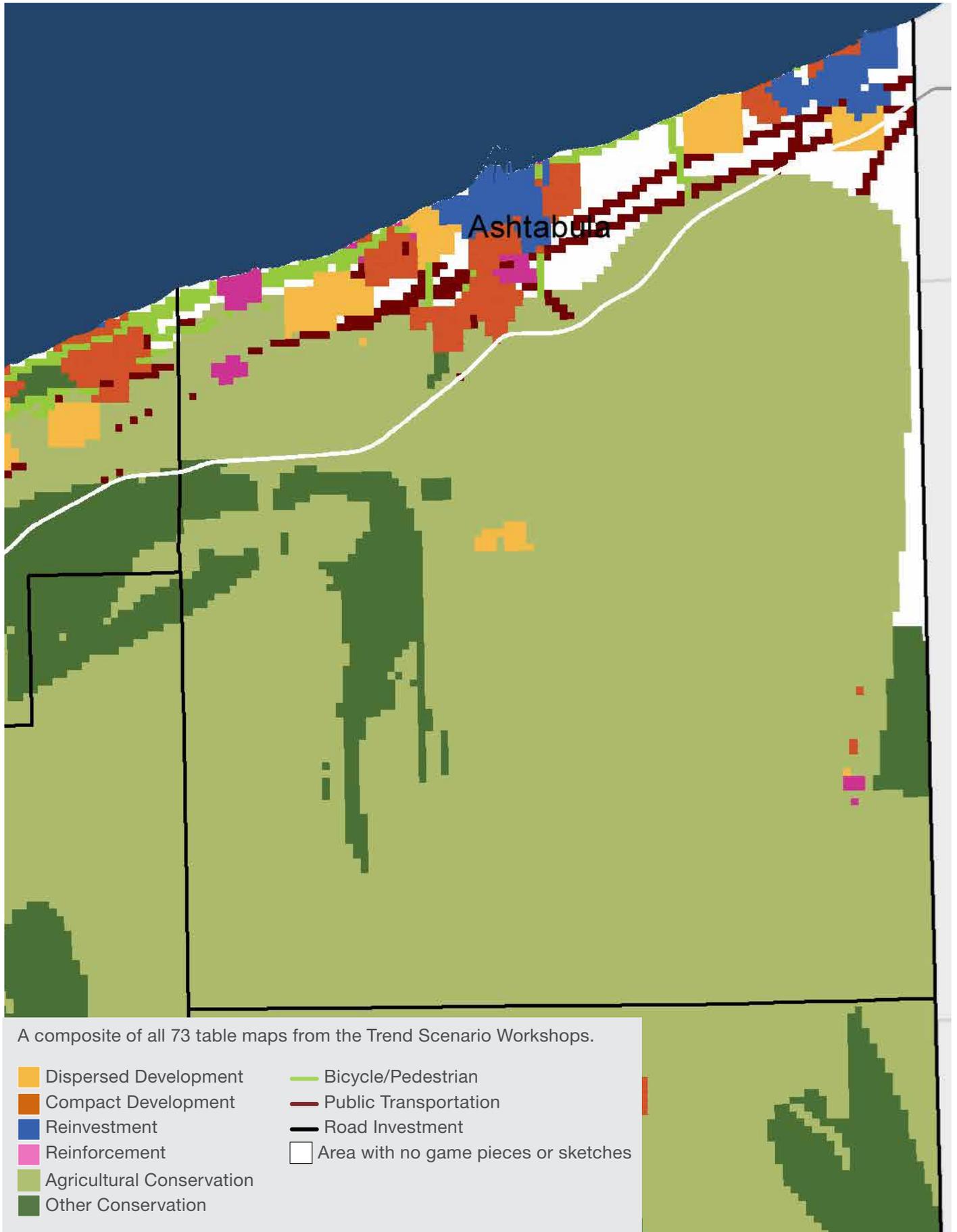


REINVESTMENT: Investing in areas with existing high-vacancy rates and moderate density. The mix of housing types and jobs is similar to compact growth pieces.



REINFORCEMENT: Investment in areas threatened with increasing vacancy and moderate density. The mix of housing types and jobs is similar to compact development pieces.

Composite Trend Workshop Map



ALTERNATIVE SCENARIOS

WHERE COULD OUR REGION AND ASHTABULA COUNTY GO?
WHAT ARE OUR OPTIONS, CHOICES,
AND KEY TRADE-OFFS?

INTRODUCING THE ALTERNATIVE SCENARIOS

The alternative scenarios show a range of plausible futures for the region to help us understand how key choices and trade-offs affect outcomes. The purposes of the scenarios are to learn about the range of options and spark reflection and discussion. Feedback and lessons learned from the alternatives directly shaped the regional vision.

On the regional scale, the projections for the Trend and Do Things Differently Scenarios use the same values, while the projections for the Grow the Same and Grow Differently Scenarios use higher values, however, outcomes at the county level vary significantly across scenarios, as growth is projected to occur in either existing or newly created communities.

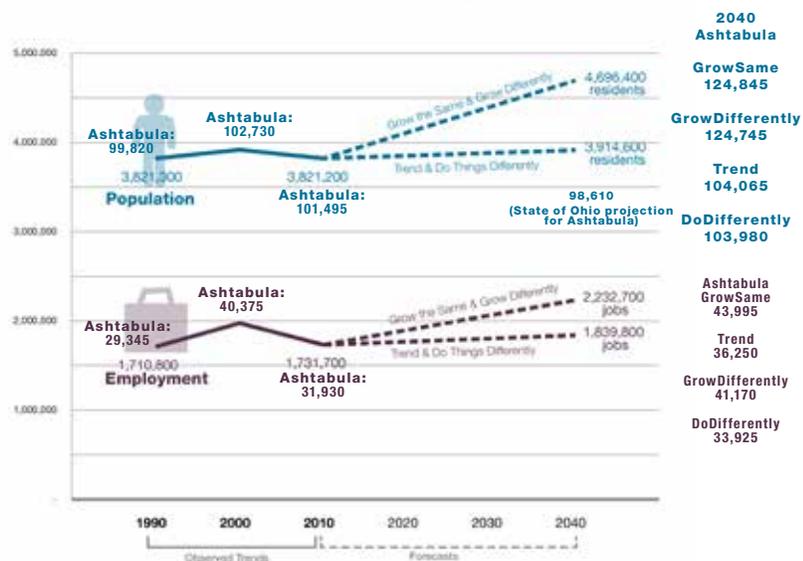
The GROW THE SAME Scenario predicts the impacts of additional population and employment growth in the region if Northeast Ohio grew at the same rate as the nation and no changes in policies or funding priorities take place. Since the policies and funding priorities are the same as in the Trend Scenario, the additional homes and businesses are predominately in the form of dispersed development in emerging and newly created communities.

The DO THINGS DIFFERENTLY Scenario forecasts the impacts of changing the policies and priorities that occur in the Trend Scenario. These include focusing on reinvestment in established

communities, limiting development in environmentally sensitive areas, using existing infrastructure wherever possible, increasing the proportion of mixed-use and walkable development, expanding public transportation and bicycle/pedestrian trail networks, and prioritizing growth near established communities.

The GROW DIFFERENTLY Scenario calculates the impacts of combining growth at the national rate with different local and regional policies and funding priorities. This scenario sees the same number of new residents and jobs as Grow the Same, but emphasizes redevelopment, infill, and compact development (as they are in Do Things Differently).

Employment and Population Projections for Ashtabula County and the Region



LAND-USE CHANGES IN ASHTABULA COUNTY IN 2040

A significant difference among the scenarios is the location of new development. Like the Trend Scenario, Grow the Same continues the region’s current pattern of putting new development on previously undeveloped farmland or in natural areas at the edges of established communities. Grow Differently and Do Things Differently emphasize reinvestment and infill in established communities.

Trend Scenario



Do Things Differently Scenario



- Mixed-Use
- Commercial
- Industrial
- Residential: Urban or Multifamily
- Residential: Suburban
- Residential: Rural
- Agriculture
- Parks and Conservation
- Abandoned Parcels
- Other Unbuilt
- Other Built
- Water

Grow the Same Scenario

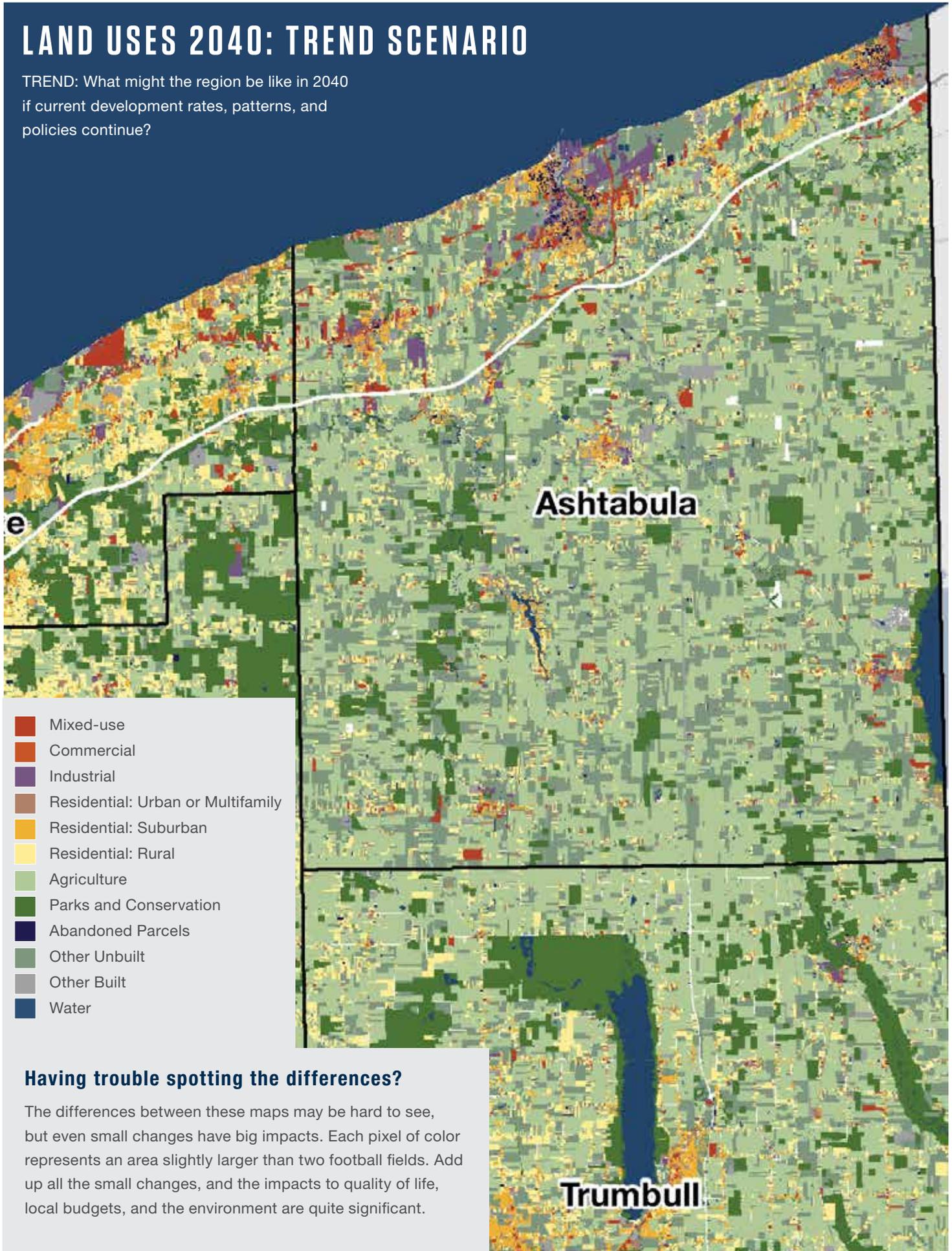


Grow Differently Scenario



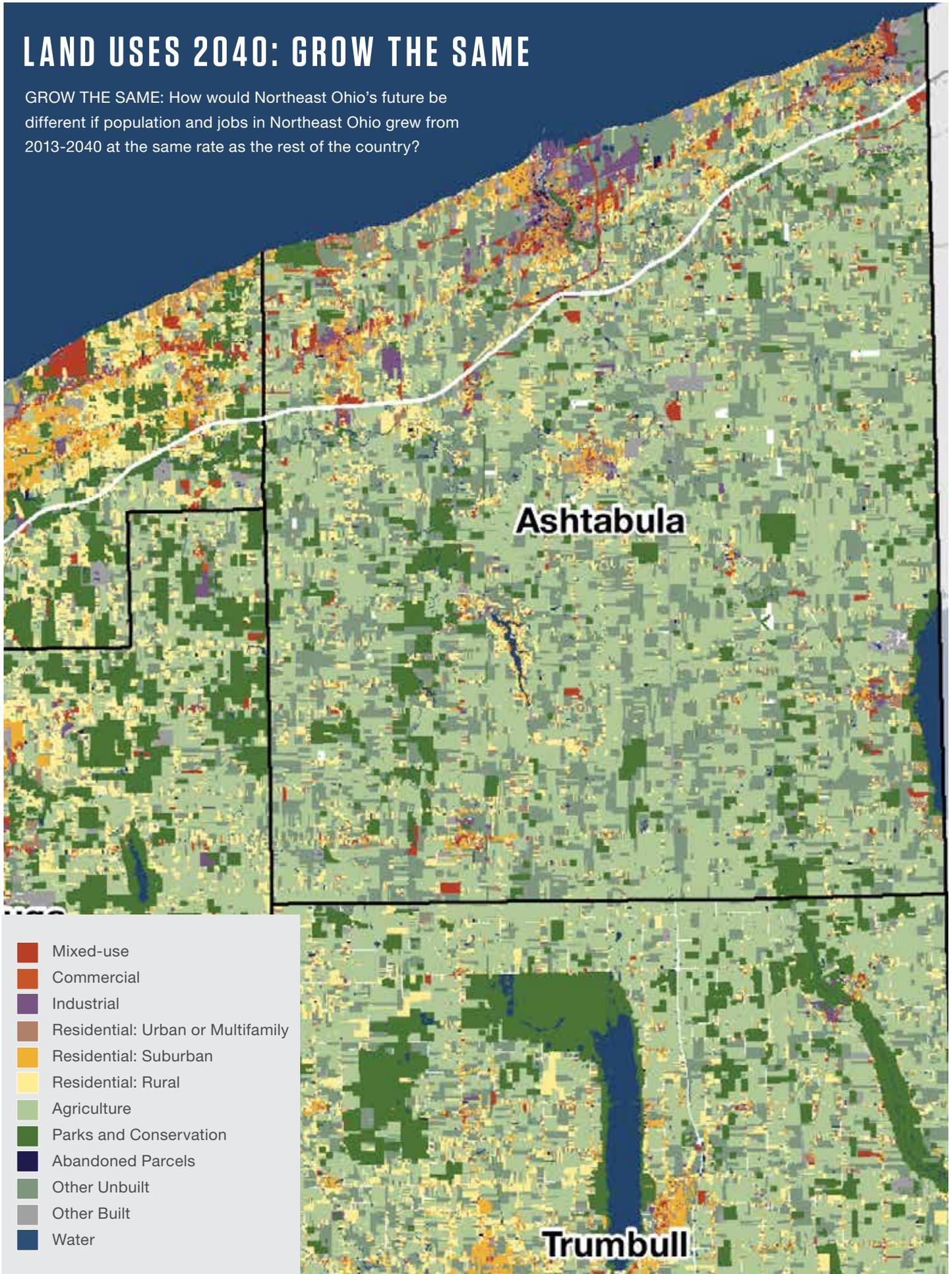
LAND USES 2040: TREND SCENARIO

TREND: What might the region be like in 2040 if current development rates, patterns, and policies continue?



