



Economic Development Plan (2019)

The Area Development Foundation, Inc. (the “**Foundation**”) is the central clearinghouse for economic development expertise and activities in Knox County. From guiding workforce development efforts, negotiating public-private partnerships, administering the Knox County Land Bank, and marketing industrial site development, we serve in a number of capacities. Established in the mid-20th Century to develop industrial parks, the Foundation has evolved as an organization to broaden its areas of emphasis. We believe the practice of economic development in the current era involves so much more than driving around our industrial parks and providing taxpayer-funded incentives to private companies choosing to locate here. Rather, the Foundation has adopted an integrated development strategy, informed by best practices, that focuses on jobs, workers, and local housing. Our approach is based on an understanding that Knox County’s economic growth is directly related to the county’s community development.

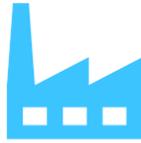
During the past several decades, many parts of Ohio have experienced widespread factory closings, stagnant incomes, and declining population. Knox County has generally avoided these pitfalls. But we still have our issues, including shuttered industrial sites, declining housing stock, substance abuse, and a net loss of young people. In many respects, we share key characteristics with declining parts of Ohio: we, too, are a community built around a small number of industries. But our local industrial partners have not collapsed or pulled back, and we still have a significant number of middle-class jobs and community leaders.

Our **mission** is to help create more jobs of a high quality that keep residents financially secure, match good employers to job-ready workers, and advance efforts to support livable communities throughout Knox County.

Our **statement of values** sets forth the notion the Foundation serves Knox County as a center of excellence. We operate according to sound public policy theories and business practices. We are professionals representing Knox County as trustworthy, transparent, and informed ambassadors. The materials and information we publish are of the highest quality and stand as authoritative sources of information. Our actions demonstrate that we expend the extra effort.

At the same time, we exercise humility and acknowledge our efforts, in and of themselves, do not grow Knox County’s economy or create jobs. We create the business-friendly, networked environment in which employers hire workers, investors spend their money, and neighborhoods are strengthened. We understand economic development to be accomplished through collaboration, and strive to connect the people, organizations, and initiatives which are doing the hard work.

The practice of Economic Development in Knox County stands on 3 Pillars:



**Pillar 1:
Jobs**



**Pillar 2:
Workers**



**Pillar 3:
Livable
Communities**

By facilitating collaboration and convening people and groups, naturally we find the Foundation getting involved in new areas outside its traditional bounds. By way of example, the Foundation in recent years has taken a seat at discussion tables regarding civic improvements, downtown corridor façade fixes, high school curriculum changes, and neglected properties. This is a good thing. The Foundation views all these elements as related to economic development, because they relate to retaining and attracting businesses and talent in Knox County. That said, we strive to avoid the inevitable mission creep, in which the Foundation’s resources are overstretched and staff are involved in too many off-topic conversations.

Are we ready for the proverbial site selector who comes into town searching for +30 acres of flat industrial land? Does the community look sharp? If we have a plant manager who comes through with his wife, and she says, “This place is terrible,” Knox County has lost that opportunity.

In 2019, the Foundation will pursue economic development based on 3 Pillars: we will do what we can to help create **high-quality jobs**; we will **connect employers with job-ready workers**; and we will support **livable communities**.



**Pillar 1:
Contribute to the Creation of More High-
Quality Jobs**

The Foundation is focused on helping create jobs within Knox County that pay enough so that workers can keep their heads financially above water. In this way, we will pursue economic development opportunities that create and retain jobs paying residents financially sustainable wages, with benefits and long-term employment prospects.

Higher quality jobs, it can be said, are associated with those types of employers offering services or making products for consumers located within and beyond Knox County’s boundaries. Economic base businesses help inject new money into the local economy by selling services or products to nonlocal consumers. They also tend to pay higher wages. Manufacturing companies

are good examples of these kinds of economic base employers; Knox County's relatively strong economic health results from the fact we are still a big manufacturing community.

The Foundation seeks to get involved in those projects that offer employment opportunities from economic base employers. We want to lure companies into Knox County and help our existing base employers expand their operations.

**Pillar 1 Goal:
Develop inventories of high-quality available land and buildings**

Manufacturing is critical to Knox County, comprising a higher proportion of jobs (23 percent) than the other ten counties in the Columbus Region. And manufacturing jobs tend to pay above-average wages; when employed directly by employers they represent high-quality jobs.

Our economic development efforts are keyed to retaining and attracting new or expanded manufacturing investment. In this competitive environment, in which virtually every community across the country has an economic developer extolling the virtues of his or her own sites and communities, we must take all reasonable steps to gather information, complete due diligence tasks, market, and upgrade an inventory of sites ready for new end users

Knox County's significant manufacturing presence means the utility infrastructure in the ground is appropriately sized and designed to accommodate additional heavy industrial end users. And industrial development in our community is best placed in areas already served by sufficient water, wastewater, rail, electric, and natural gas utility infrastructure.

**Pillar 1 Objective:
Market shovel-ready sites to end users**

We should help direct manufacturing-based development to high-quality available land and buildings already developed and/or Greenfield sites served by existing utility infrastructure.