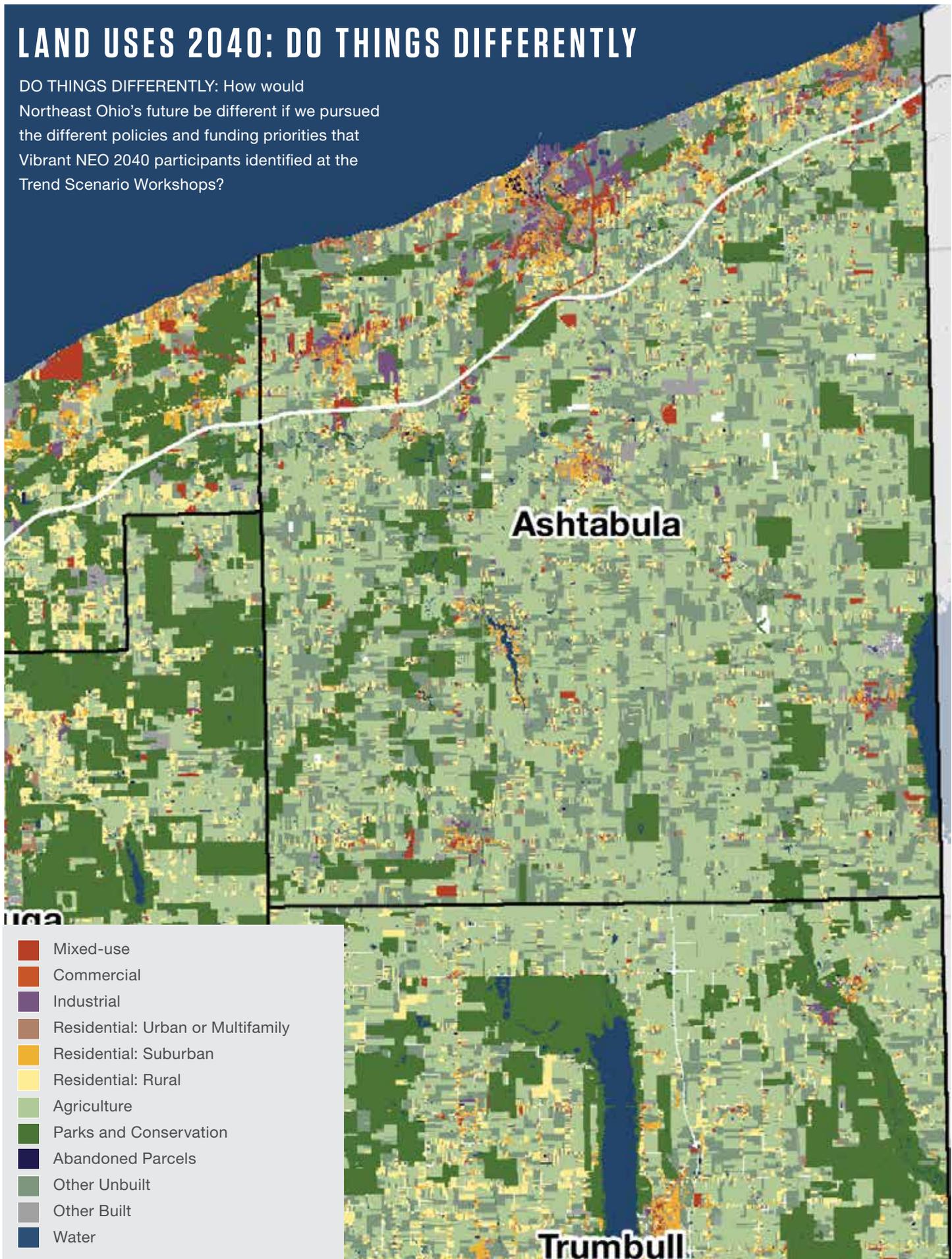
LAND USES 2040: GROW THE SAME

GROW THE SAME: How would Northeast Ohio's future be different if population and jobs in Northeast Ohio grew from 2013-2040 at the same rate as the rest of the country?



LAND USES 2040: DO THINGS DIFFERENTLY

DO THINGS DIFFERENTLY: How would Northeast Ohio's future be different if we pursued the different policies and funding priorities that Vibrant NEO 2040 participants identified at the Trend Scenario Workshops?



LAND USES 2040: GROW DIFFERENTLY

GROW DIFFERENTLY: How would Northeast Ohio's future be different if population and jobs in Northeast Ohio grew from 2013-2040 at the same rate as the rest of the country and we pursued the different policies and funding priorities that Vibrant NEO 2040 participants identified at the Trend Scenario Workshops?

Ashtabula

Trumbull

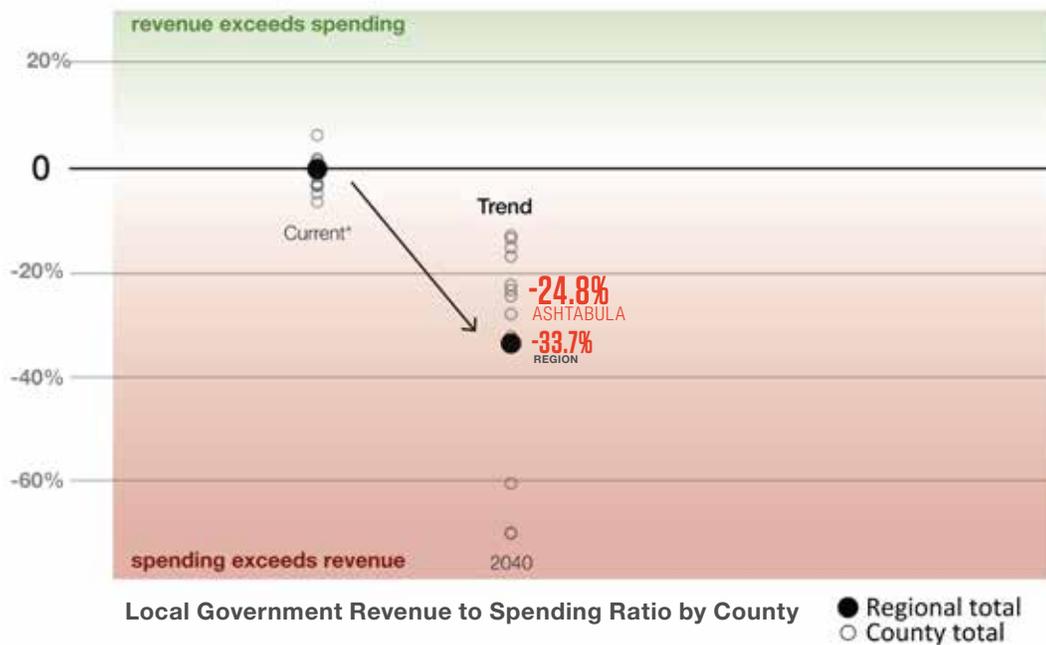
- Mixed-use
- Commercial
- Industrial
- Residential: Urban or Multifamily
- Residential: Suburban
- Residential: Rural
- Agriculture
- Parks and Conservation
- Abandoned Parcels
- Other Unbuilt
- Other Built
- Water

FISCAL HEALTH

The different development patterns and infrastructure investments shown in the four scenarios produce significantly different outcomes for public budgets and ultimately the taxpayers. Key driving factors for fiscal impacts are abandonment, infrastructure costs (capital expenditures and operations/maintenance spending), and tax revenue.



Trend Scenario



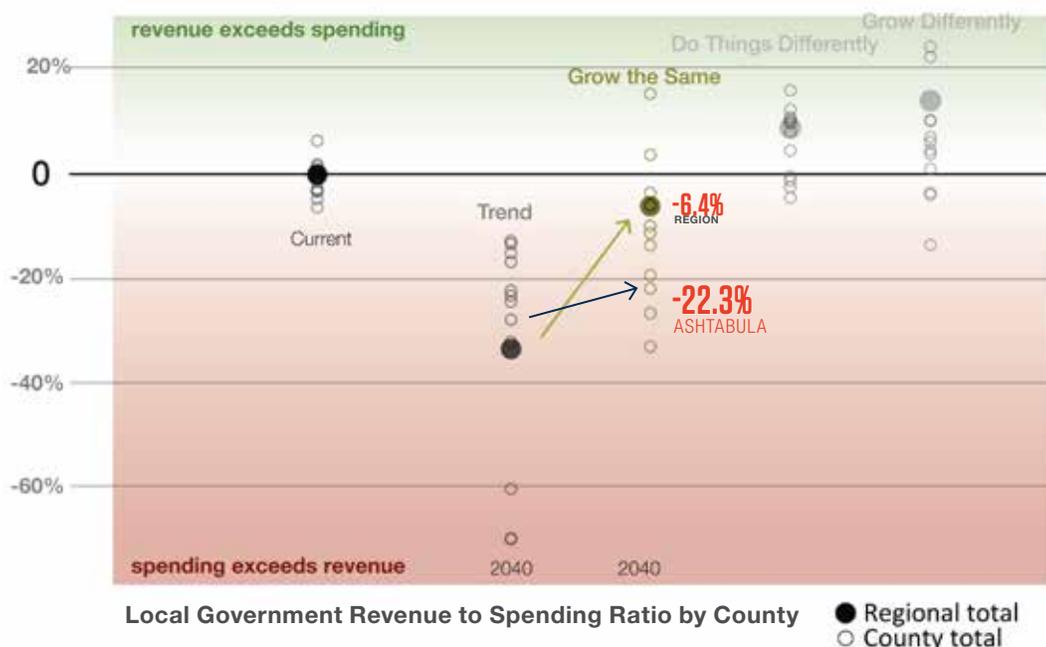
Green = Fiscally Strong
Values greater than 0 mean that the government is bringing in more revenue than it is spending.

These budget surpluses indicate more money is available to finance new infrastructure projects, fund school systems, and maintain existing infrastructure.

Red = Fiscally Weak
Values less than 0 mean that the government is spending more money than it is collecting.

These budget deficits could mean higher taxes or decreased levels of service.

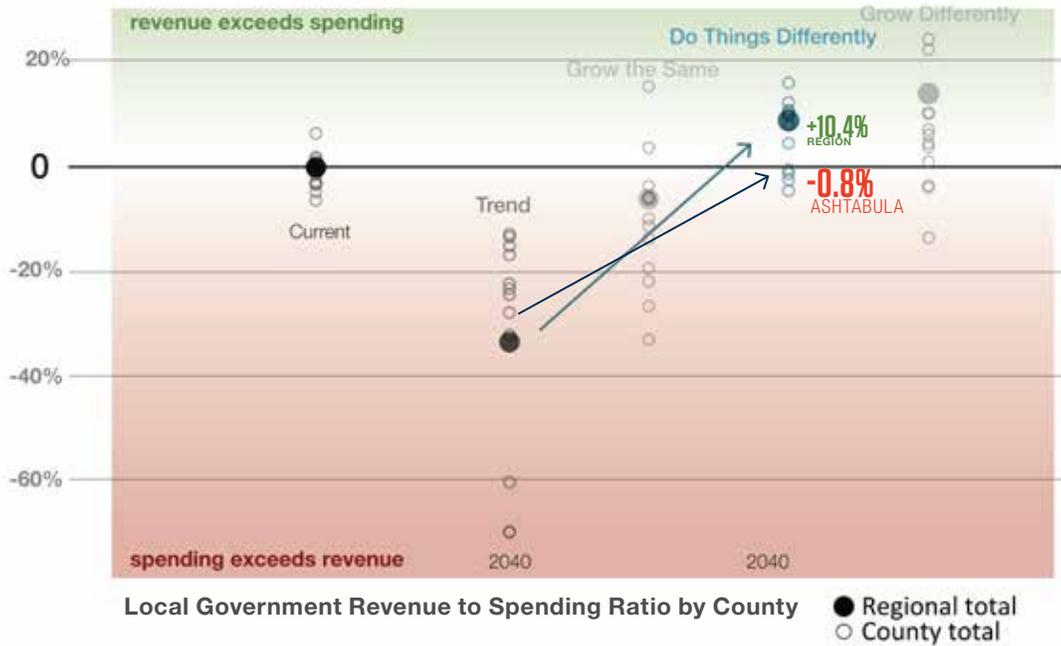
Grow the Same Scenario



What is driving these changes?

- More people and jobs add revenue, but this change alone doesn't solve all of the county's fiscal challenges.
- Some of the additional residential growth, particularly the dispersed, auto-oriented development, creates long-term costs that outweigh the revenue generated.
- Sheer numbers help fill in the gaps created by outward migration and result in lower abandonment and improved fiscal outcomes for the legacy industrial cities.

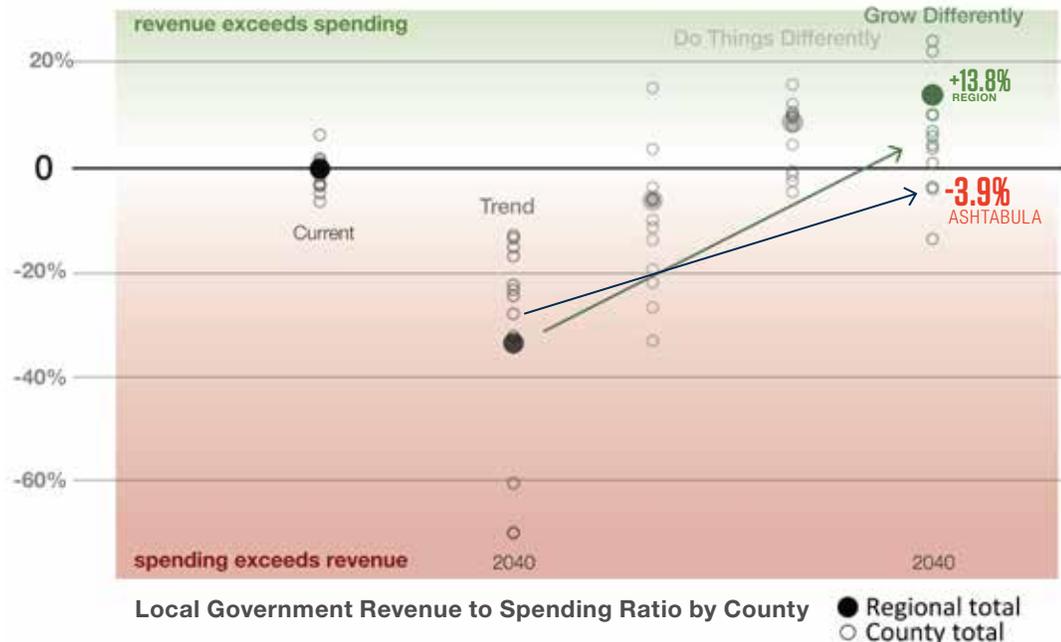
Do Things Differently Scenario



What is driving these changes?

- Takes advantage of infrastructure that has already been built.
- Capitalizes on legacy industrial sites as unique assets for future industry job growth.
- More compact options with improved transit access; revenue exceeds costs.
- Minimal increase in abandonment.

Grow Differently Scenario



What is driving these changes?

- This scenario takes advantage of the same system efficiencies as “Do Things Differently” but to a higher degree.
- Even though this scenario has the best overall fiscal outcome, some counties remain “in the red.” These tend to be counties that are rural today but are growing rapidly relative to their existing population. For those communities, this scenario doesn’t mean that a balanced budget is out of reach; it means that it will be difficult for them to add population, maintain the same tax structures and development patterns as today, and balance their budgets.

SCENARIO SUMMARY: ASHTABULA COUNTY



	POPULATION 2040	EMPLOYMENT 2040	POPULATION GROWTH 2010-2040	EMPLOYMENT GROWTH 2010-2040	NEW HOUSEHOLDS 2010-2040
TREND <i>WHAT IF OUR GROWTH AND APPROACH STAY THE SAME?</i>	 3,914,600 REGION 104,065 Ashtabula County	 1,839,800 REGION 36,250 Ashtabula County	 93,430 REGION 2,570 Ashtabula County	 108,100 REGION 4,320 Ashtabula County	 91,017 REGION 2,390 Ashtabula County
GROW THE SAME <i>WHAT IF WE GROW AT THE SAME RATE AS THE NATION AND DON'T DO THINGS DIFFERENTLY?</i>	 4,696,400 REGION 124,845 Ashtabula County	 2,232,700 REGION 43,995 Ashtabula County	 875,000 REGION 23,350 Ashtabula County	 501,000 REGION 12,060 Ashtabula County	 421,864 REGION 10,765 Ashtabula County
DO THINGS DIFFERENTLY <i>WHAT IF WE DO THINGS DIFFERENTLY AND OUR GROWTH STAYS THE SAME?</i>	 3,914,600 REGION 103,980 Ashtabula County	 1,839,800 REGION 33,925 Ashtabula County	 93,430 REGION 2,480 Ashtabula County	 108,100 REGION 1,995 Ashtabula County	 91,017 REGION 2,300 Ashtabula County
GROW DIFFERENTLY <i>WHAT IF WE GROW AT THE SAME RATE AS THE NATION AND DO THINGS DIFFERENTLY?</i>	 4,696,400 REGION 124,745 Ashtabula County	 2,232,700 REGION 41,170 Ashtabula County	 875,000 REGION 23,245 Ashtabula County	 501,000 REGION 9,240 Ashtabula County	 421,864 REGION 10,660 Ashtabula County

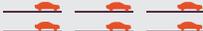
 ~ 10,000 residents

 ~ 5,000 jobs

 ~ 1,000 new residents

 ~ 5,000 new jobs

 ~ 2,000 new households

	NEW BUILDING PERMITS BY 2040	NEW ABANDONED HOMES BY 2040	LANE MILES OF NEW ROADS BY 2040	NEW PARKS AND CONSERVATION LAND BY 2040	COST-TO-REVENUE RATIO BY 2040
TREND WHAT IF OUR GROWTH AND APPROACH STAY THE SAME?	 292,150 REGION 4,650 Ashtabula County	 174,900 REGION 1,935 Ashtabula County	 3,100 REGION 60 Ashtabula County	 121,500 REGION 14,645 Ashtabula County	-33.7% REGION -24.8% Ashtabula County
GROW THE SAME WHAT IF WE GROW AT THE SAME RATE AS THE NATION AND DON'T DO THINGS DIFFERENTLY?	 554,214 REGION 11,845 Ashtabula County	 93,100 REGION 250 Ashtabula County	 6,000 REGION 185 Ashtabula County	 121,500 REGION 14,645 Ashtabula County	-6.4% REGION -22.3% Ashtabula County
DO THINGS DIFFERENTLY WHAT IF WE DO THINGS DIFFERENTLY AND OUR GROWTH STAYS THE SAME?	 121,483 REGION 2,990 Ashtabula County	 19,800 REGION 480 Ashtabula County	 700 REGION 15 Ashtabula County	 288,500 REGION 34,460 Ashtabula County	+10.4% REGION -0.8% Ashtabula County
GROW DIFFERENTLY WHAT IF WE GROW AT THE SAME RATE AS THE NATION AND DO THINGS DIFFERENTLY?	 430,132 REGION 7,410 Ashtabula County	 2,400 REGION -3,765 Ashtabula County	 2,400 REGION 60 Ashtabula County	 205,600 REGION 24,550 Ashtabula County	+13.8% REGION -3.9% Ashtabula County

 - 2,000 new housing units

 - 100 new abandoned housing units

 - 30 lane miles of new roads

 - 10,000 new acres of parks and conserved land

SCENARIO THEMES AND PUBLIC FEEDBACK

WHERE DO WE WANT TO GO?

The different scenarios show that Northeast Ohio has multiple choices to make about its future, and its decisions will significantly impact quality of life, fiscal health, neighborhood character, and environmental quality over the long run.

Ten public open houses held across the region provided opportunities to gather public feedback on the scenarios and the trade-offs they represented. Maps, tables, and interpretive graphics that summarized the four alternative scenarios were printed on boards and arranged in a series of themes. This report summarizes the 23 public responses from Ashtabula County residents who attended open house at Kent State University's Ashtabula Campus.

Theme 1: Outward Migration

Theme 2: Place Types and Community Character

Theme 3: Transportation

Theme 4: Open Space—Environment and Agriculture



The arrangement of the boards was similar in each location. This photo is from the open house in Lorain County.

THEME 1: OUTWARD MIGRATION

A significant difference between the scenarios is the location of new development. Like the Trend Scenario, Grow the Same continues the region’s current pattern of putting new development on previously undeveloped farmland or in natural areas at the edges of established communities. Grow Differently and Do Things Differently emphasize reinvestment and infill in established communities. The overall magnitude of new development is greater in the growth scenarios.

These differences lead to dramatically different outcomes. Abandonment varies significantly across the scenarios, from a high of 175,000 newly abandoned units in Trend to a low of 2,400 abandoned homes in Grow Differently. For Ashtabula County, the scenarios range from a high of 1,935 newly abandoned units in the Trend to no abandonment in the Grow Differently scenario. The combination of growth and new policies that emphasize reinvestment reduces abandonment.

Open House Board: How should we develop?



- **OUTWARD** = New development away from already established communities
- **CREATES HOMES WITH LARGE LOTS:** Outward development creates a supply of suburban and rural houses with large lots
- **PROVIDES OPPORTUNITIES FOR NONURBAN LIFESTYLE:** The new communities created offer opportunities for a “fresh start” away from the denser urban areas
- **REQUIRES INVESTMENT IN NEW INFRASTRUCTURE:** New construction outside established communities requires building and maintaining new infrastructure—roads, sewers, and utilities
- **PRESENTS ABANDONMENT RISK:** As residents leave old communities for new ones, vacancy and abandonment occur if no one moves in to take their place
- **IMPACTS RURAL CHARACTER AND AGRICULTURAL LAND:** Outward migration puts increased development pressures on agricultural land and environmentally sensitive areas

- **INWARD** = New development in already established communities
- **REUSES EXISTING INFRASTRUCTURE:** Inward growth can take advantage of existing utilities, sewers, and transportation networks to save taxpayers money
- **REVERSES ABANDONMENT:** New construction and rehabs within established communities reverse abandonment and stabilize neighborhoods
- **PROTECTS RURAL LAND:** Farms, open space, and small towns see less development pressure if development is focused in existing, more urban communities
- **INCREASES POPULATIONS IN URBAN AREAS:** Land values rise with inward growth, making it more expensive to afford large lots and yards. There would be more people living near each other

Outward migration requires new infrastructure and results in abandonment. Inward investment reuses existing infrastructure and reduces abandonment.

SHOULD WE DEVELOP INWARDLY OR OUTWARDLY?

At the open houses, participants were asked to what extent future development should be outward-focused versus inward-focused. The scenarios show some of the impacts and trade-offs of this decision. Another board presented the pros and cons of each viewpoint. Attendees were asked to sketch on a dial on a community investment feedback card to show how they think the region should develop. 21 completed cards were submitted by residents of Ashtabula County at a variety of open house meetings.

The results were in favor of an approach that prioritizes inward development. The average response was that inward development should be slightly more of a priority than it had been in Do Things Differently and Grow Differently. Summaries of feedback are shown below. For more details about the feedback, visit <http://vibrantneo.org>.

How to read the dials:

The dials represent a spectrum of positions on a certain topic. The ends of the dials represent the extremes. The dashed lines on the dials show where the four scenarios fall along the spectrum of positions. Trend and Grow the Same share the same position, since they have the same policies, and likewise for Do Things Differently and Grow Differently. Open house attendees were asked to draw their own arrows on the cards to reflect their personal view about the topic. The heavy arrow shows the average regional response.



Community Investment Feedback Card

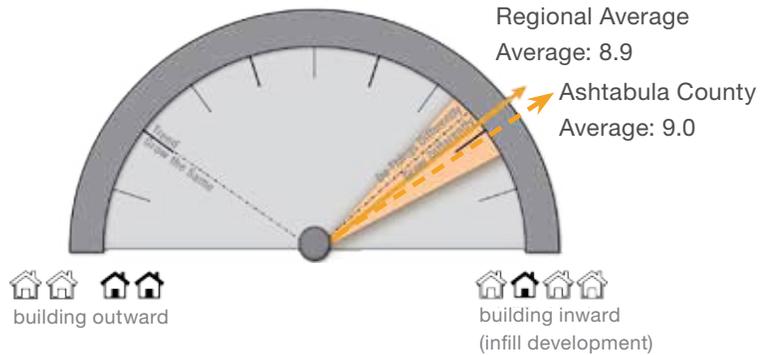
Sample Comments

- Let the free market decide. Capitalism should prevail.
- Can't sustain outward development.
- Invest in inner city areas and inner ring suburbs. Develop policies to promote and preserve rural areas.
- Infill with dollars toward infrastructure improvements not outward built.
- Reduce subsidies for outward growth & support targeted infill development (not just infill generically).

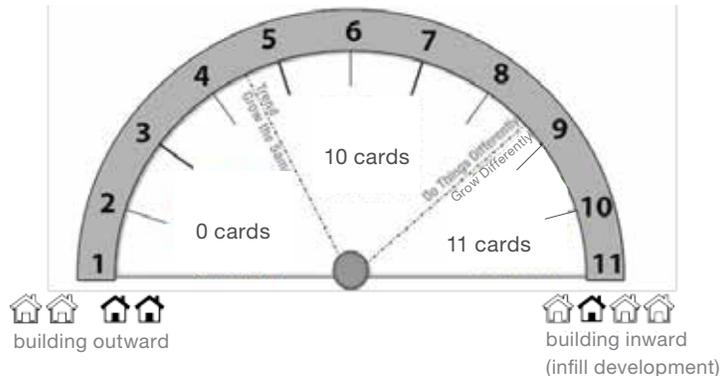


Open House Dials: Outward Versus Inward Community Investment

Community Investment Dial: Average Regional Response



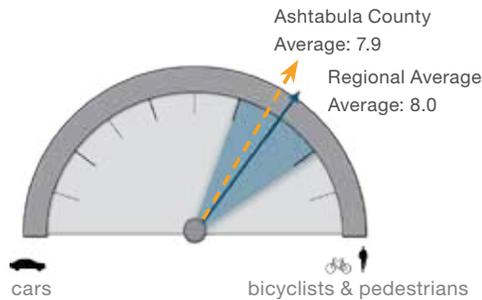
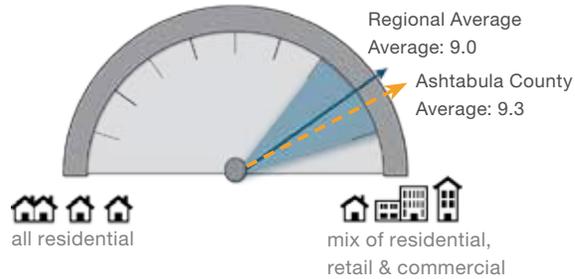
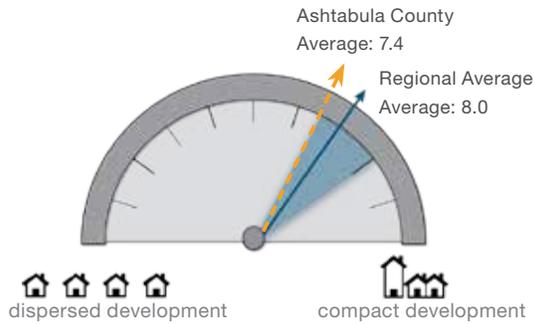
Community Investment Dial Responses by Segment



THEME 2: PLACE TYPES AND COMMUNITY CHARACTER

Development styles have shifted in the region away from smaller-lot, compact, mixed-use urban neighborhoods to more dispersed, auto-oriented subdivisions that are separated from office parks and shopping centers. The character of communities has a significant impact on quality of life for residents. The scenarios demonstrate a range of alternatives for how future development could look. Should the predominant style of development continue the dispersed pattern of recent decades (like Trend and Grow the Same)? Or should new development include a higher percentage of compact options and focus on reinvesting in established communities (like Do Things Differently and Grow Differently)? 17 completed community preference feedback cards were received from Ashtabula County residents.

Open House Dials: Community Preferences



Sample Comment

Rural is better

I do not see any reduction in vehicles. But more bike lanes, sidewalks, bus circulators, would help. Reduction in some care volume.

More walkable communities, build on existing investment. Protect environment.

I think you also need to consider negative impacts on existing communities when compact development takes place.



Place Types with Highest Public Investment Priority in the Region

The project team categorized the communities of Northeast Ohio according to six place types based on the mean age of housing stock in the community (see map). These place types let us see how similar communities fare in the scenarios and provide a framework for implementation. Boards presented images of the six place types and asked participants to identify which place types they use, value, and enjoy, and which place types the region should invest in. The green boxes below indicate the investment priorities of Ashtabula County Participants. The top three place types in which the participating public felt the region should invest were legacy cities, first-ring suburbs, and established cities and towns. These preferences are consistent with desires for investing in established communities expressed by participants during the Trend Scenario Workshops.



Legacy Cities (Pre-1910) *City Architecture*

Regional
95%



First-Ring Suburbs (1910–1959) *City Architecture*

Regional
86%



Second-Ring Suburbs (1950–1969)
City Architecture

Regional
33%



Outer-Ring Suburbs (1970–present)
City Architecture

Regional
14%



Established Cities and Towns (varies)
Sasaki Associates

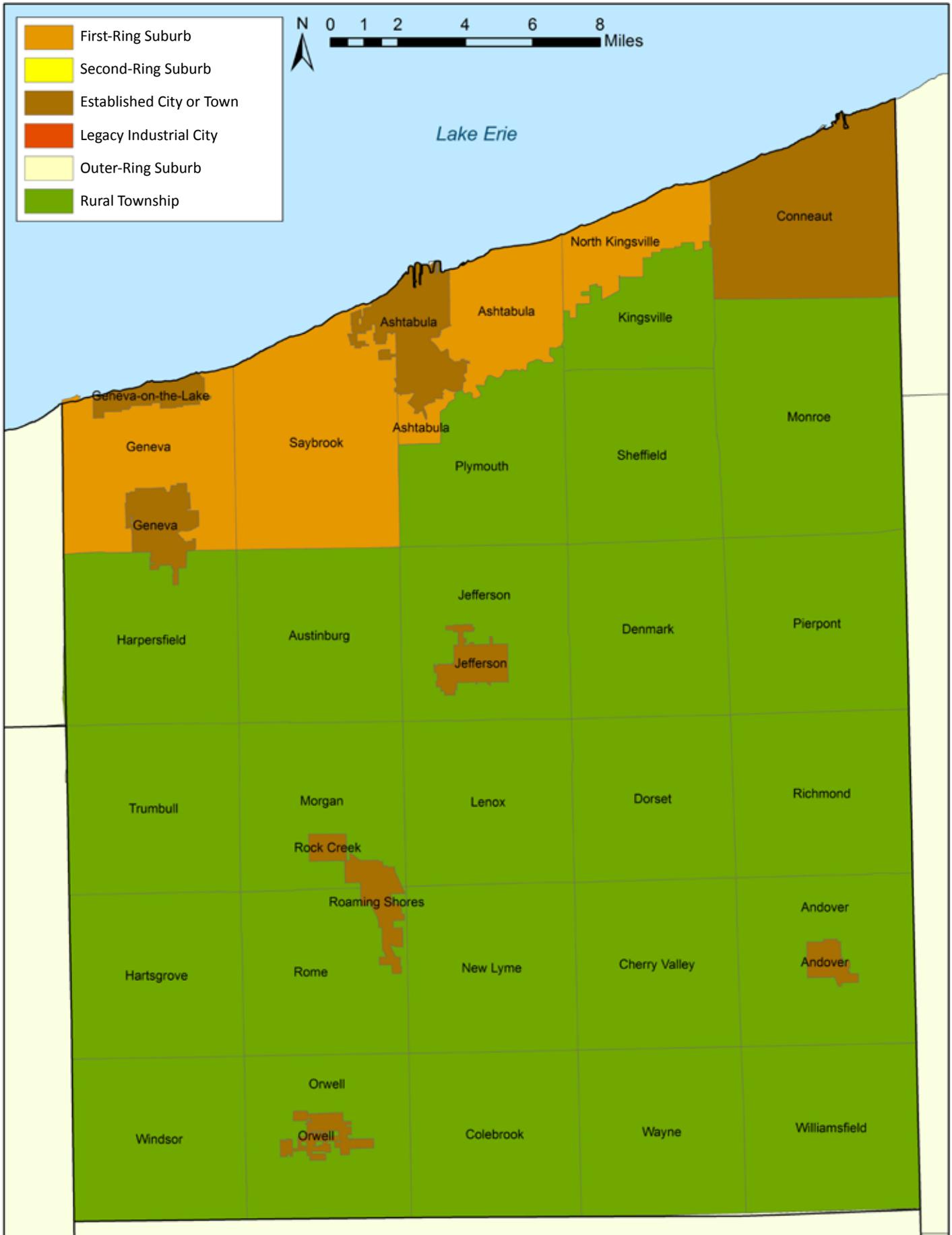
Regional
91%



Rural Townships (varies)
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/kenlund/7984528214/>

Regional
59%

ASHTABULA COUNTY COMMUNITY TYPES



THEME 3: TRANSPORTATION

HOW SHOULD THE REGION INVEST IN TRANSPORTATION IN THE FUTURE?

We asked participants at the open houses whether the region should continue to prioritize auto-oriented infrastructure, or whether it should expand transportation options for multiple modes. Participants were asked to sketch on a dial to show their transportation investment preference: more auto-oriented focus versus multiple modes of transportation including walking, bicycling, and public transit. Out of 23 completed cards from Ashtabula County residents, the results overall tended toward expanding transportation options to include alternative modes.

Some participants felt that public transit may not be appropriate everywhere in the region and noted that rural areas would be less likely to have frequent transit service. Many comments emphasized the importance of distinguishing between investments needed to maintain existing road infrastructure and those needed to add new road infrastructure. Comments showed strong support for maintaining existing roads (and bridges) and less support for roadway infrastructure expansion. Comments reflected the participating public's desires for a balanced approach to transportation that expands options for public transit, walking, and bicycling while maintaining existing roadway infrastructure.



Sample Comments

Personal freedom outweighs government transportation.

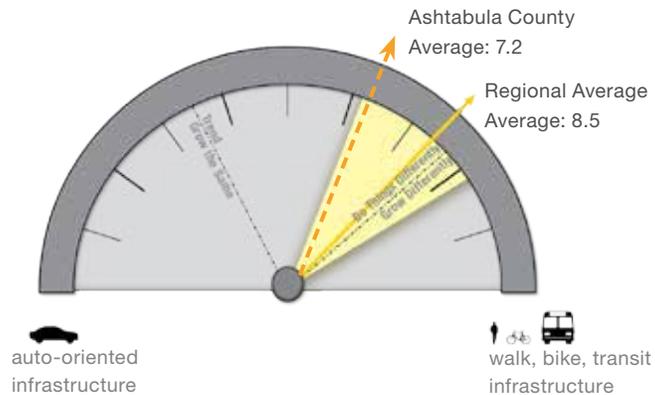
Let the free market decide.

I think we have far, far too much investment in and subsidies for cars. I prefer focus on safe, healthy cities, with equitable funding for safe streets, hike & bike trails & public transit.

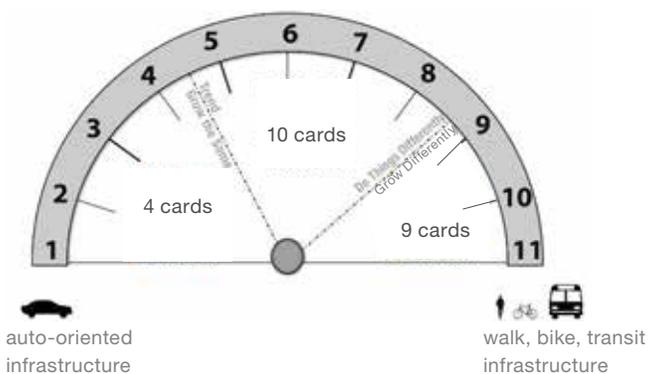


Open House Dials: Transportation Choice

Transportation Dial: Average Regional Response



Transportation Dial Responses by Segment



THEME 4: OPEN SPACE - ENVIRONMENT AND AGRICULTURE

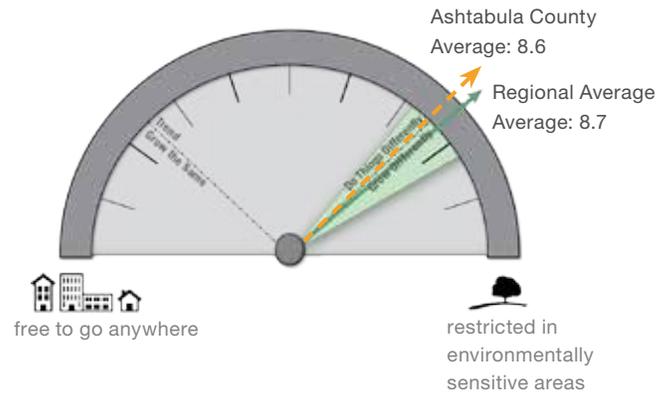
SHOULD WE RELAX, STRENGTHEN, OR MAINTAIN CURRENT ENVIRONMENTAL REGULATIONS ON DEVELOPMENT?

Discussions about development regulations are often contentious, so the project team sought public input to guide the eventual recommendations in the Vision. Northeast Ohio has a sufficient supply of developable land that is already served by infrastructure to accommodate the regional growth anticipated in any of the four scenarios without affecting sensitive ecological land or high-value farmland. We asked open house attendees how they felt about this question: “Should we relax or strengthen environmental regulations on development?” We received 19 completed feedback cards from Ashtabula County residents.

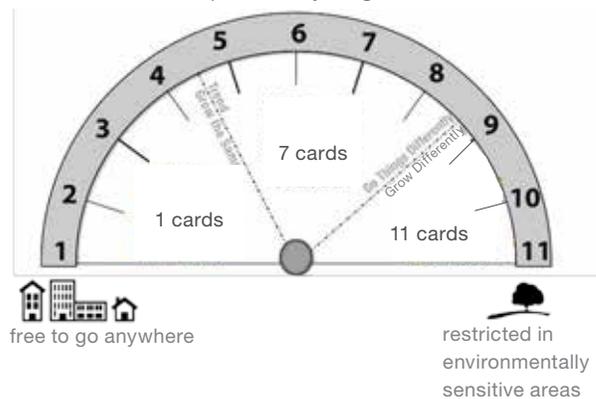
Comments by participants who voted in favor of no development regulations cited private property concerns and a view that regulation is not the best way to achieve environmental goals. Participants who voted in favor of a middle approach felt that location is not the only factor that matters for environmental impacts and that there should be a balance. Participants who voted in favor of restricting development in environmentally sensitive areas gave a variety of reasons: to mitigate flooding and flood damage, improve environmental health, protect watersheds, and conserve open space and agricultural land. Citing the available land in established communities, comments also touched on the link between inward/outward development and environmental resources.

Open House Dials: Environmental Regulations

Environment and Development Regulations Dial: Average Regional Response



Environment and Development Regulations Dial Responses by Segment



Sample Comments

- Freedom of choice is more important than politicians making my decisions for me.
- Protect wet lands. Residential restrictions.
- Definitely protect the Cuyahoga watershed and invest in restoration of it.
- Ecological reserves must be preserved for the quality of life to be sustained narrowly defined economic growth is not sustainable.
- Difficult, but environmental problems require major attention - repair of existing problems must be completed.
- Managed growth in areas not connected to existing transportation infrastructure.
- I prefer denser, locally-friendly development concentrated in more urban/inner-ring suburban.
- Farming pays more taxes than it uses.



CONSERVATION, PARKS, AND GREENWAY NETWORKS IN THE SCENARIOS

Trend Scenario



Do Things Differently Scenario



Grow the Same Scenario



Grow Differently Scenario



CROWDSOURCED PRIORITIES: IMAGINEMYNEO

WHERE DO WE WANT TO GO?

HOW DOES IMAGINE MY NEO WORK?

As another way to explore the topics and trade-offs discussed at the open houses, the project team created an online platform called ImagineMyNEO. The tool was designed to elicit priorities, communicate the impacts of policies and investments on those priorities, and gather feedback about preferred future directions for the region. The tool debuted for public use in June 2013, and the project team presented the initial results at the open houses. These results included 1,458 unique respondents, 1,365 of whom were Northeast Ohio residents, including 63 Ashtabula County residents, at the time of completion. The following pages show the ranked priorities, projects and policies of Ashtabula County residents.

Regional Priority Icons



STEP 1: PRIORITIZATION OF VALUES

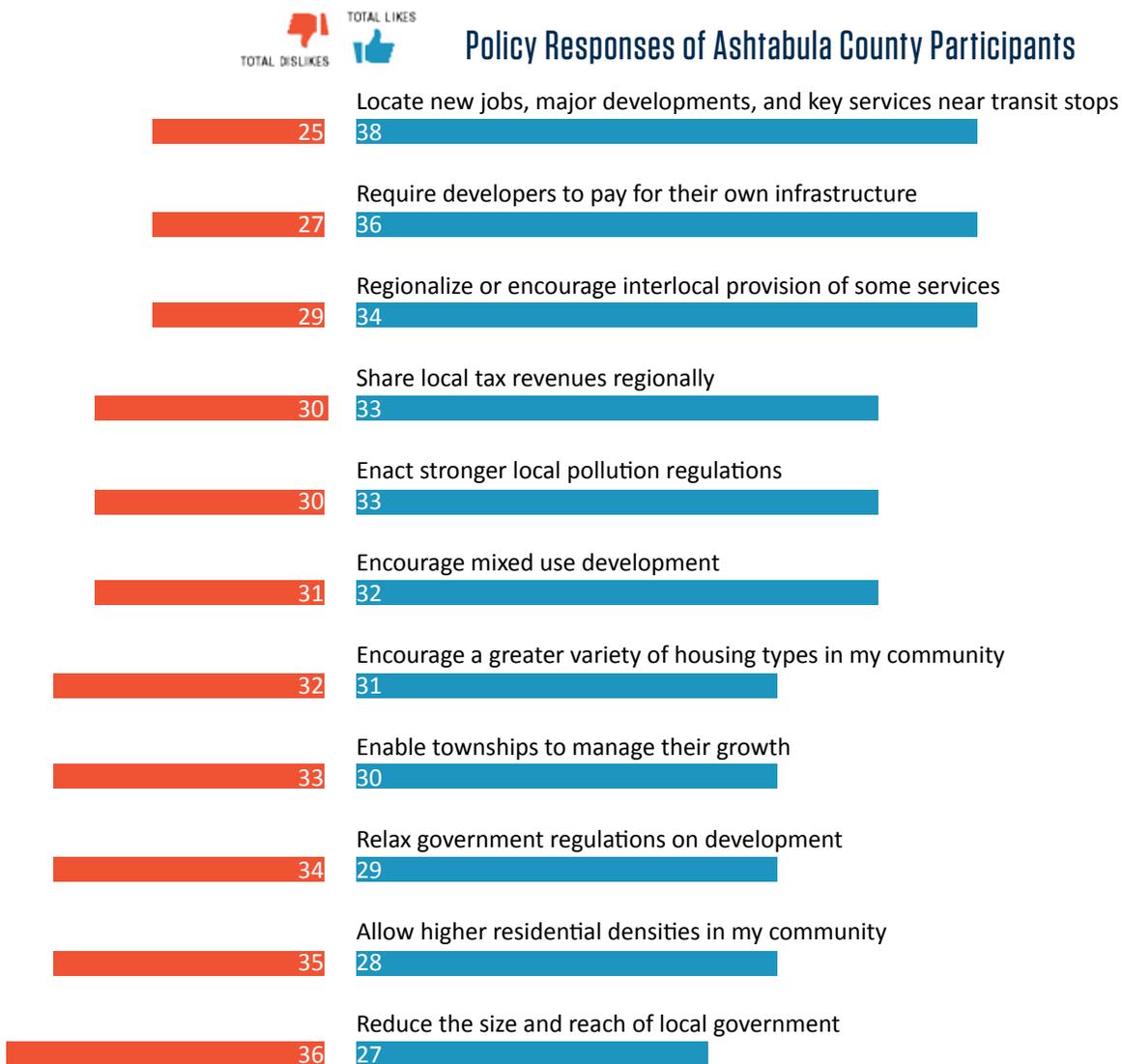
ImagineMyNEO first asked users to identify their priorities for the future. Priorities were described in the form of a list of present-tense statements that described attributes of a community. This enabled users to consider each statement from the perspective of either wishing to preserve a current attribute of the community/region or describing an ideal future condition of the community. Users gave anywhere from zero to five stars to the priorities they valued most. The ranked list of priorities below created a total number of star votes based on the individual rankings. A dynamic display of icons shifted with the user’s scoring of each statement, yielding a composite, icon-based visualization of their individual priorities.

Ranked Priorities of Ashtabula County Participants

	TOTAL STAR VOTES ★★★★★	COMPOSITE STARS ★★★★★
We have clean air, water, and land	212	★★★★☆
Residents can find good jobs and share in the region’s financial success	200	★★★★☆
We have well-maintained infrastructure	187	★★★★☆
There are recreational opportunities and parks nearby	178	★★★★☆
We preserve our open spaces and natural resources	175	★★★★☆
Children can safely walk or bike to neighborhood schools	163	★★★★☆
My community has a rural character	145	★★★★☆
My taxes are low	145	★★★★☆
I can experience great arts, culture, sports, and entertainment	142	★★★★☆
I can easily stay in my community after I retire	126	★★★★☆
I can get to places without a car	110	★★★★☆
We preserve and invest in our central cities	91	★★★☆☆
My community has an urban character	81	★★★☆☆
There are fewer local development and zoning regulations	76	★★★☆☆
My community has a suburban character	74	★★★☆☆

STEP 2: EXPLORING IMPACTS

After marking priorities with a star, users could then learn how different planning policies and projects impact each of their priorities. “Policies” were actions taken by local governments to shape outcomes in the built environment, whereas “projects” were direct actions with a specific, material outcome (see next page). Clicking on the priority icon revealed a written explanation of how the project or policy impacts that specific priority, providing an opportunity for the user to learn about the consequence of a choice to “invest” in a particular policy or project.

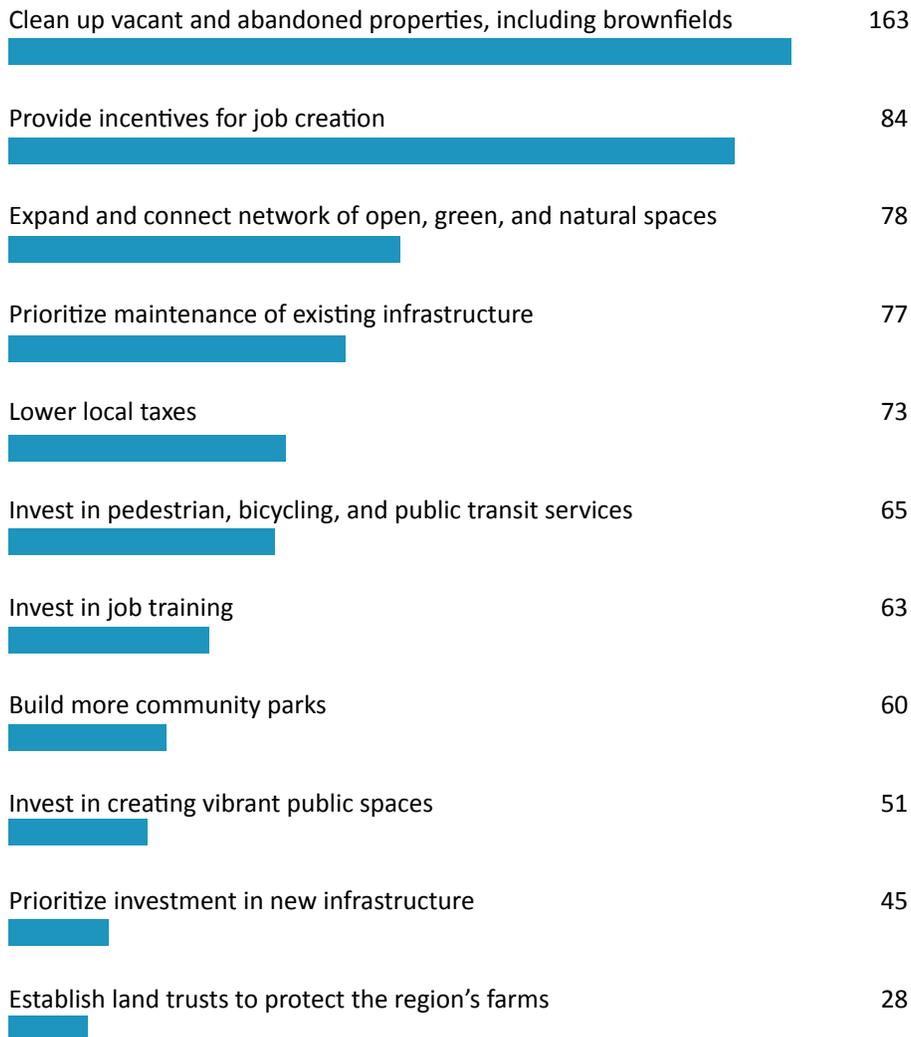


STEP 3: PUT YOUR MONEY WHERE YOUR MOUSE IS

In the final stage of the tool, users chose specific projects and policies in a budget-constrained environment. Similar to the second screen, the color of the priority icons changed to reflect their relationships with the selected project. The budget-constrained environment was simulated by allowing participants to assign an overall limited number of total coins to different projects. As participants assigned coins to projects, the color of icons shifted with the intensity of color indicating a positive, neutral, or negative impact of a project on the full set of “priorities.” Aggregating the total number of coins assigned to each project by individual participants from Ashtabula County, created the ranked priority project list below.

Once complete, users could share their selections via social media and compare their answers with those of other residents of the region using a map viewer.

Ranked Projects of Ashtabula County Participants



REGIONAL VISION

WHERE SHOULD WE GO TOGETHER?

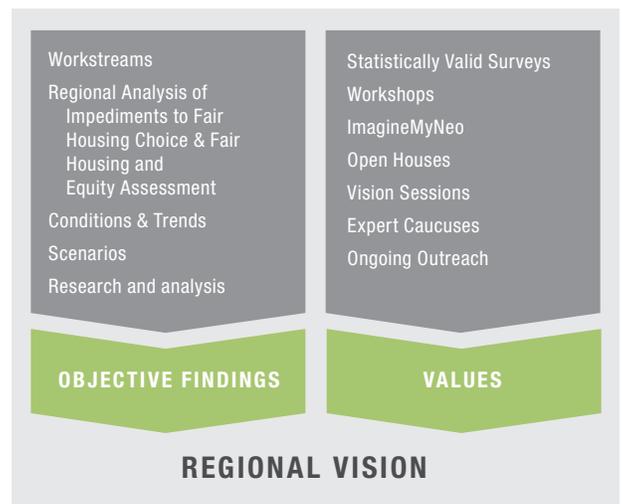
HOW WAS THE REGIONAL VISION CREATED?

All of the learning that took place during the Vibrant NEO 2040 process ultimately fed into the regional vision. The vision-creation process used two kinds of inputs: objective findings and community values. Much of the three years of Vibrant NEO 2040 was spent collecting and analyzing data, modeling trends and alternatives, and interviewing experts across the region. This information provided the factual basis for the Vision.

In addition to facts and data, the Vision also requires a normative direction. Compared to the scenarios, which were based on data and assumptions, the Vision is aspirational. It is a statement of where we would like to go in the future. To understand the region's values and aspirations, the project team invested significant resources into outreach and engagement. The team conducted surveys, mapping workshops, digital outreach, open houses, and ongoing, small-group engagement. The team also released a draft of the vision months before the project's conclusion and received feedback on it through a series of public Vision sessions, expert review caucuses, and comments from NEOSCC's many partners.

This review process resulted in several refinements to the draft regional vision. These changes notwithstanding, a critical outcome of the Vision sessions was learning that, on the whole, the majority of the attendees supported the Vision.

INPUTS TO THE REGIONAL VISION



Vision Themes

- 1) Strengthen Established Communities
- 2) Increase Transportation Choice
- 3) Preserve and Protect Natural Resources
- 4) Promote Collaboration and Efficiency

VISION OBJECTIVES: ASHTABULA COUNTY

Overarching objective and priorities identified by Ashtabula County Residents



Mark K. <http://www.flickr.com/photos/17708700@N07/647523743/>



PROTECT OUR SOIL, WATER, AIR, AND ECOLOGICALLY SENSITIVE AREAS



Greater Ashtabula Chamber of Commerce



CULTIVATE AND CELEBRATE OUR LOCAL ASSETS AND PLACES OF PUBLIC VALUE



Stark County Regional Planning



PROMOTE INVESTMENT IN OUR ESTABLISHED COMMUNITIES



City Architecture



DEVELOP OUR REGIONAL ECONOMY WITH ACCESSIBLE EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES



Photo by Scott Leaver. USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service



PRESERVE AND VALUE OUR PRIME FARMLAND AS A REGIONAL ECONOMIC ASSET



Doug Kerr www.flickr.com



IMPROVE OUR REGIONAL FISCAL HEALTH



Akron Metropolitan Area Transportation Study



ENHANCE OUR REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION NETWORK



Ashtabula County Chamber of Commerce



EXPAND OUR PARKS AND OPEN SPACE NETWORK

VISION THEME 1 - STRENGTHEN ESTABLISHED COMMUNITIES

The overarching objective of the Vision is to “promote investment in our established communities,” and likewise, its primary theme is to “strengthen established communities.” What are “established communities”? They are cities, towns, townships, or neighborhoods that have matured over time into places with defining characteristics such as local traditions, major commercial activity, valued institutions, prized architecture, and great public places such as parks, public squares, and main streets. They could be urban, suburban, or rural. They have an identity of place that their residents understand and value.

REGIONAL MOSAIC OF COMMUNITIES

Investment means many different things depending on the place in question. The Regional Mosaic of Communities map depicts a regional mosaic of communities categorized by current trajectories, each of which requires a different Vision investment strategy.

STRATEGIC INVESTMENT AREAS: Places that have a stable or growing population and a high density of community assets and existing infrastructure that supports current and likely future development. This makes them ideal candidates for investment.

ASSET RISK AREAS: Places that face declining population and employment, yet they also have a high density of community assets and existing infrastructure that would support reinvestment and future population growth.

COST RISK AREAS: Places that have experienced rapid population growth but lack existing infrastructure to support that growth. As a result, additional development in these communities requires investment in new infrastructure and community facilities. Any new development must be carefully planned to ensure long-term financial stability.

These categories reference current trajectories relative to the Regional Vision, but they are not seen to be static. In the same way that place types can change (e.g., a rural township can become a small town, which can later become a city), a community’s investment categorization can also change. For example, through good policy and citizen initiative, asset risk areas and cost risk areas can become strategic investment areas.

STRATEGIC INVESTMENT PLACES

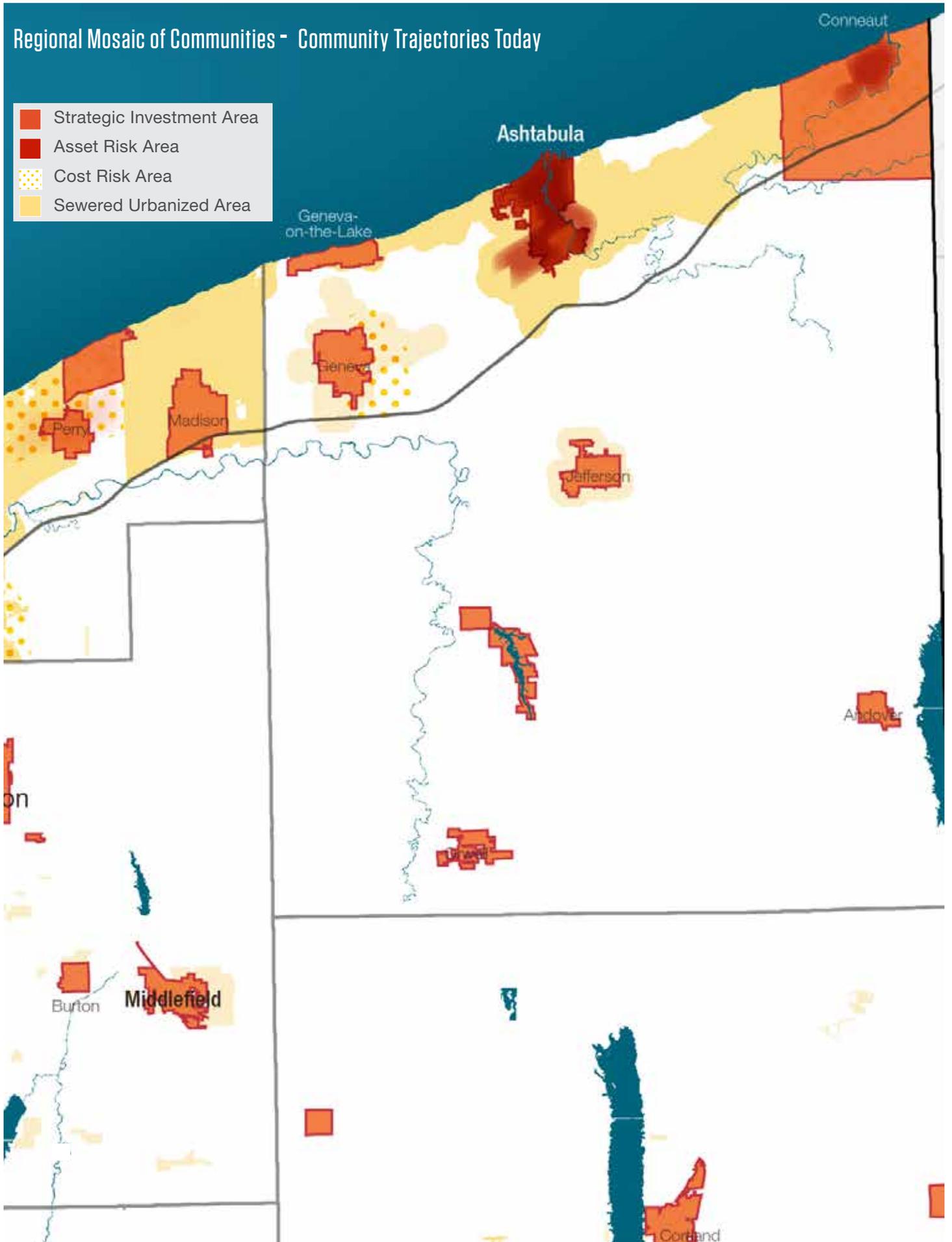
In addition to investment strategies articulated at the community level, the Vision also includes an inventory of several strategic regional sites. The Strategic Investment Places map shows an overview of these sites.

- WESTERN RESERVE TOWN:** Historical town centers that can provide an anchor for new mixed-use development
- INNOVATION ZONES:** Universities and adjacent mixed-use commercial districts that have the potential to catalyze new business investment in the innovation economy
- EMERGING CULTURAL DISTRICT:** Districts that have a high density of cultural assets that represent tourism opportunities and can serve as the nuclei for redevelopment
- INDUSTRIAL WATERFRONT:** Deep-water, industrial ports along the Lake Erie waterfront that also have regional recreational opportunities
- NEW INDUSTRIAL OPPORTUNITY SITE:** Large abandoned or partially vacant industrial parcels that are suitable for reuse given their proximity to transportation infrastructure and the presence of preexisting high-capacity utility connections

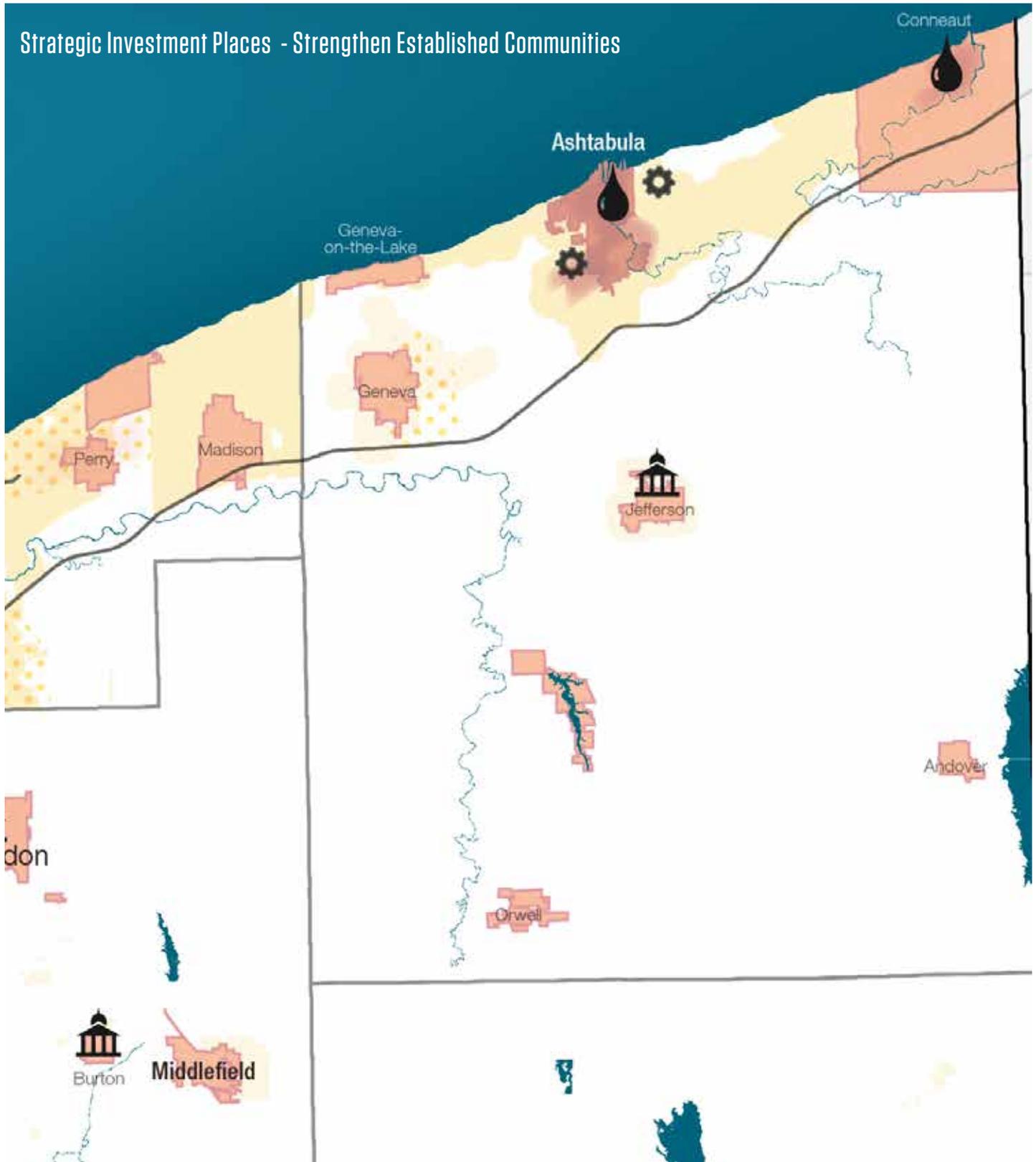
These sites offer strategic opportunities for future investment. They each represent, to varying degrees, unique assets that would be difficult or impossible to replicate elsewhere and should be recognized and leveraged to the greatest extent possible. This theme is about investing and reinvesting in our communities to strengthen them. The investment comes from all sources: government, private sector, nonprofit organizations, and individual citizens. All parties will need to forge partnerships together to produce the best outcome.

Regional Mosaic of Communities - Community Trajectories Today

- Strategic Investment Area
- Asset Risk Area
- Cost Risk Area
- Sewered Urbanized Area



Strategic Investment Places - Strengthen Established Communities



Strategic Investment Places

-  Western Reserve Town
-  Innovation Zone
-  Emerging Cultural District
-  Industrial Waterfront
-  New Industrial Opportunity Site

Mosaic of Communities

-  Strategic Investment Area
-  Asset Risk Area
-  Cost Risk Area
-  Sewered Urbanized Area



VISION THEME 2 - INCREASE TRANSPORTATION CHOICE AND EMPLOYMENT CENTERS

A central aspect of the Vision is to improve the way that we move around the region and to support development through transportation infrastructure. Choice means increasing both the number of destinations that are easily accessible as well as the variety of means to get to them.

The following maps show a detailed picture of the transportation network, with the Vision's proposed public transportation network identified by mode.

This transportation system would create a T-shaped network along Lake Erie and from Cleveland south to Canton, as well as a link between Akron and Youngstown. Within each of the major metropolitan areas, express and local bus services would expand coverage and make connections between some of the smaller towns and cities within the region.

At the neighborhood scale, the Vision aims to make it easier to get around using nonmotorized methods of transportation. This involves investments in infrastructure such as sidewalks, crosswalks, trails, and bicycle lanes. These forms of mobility are not just meant for leisure; with good planning, walking and bicycling can serve as primary commuting options.

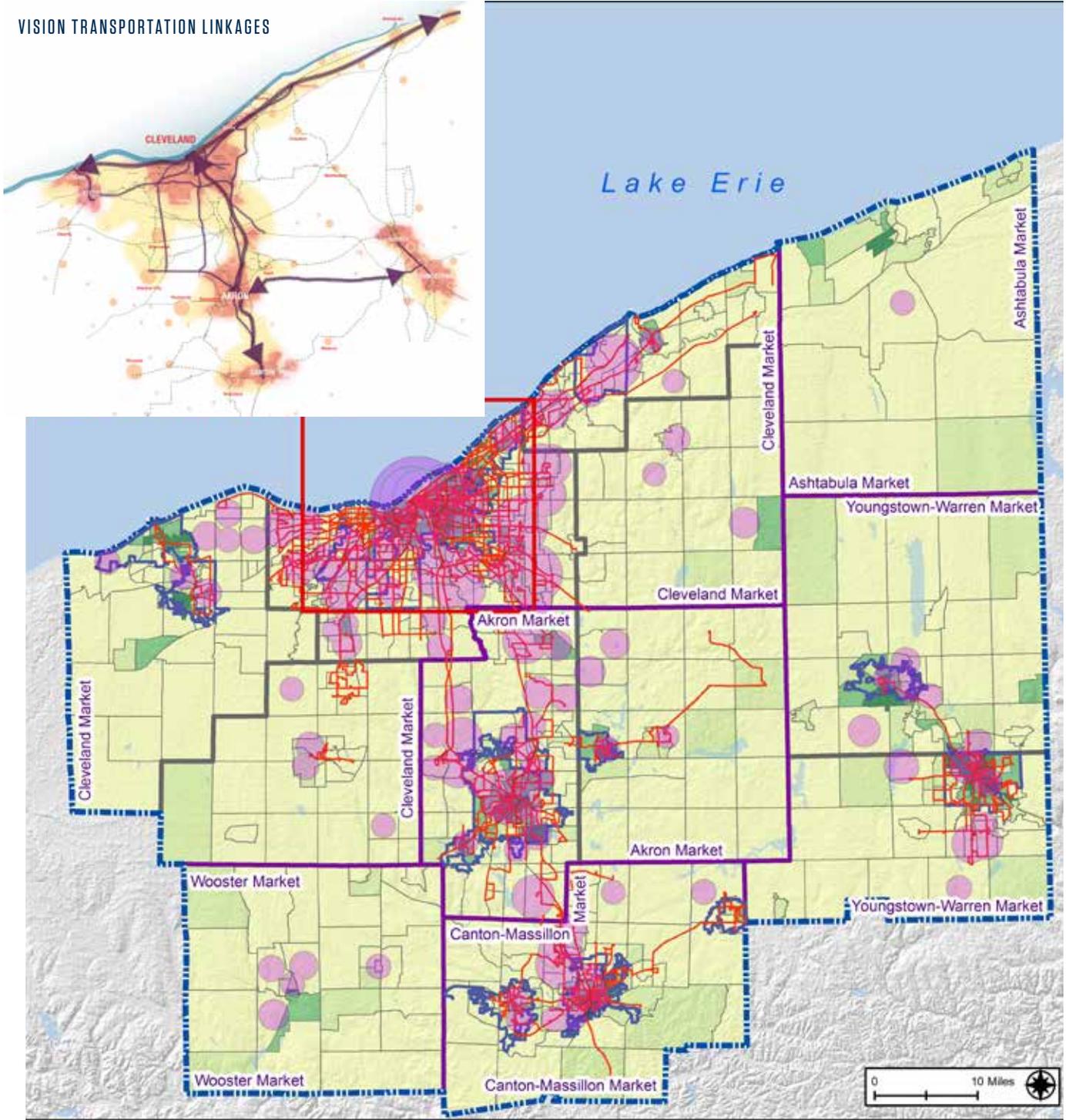
Cars and trucks will continue to be primary modes of transportation for a significant number of Northeast Ohioans, and ensuring that the road system is maintained in a state of good repair is central to the Vision. As a top-level priority, this means fixing existing roads before building new ones.

Enhancements to the transportation system need not involve major new additions to the network. In many cases, a linkage between existing routes or a change in route management procedures can be the most strategic option. This can mean adding physical connections, changes in transit routes, schedule adjustments, or making it easier for riders to use the system.

Finally, it is important that transportation planning be integrated with other kinds of planning. Land-use and transportation decisions should be closely coordinated. Major new developments are significantly enhanced through colocation with transportation infrastructure; likewise, new transit routes achieve their highest value when they link nodes of high-activity density (jobs, residents, or both).

NEO Transit Network, Employment Centers and Poverty

VISION TRANSPORTATION LINKAGES



LEGEND

Concentration of Employees, Public Transit Routes, and Poverty Rates

2006–2010 Average Poverty Rate Among All Census Tracts in the NEOSCC Region = 13.2%

- Census Tract Boundaries
- Entitlement City Boundaries
- Housing Market Boundaries
- Public Transit Routes
- NEOSCC Boundary

NOTE: The Counties of Cuyahoga, Lake, Stark, and Summit are also entitlement areas.

Poverty Rate

- 0.0 - 13.2
- 13.3 - 23.2
- 23.4 - 40.0
- 40.1 - 60.0
- 60.1 - 81.2

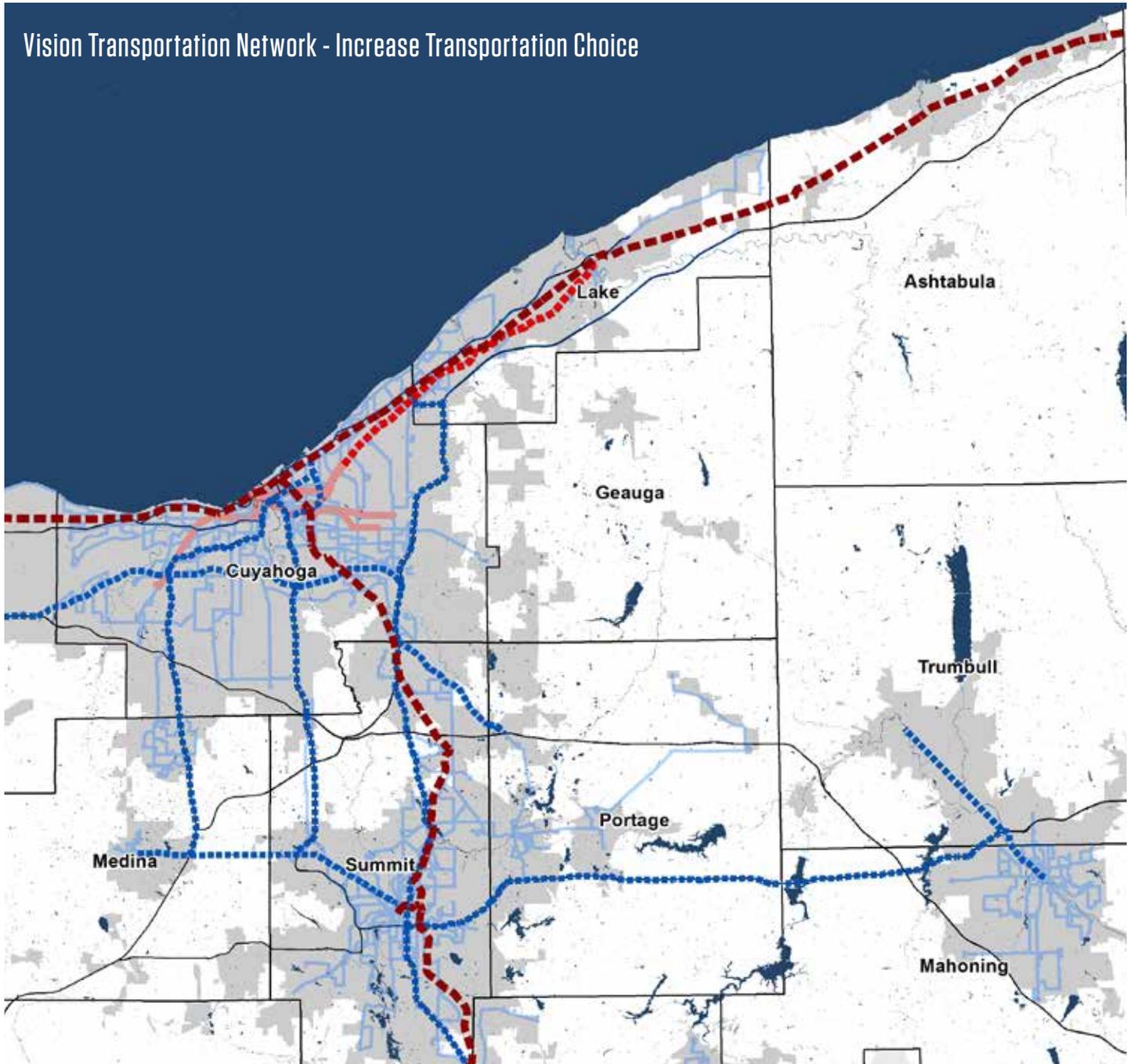


Tracts with 3,000 - 49,381 Employees

- 3,000
- 15,000
- 25,000

Data Source: 2010 LEHD, NEOSCC, 2006–2010 ACS

Vision Transportation Network - Increase Transportation Choice



BUS RAPID TRANSIT (BRT): The buses in a BRT system spend the majority of their trips in their own dedicated lanes or roadways, make fewer stops than a local bus, sometimes have traffic signal priority at intersections, and let people pay before they board to shorten the time buses are not moving. BRT functions like a streetcar or light rail.

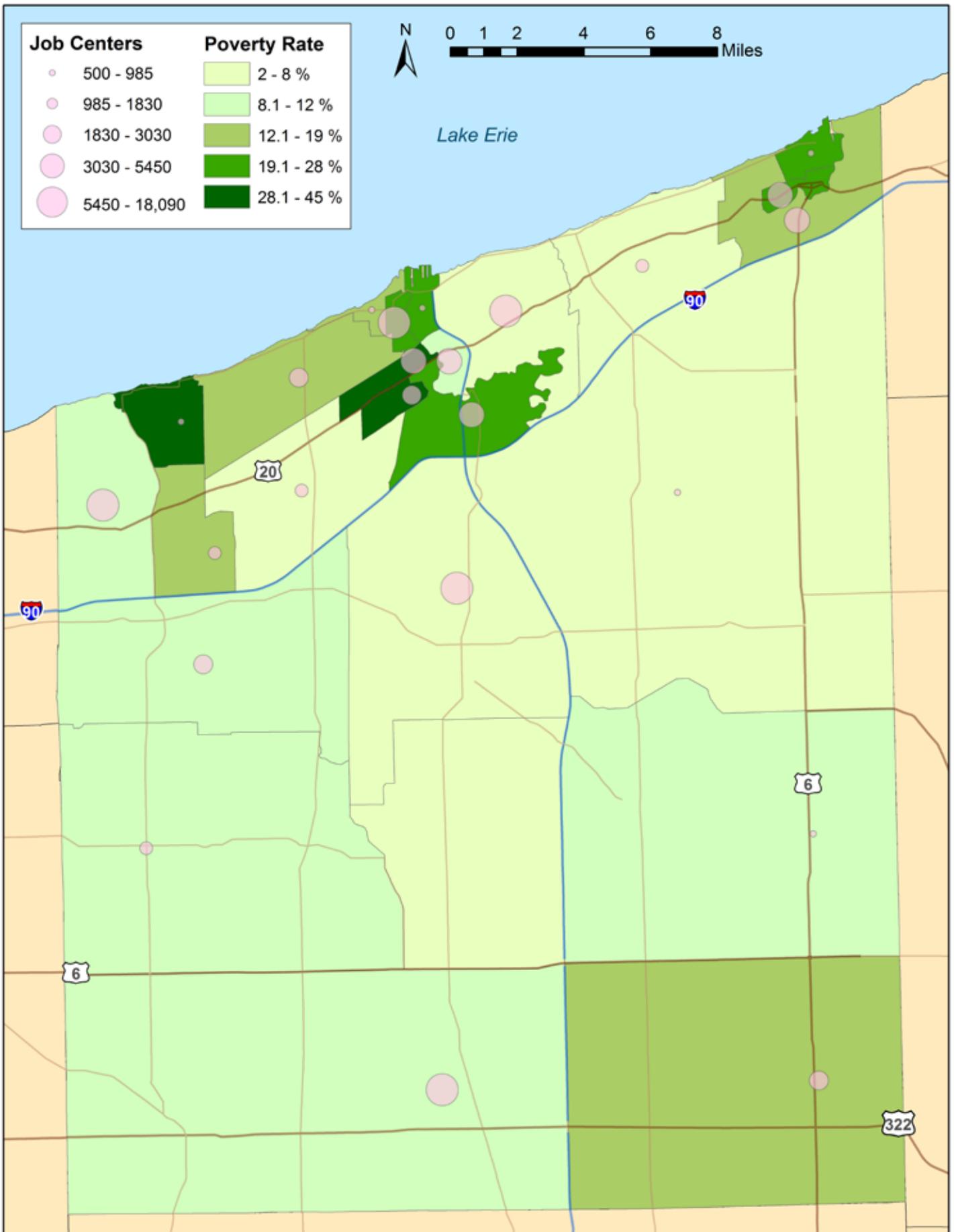
EXPRESS BUS: An express bus makes even fewer stops than a local bus or a BRT, since its primary function is to carry passengers over long distances, often using highways rather than local streets. It provides an alternative to rail-based commuting between major towns and cities.

- ■ ■ Proposed New Rail
- ■ ■ Proposed New Bus Rapid Transit
- ■ ■ Proposed New Express Bus*
- Existing Rail or Bus Rapid Transit**
- Existing Bus
- Existing Interstate or Major Highway
- Metropolitan Areas

* a commuter bus with limited stops that drives in normal traffic

** a high-speed bus with its own dedicated lane or roadway that makes limited stops

Ashtabula Transportation Network, Employment Centers and Poverty



VISION THEME 3 - PRESERVE AND PROTECT NATURAL RESOURCES

Protecting the region's air, water, and soil was frequently cited as the number one priority elicited through public engagement, and consequently, it is one of the primary themes of the Vision. This theme covers parks, public gardens, trails, rivers, streams, lakes, natural areas, and farmland.

One key aspect of the Vision is a significantly expanded natural areas network. The following map shows this network in detail.

This network includes:

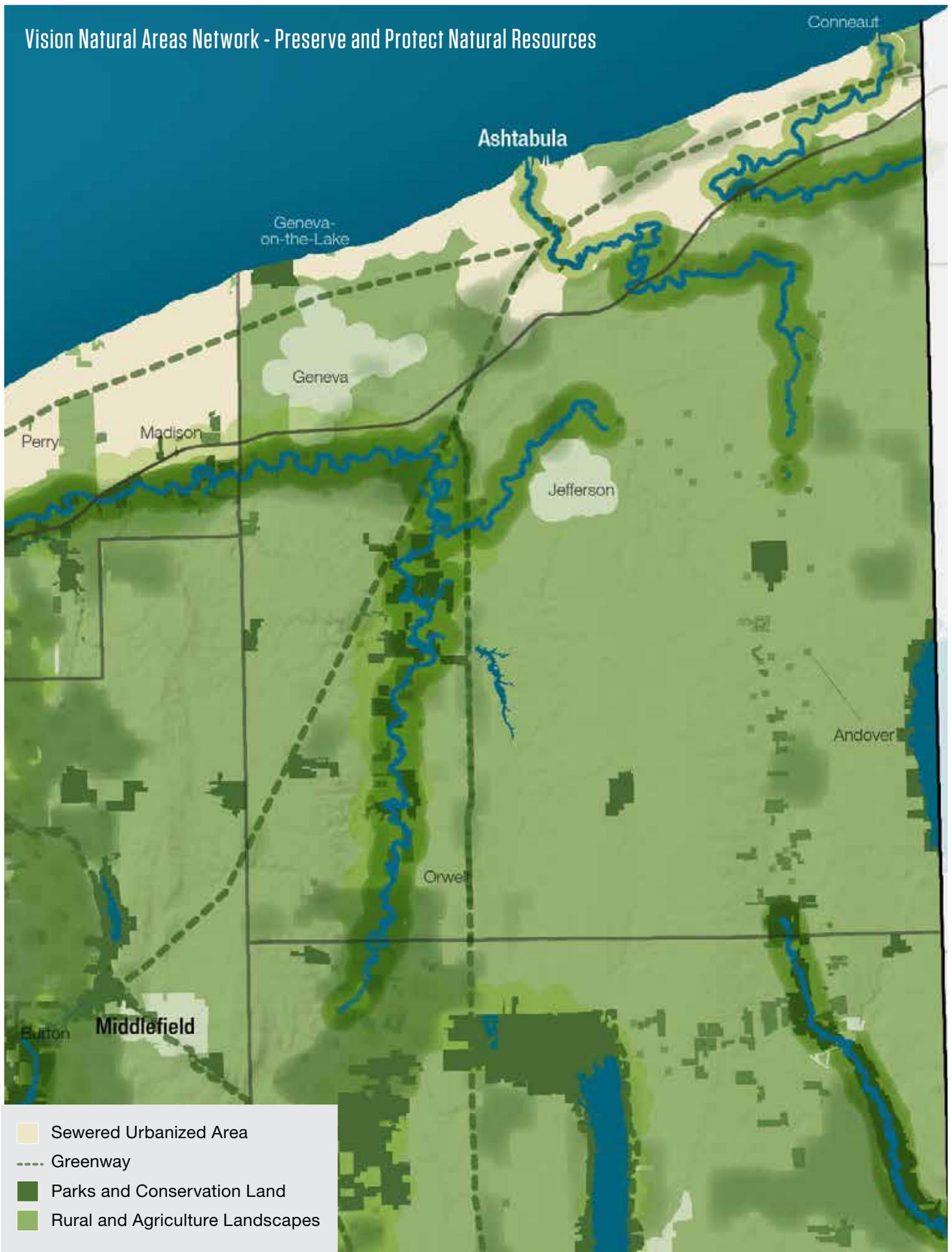
- **GREENWAYS:** Trails, paths, or natural areas that provide connections throughout the open-space system.
- **RIVER CORRIDORS:** The land immediately adjacent to rivers and streams. It is important to protect this land because it keeps water clean, provides critical habitat, and prevents erosion and sedimentation.
- **PARKS AND CONSERVATION OPPORTUNITY NETWORK:** Areas that present opportunities for medium- and large-scale natural-area protection. These areas could become parks, hunting areas, or wildlife refuges.
- **SCATTERED CONSERVATION:** Smaller areas that provide local community recreation. These could be picnic sites, ball fields, playgrounds, etc.
- **RURAL AND AGRICULTURE LANDSCAPES:** Farmland and other undeveloped parts of the region. The Vision sets a target for conserving these important elements of the natural-areas network.

This theme goes beyond direct conservation; it also calls for changes in the region's development patterns, which will improve the way in which human and natural systems interact. The Vision advocates for a reversal of outward migration, which would reduce development pressure on farms and other open space. Even within developed areas, nature persists in the form of parks, rivers, lakes, and wildlife. When these systems clash, events such as flooding occur. An integrated approach that enables human and natural systems mutually to coexist in the same spaces is not only practical but also ideal. This means recognizing and planning in accordance with natural, as opposed to political, boundaries. Watersheds, for example, have their own boundaries that do not align with jurisdictional boundaries. The actions of upstream communities directly affect the fate of downstream communities, so it is necessary for them to cooperate. In fact, the interjurisdictional qualities of natural systems provide one of the strongest arguments in support of regional planning.

How does conservation work?

For land that is currently owned by private individuals, the decision to conserve is entirely voluntary. The land owner may outright sell the property to the public sector or a nonprofit organization, or he/she may sell only the option to develop the land, ensuring that it remains undeveloped in perpetuity while staying in private hands. Some land already belongs to nonprofits or the public sector but is not being used for conservation today, in which case those entities can choose to switch the use of the land in the future.

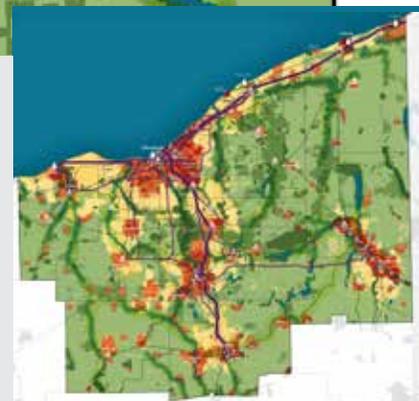
Vision Natural Areas Network - Preserve and Protect Natural Resources



THE REGIONAL VISION – ASHTABULA COUNTY



- | | |
|---------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Strategic Investment Area | Parks and Conservation Land |
| Asset Risk Area | Rural and Agriculture Landscapes |
| Cost Risk Area | Western Reserve Town |
| Sewered Urbanized Area | Innovation Zone |
| Transit Connection | Emerging Cultural District |
| Greenway | Industrial Waterfront |
| | New Industrial Opportunity Site |



VISION THEME 4 - PROMOTE COLLABORATION AND EFFICIENCY

Many communities and regions in post-recession America are required to do more with less and become increasingly resourceful in the face of shrinking federal and state support. Northeast Ohio is no exception. Vibrant NEO 2040 has dedicated substantial resources to understanding the real operating constraints facing the region's communities today. These constraints can be overcome, but it will require collaboration and efficiency.

Strategic efficiencies involve getting the highest return for the investment of limited resources. Time is an important element for understanding payoff versus cost. One of the rare opportunities afforded by a project such as Vibrant NEO 2040 is to be able to step back from the usual time frames in which decisions are made—at most a few years into the future—and consider the long-term effects of choices we can make today. The fiscal impact analysis demonstrated that while some initiatives may be attractive in the short term, these same investments may end up being financial liabilities over the long term. The empty shopping malls of today are a reminder of the dangers of investing too heavily in a rigid style of development whose appeal is based on a moment in time. The Recommendations and Development Strategies offer numerous ways to create resilient communities that can accommodate changing demographics and generational preferences.

Efficiency can also be regional in scale. A tug-of-war between communities for a fixed number of jobs is not an efficient regional economic development strategy. Instead of cannibalizing its own resources, the Vision proposes that Northeast Ohio grows new jobs and attract others from outside the region or the country. The strategy is to grow the pie, not fight over the pieces.

An important step for achieving efficiency, both locally and regionally, is collaboration. Time and again, the project team has discovered an initiative in one part of the region that is unknown everywhere else. This means each community must “reinvent the wheel” rather than learn from the experience of its neighbors. The Vision encourages communities to identify

common ground and to connect with existing regional initiatives. Many times, the solution is not to create a new organization or an initiative but it is to connect two or more existing organizations or initiatives. The Vision presents a number of ways that communities can self-identify and find counterparts: the rural townships of Stark can learn from the rural townships of Ashtabula, the asset-risk areas of Cuyahoga can learn from the asset-risk areas in Summit, and so on. Just like all the other Vision themes, efficiency and better governance are largely about making connections.

In addition to its many other roles, NEOSCC was intended to provide a platform precisely for this kind of collaboration and networking. Beyond Vibrant NEO 2040, it will greatly benefit the region to continue the momentum established by NEOSCC. This continuation could be formal or informal, centralized or dispersed, but the main priority is that it connects the themes, issues, opportunities, topics, and actors that are necessary to achieve the Vision.

Putting the Pieces Together: Composite Vision Map

The map on the back cover combines all of the major Vision themes into a single image.

Major spatial features of the Vision include:

- Communities grouped by investment strategy
- Location-based assets
- The envisioned edge of regional development
- Major transportation connections
- Greenways and large open space
- Key waterways

RECOMMENDATIONS

HOW CAN WE ACHIEVE THE VISION?

These recommendations, initiatives, and products are not one-size-fits all, and some aspects of the initiatives won't be applicable everywhere in the 12-county region. Vibrant NEO 2040: A Vision, Framework, and Action Products for Our Future is intended to inspire and guide decision-making by various stakeholders to ensure that land use, transportation, and environmental considerations are simultaneously addressed by their processes.

Ultimately, the implementation of Vibrant NEO 2040 is up to Northeast Ohio's communities and residents. But regardless of the applicability of each initiative to any particular part of the region, the goal for each community within the Vision is the same: stability, prosperity, and a high quality of life for all of its residents.

The Recommendations provide the framework, steps, and tools for making the Vision a reality. There are nine Recommendations total, each of which match up with several of the Vision Objectives and Indicators.

1. Focus new residential and commercial development on sites within established communities
2. Develop a robust network of regional job centers connected by multimodal transportation corridors between and within counties
3. Pursue the remediation, assembly, marketing, and redevelopment of abandoned properties at both the local and regional levels
4. Encourage a higher frequency of mixed-use development and a range of diverse, affordable housing options
5. Enhance and coordinate the region's rail and bus services
6. Enhance walking and cycling as transportation options to increase regional mobility and improve public health
7. Preserve our natural areas for future generations, provide outdoor recreation opportunities, and develop a regional approach to protecting air, water, and soil quality
8. Support sustainable agriculture and the local food system in Northeast Ohio
9. Increase collaboration among the region's government agencies to expand information sharing and find more cost-effective means of providing essential services

REGIONAL VISION RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLEMENTATION MATRIX

RECOMMENDATIONS AND INITIATIVES	AREA TYPE			IMPLEMENTATION COMPLEXITY			POTENTIAL LEADS
	STRATEGIC	ASSET RISK	COST RISK	HIGH	MODERATE	LOW	
	1 Focus new residential and commercial development on sites within established communities						
1.1 Encourage infill and redevelopment through the use of tax credits and other direct and indirect public incentives.	X	X	X			X	Municipalities
1.2 Fix it first: continue to privilege projects that maintain the existing road network in a state of good repair, rather than building additional capacity.	X	X	X			X	Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs)
1.3 Improve the ability of municipalities and townships to analyze the long-term impacts of new development and better manage their own development.	X	X	X			X	Nonprofit Organizations; Councils of Government (COGs); Universities
1.4 Continue development throughout the region in accordance with local zoning requirements and preferences, but prioritize public subsidies to projects within the region's established communities.	X	X	X		X		Municipalities, Townships, Counties; Metropolitan Planning Organizations, Councils of Government
1.5 Require the users of new sewer extensions that serve previously unsewered areas to pay the full cost of service.			X		X		Sanitary Sewer Districts; Municipalities, Townships, Counties
1.6 Consider instituting a land value tax to replace existing improvement-based property assessment and taxation methods.	X	X	X	X			Municipalities, Townships, Counties
2 Develop a robust network of regional job centers connected by multimodal transportation corridors within and between counties							
2.1 Strengthen regional job centers—and the corridors that connect them—by diversifying and intensifying land uses and investing in strategic local economic development within them.	X	X	X		X		Municipalities, Townships, Counties; MPOs/ COGs
2.2 Use transit oriented development (TOD) to create stronger, more accessible, regional job centers.	X				X		Municipalities; MPOs/ COGs
2.3 Implement a tiered approach to local parking requirements.	X	X	X		X		Municipalities, Townships; MPOs
3 Pursue the remediation, assembly, marketing, and redevelopment of abandoned properties at both the local and regional levels							
3.1 Develop and maintain a regional vacant industrial and commercial properties database and criteria for determining the most appropriate successive use, whether for redevelopment, green infrastructure, food production, parks, or natural areas.	X	X				X	Chambers of Commerce/ Economic Development Organizations; Universities; Nonprofit Organizations; COGs
3.2 Expedite permitting and remove barriers for adaptive reuse of abandoned buildings and empty lots.	X	X				X	Municipalities
3.3 Expand and coordinate existing land bank efforts to acquire, assemble, manage, and dispose of vacant properties throughout the region.	X	X			X		Nonprofit Organizations; Land Banks; Municipalities, Counties
3.4 Identify, evaluate, and—where appropriate—pursue the reuse of vacant and abandoned industrial sites endowed with significant preexisting infrastructure that could provide unique opportunities for regional economic development. Advocate for a brownfield redevelopment fund and promote these sites through a marketing campaign.	X	X			X		Nonprofit Organizations; Chambers of Commerce/ Economic Development Organizations

RECOMMENDATIONS AND INITIATIVES	AREA TYPE			COMPLEXITY			POTENTIAL LEADS
	STRATEGIC	ASSET RISK	COST RISK	HIGH	MODERATE	LOW	
4 Encourage a higher frequency of mixed-use development and a range of diverse, affordable housing options							
4.1 Include mixed-use designations and/or planned unit overlay districts in zoning codes throughout the region.	X	X	X			X	Municipalities, Townships; MPOs/ COGs
4.2 Include traditional small-lot, compact single-family and townhouse residential designations in zoning codes throughout the region.	X	X	X			X	Municipalities, Townships, Counties; COGs
4.3 Offer financial incentives to developers that incorporate affordable housing units into their projects and implement inclusionary zoning in markets with widespread affordability gaps.	X	X	X		X		Public Housing Authorities; Municipalities, Townships, Counties; MPOs
4.4 Offer financial literacy and housing education programs for tenants and homeowners. Focus on areas in established communities where investments in housing are underway.	X	X				X	Public Housing Authorities; Municipalities; Universities; Nonprofit Organizations
5 Enhance and coordinate the region's rail and bus services							
5.1 Invest in a regional network of bi-directional public transit connections between Northeast Ohio's major job centers.	X	X		X			Transit Operators; MPOs
5.2 Create a network of high-frequency express and local transit routes connecting the region's job centers. Prioritize infill development in the corridors served by these routes. In the short and medium terms, upgrade high-performing existing bus routes and create new bus routes in designated corridors. In the long term, upgrade the highest-demand routes into commuter rail service or Bus Rapid Transit (BRT).	X	X			X		Transit Operators; MPOs; Municipalities, Counties
5.3 Coordinate the region's transit systems for joint marketing, information technology, and fare media, including information regarding private transit resources such as university/health system shuttles, private bus services, airport transportation, etc.	X	X	X		X		Transit Operators; MPOs; Municipalities, Counties; Universities
5.4 Evaluate the condition of all existing rail trackage and rail crossings to determine what investments would be necessary to bring substandard infrastructure up to standard for freight and passenger service.	X	X	X		X		Ohio Rail Development Commission; MPOs
6 Enhance walking and cycling as transportation options to increase regional mobility and improve public health							
6.1 Expand the existing bicycle lane and trail system and connect it to regional transit hubs via on-and-off street facilities.	X	X	X			X	Nonprofit Organizations; MPOs; Metroparks Authorities; Municipalities, Counties
6.2 Repair existing sidewalks and crosswalks and add new ones as needed wherever a fixed-route bus service is in operation.	X	X			X		Municipalities; MPOs
6.3 Promote "Complete Streets" through regional policy and the identification of local champions.	X	X	X		X		Municipalities, Townships, Counties; MPOs
6.4 Collaborate with school districts and local communities to further develop safe routes to school, encouraging walking and biking, and site new schools in walkable locations.	X	X	X		X		Metropolitan Planning Organizations; School Districts; Municipalities, Townships
7 Preserve our natural areas for future generations, provide outdoor recreation opportunities, and develop a regional approach to protecting air, water, and soil quality							
7.1 Expand and connect the existing network of parks, trails, rivers, lakes, and natural areas through continued partnerships with private land owners, land conservancies, land trusts, community members, and local governments.	X	X	X		X		Metroparks Authorities; Land Conservancies and Trusts; COGs; Municipalities, Townships, Counties
7.2 Support and expand green infrastructure options for flood control and general water management, both at the local level with projects like green alleys and bioswales, and at the regional level with a network of large, upstream water retention areas.	X	X	X		X		Metroparks Authorities; Land Conservancies and Trusts; Municipalities, Townships, Counties; Soil and Water Conservation Districts

RECOMMENDATIONS AND INITIATIVES

POTENTIAL LEADS

	AREA TYPE			COMPLEXITY			
	STRATEGIC	ASSET RISK	COST RISK	HIGH	MODERATE	LOW	
7.3 Improve regional quality of life and health by focusing on the interface between natural and human systems in the areas of flood mitigation, stormwater run-off, and clean beaches and the water quality of our lakes, rivers, and streams.	X	X	X		X		Metroparks Authorities; Land Conservancies and Trusts; Municipalities, Townships, Counties; COGs
7.4 Strengthen and expand watershed partnerships that foster communication and collaboration between upstream and downstream communities across all Northeast Ohio watershed geographies.	X	X	X		X		Watershed Partnerships; Soil and Water Conservation Districts; MPOs/ COGs; Municipalities, Townships, Counties
7.5 Expand collaboration between existing natural resource districts and consider the creation of new districts where appropriate.	X	X	X	X			Municipalities, Townships, Counties; Soil and Water Conservation Districts
7.6 Develop and maintain a natural resources inventory of the region.	X	X	X		X		MPOs/ COGs; Universities; Nonprofit Organizations
8 Support sustainable agriculture and the local food system in Northeast Ohio							
8.1 Support the expansion of community supported agriculture (CSAs), farmer cooperatives, farm-to-school programs, and other existing mechanisms that support sustainable agriculture and enhance food access.	X	X	X			X	Municipalities, Townships, Counties; Land Banks; Nonprofit Organizations; School Districts
8.2 Partner with local landowners, the food processing industry, and local organizations to protect agriculturally valuable land for future generations.			X		X		Land Conservancies; Nonprofit Organizations; OSU Extension, Local Universities; Soil and Water Conservation Districts
8.3 Review and amend local ordinances to allow for small- and moderate-scale urban farming on occupied and vacant parcels that are environmentally safe for growing food	X	X	X			X	Municipalities, Townships, Counties; Councils of Government, Food Policy Councils
8.4 Support the work of local food initiatives to share best practices and identify policies of regional significance	X	X	X		X		Food Policy Councils; Ohio State University Extension, Local Universities; Municipalities, Townships, Counties
9 Increase collaboration among the region’s government agencies to expand information sharing and find more cost-effective means of providing essential services							
9.1 Study privatization and public-private partnerships as means to fund critical infrastructure projects that cannot be funded solely through public dollars.	X	X	X		X		Ohio Department of Transportation; Municipalities, Townships, Counties
9.2 Utilize joint procurement strategies and the sharing of facilities, staff, and other resources wherever possible to save money on the provision of public services.	X	X	X			X	Municipalities, Townships, Counties; MPOs/ COGs; Ohio Department of Development Services
9.3 Identify one or more organizations that will host and maintain the technical resources created by NEOSCC so that they will remain current, accurate, and available for future regional visioning and planning.	X	X	X		X		MPOs/ COGs; Nonprofit Organizations; Municipalities, Townships, Counties
9.4 Align MPO/COG/ODOT transportation model inputs and continue to collaborate, share information, and align policy objectives across the multiple regional planning agencies of Northeast Ohio.	X	X	X		X		MPOs/ COGs
9.5 Foster greater engagement between MPOs/COGs and organizations/initiatives that address natural resources, parks, sewer, public health, housing, education, private business investment, and economic development.	X	X	X	X			MPOs/ COGs; Universities; Nonprofit Organizations; Special Purpose Districts or Agencies; Municipalities, Townships, Counties
9.6 Sustain the momentum of NEOSCC by continuing to convene stakeholders to identify and address regional issues and to advance the region’s collaborative capacity.	X	X	X		X		MPOs/ COGs; Universities; Nonprofit Organizations; Special Purpose Districts or Agencies; Municipalities, Townships, Counties

ACTION PRODUCTS AND INDICATORS

VIBRANTNEO.ORG/ACTION-PRODUCTS

Conditions and Trends

In 2011 and 2013, NEOSCC developed the Conditions and Trends Platform. As a precursor to the scenario-planning process, NEOSCC's Conditions and Trends Platform is a first-of-its-kind, online collection of information, data and maps that can be used to answer questions about Northeast Ohio and how its different pieces fit together. The Conditions and Trends Platform's purpose is to help provide insight into Northeast Ohio's future by giving us a tool that all of us can use to better understand Northeast Ohio's yesterday and its today.

Parcel-Based Existing Land Use and Zoning Maps

NEOSCC and its member agencies built parcel-level land-use and zoning maps that describe the current classifications for approximately 1.8 million individual parcels in the region's 12 counties. The land-use map was created using detailed real-estate information provided by the region's 12 county auditors and county fiscal officers. The zoning map was developed using the most current information supplied by each of the region's 393 municipalities and townships. Both can be scaled to the size of individual communities and filtered to show the location of specific classifications.

Regional AI/FHEA

In 2012 and 2013, NEOSCC undertook a study to evaluate fair housing throughout the 12 counties of Northeast Ohio. It is known as a Regional Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice/Fair Housing Equity Assessment (AI/FHEA) and is a detailed study of the accessibility and affordability of housing in our region.

Community Typology

NEOSCC examined the history, physical form and evolution of the region's communities and identified six discrete community types that, taken together, describe the development conditions found in the region's 393 municipalities and townships. These six types are based on the type of jurisdiction and the age of its housing stock and identify characteristics common to each community type. This typology was developed to ensure that the scenario-planning process accurately reflects conditions found on the ground in Northeast Ohio's communities and was used to conduct a visual preference survey during the public engagement process. Going forward, communities can use these typologies to identify other jurisdictions in Northeast Ohio that share key characteristics and challenges.

Data and Analytic Tools

Much of the three years of Vibrant NEO 2040 was spent collecting and analyzing data, modeling trends and alternatives, and interviewing experts across the region. All of the data that was collected to create the four alternative scenarios and fiscal impact and to develop the Regional Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice/Fair Housing Equity Assessment is being stored at the Northeast Ohio Areawide Coordinating Agency (NOACA). NOACA will maintain a sharing portal for community access to the data.

Envision Tomorrow and Fiscal Impact Analysis

An open-source tool to study land-development patterns and identify the costs, returns, and potential trade-offs that Northeast Ohio may encounter in its efforts to achieve its regional Vision.

Development Strategies

Vibrant NEO 2040 calls for investing in communities, especially existing communities built around quality places. Instead of thinking about community and economic development investments in terms of discrete developments, buildings or projects, Vibrant NEO 2040 advocates for communities to focus on developing places—a group of buildings, spaces, and uses that come together to form a whole on a neighborhood scale and are tailored to fill a particular need. NEOSCC has identified a list of 22 different types of places that fit the Vibrant NEO 2040 Vision and could be created and/or maintained in Northeast Ohio. These place types serve a specific development strategy that communities can adopt when considering how best to use land in their areas. The entire list of development strategies and their descriptions may be found at vibrantneo.org/dev-strategies.

Policy Framework

The Vibrant NEO 2040 Vision, Framework and Tools report recommends 30 policy changes that will help further the Vision's implementation and identifies a "Top Ten List" of highest-priority policy changes. All recommended policy changes are tied to specific recommendations and initiatives.

Tool Kit & Best Practices

The Vibrant NEO 2040 Vision, Framework and Tools report has identified more than 150 techniques and best practices, which NEOSCC has compiled into a tool kit for implementing the vision. Each technique and best practice is tied to the specific recommendation(s) and initiative(s) to which it applies.

Pilot Projects

The Vibrant NEO 2040 Vision, Framework and Tools report has identified more than 300 pilot program examples, including 275 existing pilot programs and more than 30 proposed pilot programs that demonstrate emerging best practices and show promise for moving the region toward the Vibrant NEO 2040 Vision. Each pilot is tied to the specific recommendation(s) and initiative(s) to which it applies.

Dashboard

As part of the Vibrant NEO 2040 process, NEOSCC has developed the design specifications to create a regional dashboard that will allow Northeast Ohioans to track how the region is performing according to a variety of metrics and gauge our progress toward the Vibrant NEO 2040 Vision. This dashboard would include both the "Vision Indicators" outlined with the Vision Objectives and a second set of indicators called "Context Indicators" that are meant to track topics outside the core thematic focus areas of Vibrant NEO 2040, such as macroeconomics, education, health, and demographics.

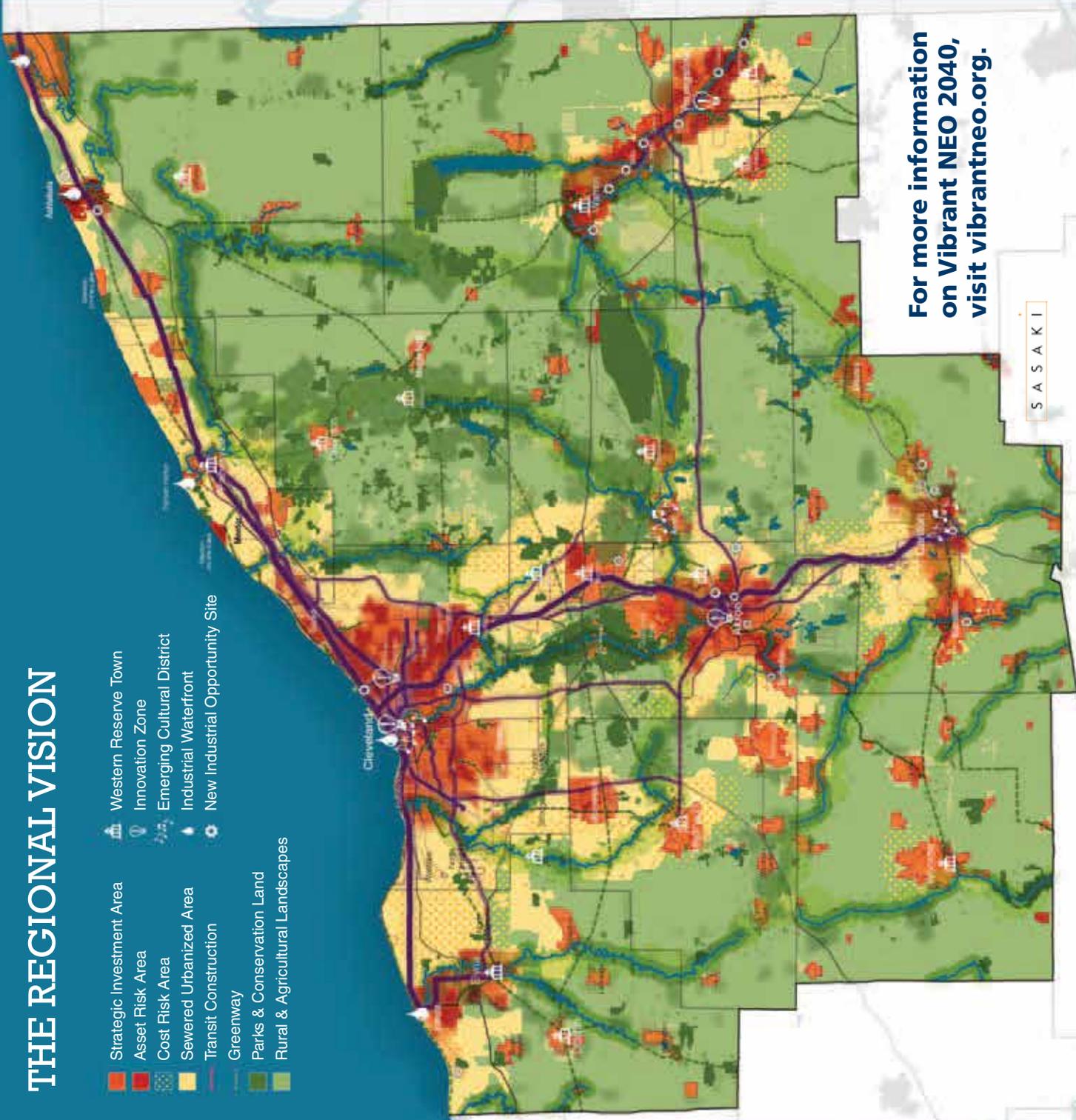
INDICATORS

For the objectives, recommendations and initiatives to be meaningful, they have to be measurable, and they have to include targets that define success. NEOSCC has therefore identified key indicators and associated target metrics, which are outlined in the table below, that should be used to measure the region’s progress toward these objectives and determine if these objectives have been reached.

INDICATOR	REGIONAL TARGETS
DEVELOPMENT LOCATION	At least 81% of new housing development and 91% of new jobs should be located within urbanized and urbanizing areas.
VEHICLE MILES TRAVELLED (VMT)	New road infrastructure should be capped at 2.75 lane miles per projected 1,000 additional persons for a maximum of 2,400 lane miles throughout the region. Each lane mile of new road should be accompanied by investments in bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure. VMT per capita should decrease, even if population and employment increase.
URBAN & MULTIFAMILY HOUSING	The percentage of urban and multifamily homes in the region should remain at least 45% of the housing supply.
HOUSING VACANCY	No more than 7% of housing units should be vacant.
HOUSING + TRANSPORTATION COSTS	By 2040, all Northeast Ohio residents should spend less than 30% of their income on housing. By 2040, fewer than 65% of residents should spend more than 45% of their income on combined housing and transportation costs.
TRANSIT PROXIMITY	By 2020, at least 55% of jobs should be near transit. By 2030, at least 60% of jobs should be near transit. By 2040, at least 65% of jobs should be near transit. By 2020, at least 38% of residents should live near transit. By 2030, at least 44% of residents should live near transit. By 2040, at least 50% of residents should live near transit.
ROADWAY INVESTMENT BALANCE	For every new vehicle lane mile built, there should be at least the same number of bicycle lane miles built. For every new vehicle lane mile constructed, there should be at least 10 times the linear miles of sidewalks (5-foot minimum width) built or repaired in the region.
COMMUTE – MODE SHARE	By 2020, reduce region-wide drive alone commute trips to less than 79%. By 2040, reduce region-wide drive alone commute trips to less than 67%.
EXISTING ROAD INFRASTRUCTURE MAINTENANCE	All roads should achieve at least a “Good” rating on the Ohio Department of Public Works evaluation standard.
OPEN SPACE CONSERVATION	Conserve at least 10,700 new acres per year, for a total of 15% of the 12-county region conserved by 2040.
RIPARIAN CORRIDOR PROTECTION	Conserve at least 1,100 new acres of riparian corridors each year, for a total of 30,300 new acres by 2040.
CLEAN WATER	<p>AQUATIC LIFE USE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 100% full aquatic life use attainment on all Ohio large rivers by 2020. • 80% full aquatic life use attainment on Ohio’s principal streams and small rivers by 2020. • Identify more high-quality waters. • Maintain adequate monitoring coverage on Ohio’s principal and small rivers. <p>HUMAN HEALTH USE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More fish from Ohio’s waters should be safe to eat by 2020. <p>PUBLIC DRINKING WATER SUPPLY USE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All drinking water sources should obtain water quality standards by 2020. • All drinking water sources should be assessed (nitrate and atrazine) by 2020. <p>RECREATION USE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ohio beaches and canoeing streams should be safe for swimming (meet WQS) by 2020. • Maintain adequate monitoring coverage on Ohio’s watersheds, large rivers and beaches.
CLEAN AIR	By 2040, every county should achieve full attainment of National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) for all pollutants.

THE REGIONAL VISION

- Strategic Investment Area
- Asset Risk Area
- Cost Risk Area
- Sewered Urbanized Area
- Transit Construction
- Greenway
- Parks & Conservation Land
- Rural & Agricultural Landscapes
- Western Reserve Town
- Innovation Zone
- Emerging Cultural District
- Industrial Waterfront
- New Industrial Opportunity Site



For more information on Vibrant NEO 2040, visit vibrantneo.org.

S A S A K I

“Vibrant NEO 2040 is Northeast Ohio’s Vision for its future, plus the tools to create that future.”

Peggy Carlo
Commissioner, Ashtabula County