During 2019, the Foundation will assertively market to new heavy industrial end users the **Shellmar Site**, **Siemens Campus**, and the **Mount Vernon Enterprise Park site** in the City of Mount Vernon as well as the **Fredericktown Industrial Park** in the Village of Fredericktown. These four (4) shovel-ready sites are primed for development.

The Foundation will seek to get as many of these sites authenticated under JobsOhio's SiteOhio program. At the very least, our team will ensure each site meets the following:

- Zoned for Manufacturing (e.g., M-1 or M-1A);
- Set of due diligence studies completed and on-file;
- Subject of professionally prepared marketing materials;
- Listed with a reputable commercial real estate broker; and,
- Appears on all relevant JobsOhio site search databases.

From real property tax relief, low-cost loans, using the Knox County Land Bank for site-assembly, to obtaining JobsOhio grants, the Foundation can get involved in ways that materially impact a project's financial model. But we will do so smartly and with discernment, carefully designing our incentives to fit high-quality job projects.



**Pillar 2:
Connect Employers with Job-Ready
Workers**

The Foundation hears local employers' universal frustration that good workers are difficult to identify and hire in the current environment. In addition, educators are asking for input as to which skills need to be taught for which jobs, and workers are unaware which jobs are available requiring which skills.

With Knox County's unemployment rate at 4.1% (as of October 2018), one may say we are at universal employment; everybody in the community who wants a job has a job. That said, there are steps the Foundation can take to improve the quality of the workforce in Knox County.

Workforce development programs and policies, designed to improve individuals' opportunities for employment through education, training, and support services, have existed in Ohio for several decades. Knox County's workforce development system features a variety of partners from early childhood education to collegiate degree programs, from adult-oriented training programs to employer-specific training initiatives. We benefit from having a relatively large number of high-quality educational and skills-based learning providers. But according to the natural laws of organization evolution, over the years our various workforce organizations and professionals have segmented themselves into a number of silos.

The Foundation desires to break down the workforce silos in Knox County to increase collaboration among employers, non-profits, educators, and job seekers. The purpose behind driving this collaboration is to raise awareness at all levels: high school students know which jobs are available in the county, employers know which students are graduating from which education programs, and our workforce partners know and respond to employers' needs.

**Pillar 2 Goal:
Break down workforce development system silos**

The Knox County community is best-served by aligning workforce development organizations, professionals, and activities to meaningfully connect business and education. With many programs, initiatives, and opportunities available, the Foundation seeks to convene partners and gather their resources into a cohesive whole. The goal is to produce high-quality trained and informed workers aware of local employment opportunities.

Through much hard work during the past several years, Knox County's workforce development system has already formed itself into a task force-type organization, known simply as WorkDev. Building on this existing infrastructure, WorkDev is ideally positioned to drive collaboration among educators (high school, collegiate, and adult) and non-profits (the Foundation and Opportunity Knox) into a fruitful relationship with local employers.

Pillar 2 Objectives:

(A) Complete a Strategic Workforce Development Analysis for Knox County

We should study Knox County's key economic drivers and focus industry segments, and identify occupations with the greatest needs and the most important skills for the next ten years.

The Foundation serves as the chair of WorkDev. In our role, it has become patently obvious that high quality workforce data are not readily available in Knox County. Educators, employers, and policy decision-makers in our community are clamoring for workforce data, of which very little is at-hand.

During 2019, the Foundation will work with United Way of Knox County to complete a Workforce Development Analysis, which will result in the following: (i) identify employers, industries, and job types for workforce development focus; (ii) identify critical occupations within the key industries and the skills needed by Knox County workers in those occupations; and (iii) engage industry leaders and school guidance counselors for their insight regarding occupations and skills in-demand. Once complete, the study will be shared widely with community leaders and decision-makers to guide workforce-related efforts for the next several years.

(B) Develop a career pathways approach to connect high school students to employment

Not every graduating high school senior should feel the need to pursue the traditional four-year college track. Many young adults may be better served working with their hands and (in many instances) making more money on factory floors or as members of the skilled trades, than with a bachelor's degree in sociology or history.

The Workforce Development Analysis will help the Foundation in 2019 as we build the case for a so-called career pathways specialist in Knox County. This staff person, to be housed within a partner organization within the community, would help direct traditional high school students to consider high-demand occupations available in the community (which may or may not require a four-year college education).

(C) WorkDev to serve as school districts' required Business Advisory Councils

The Ohio General Assembly enacted legislation requiring school districts to create so-called business advisory councils (*see* Ohio Revised Code Section 3313.821). The purpose of these councils is to convene, at least quarterly, business leaders and school administrators to align in-demand job skills with instruction. The Foundation believes there is no need to reinvent the

wheel; such an organization already exists within the County – WorkDev – and it satisfies the schools’ statutory requirement.

During 2019, the Foundation will lead WorkDev in its role of business advisory council to each of the school districts in Knox County. In so doing, the Foundation will grow the representation of employers on the WorkDev group, so the schools are timely informed of the skills and knowledge needed by local companies of graduating high school students.



**Pillar 3:
Support Livable Communities**

In a low unemployment environment, workforce availability is a key determinant of success. And the Foundation is beginning to understand the relationship between economic growth and population and housing. Put simply, Knox County has experienced little population growth and a relative decline in the quality and/or availability of its middle-income housing stock. At the same time, employers continue to demand large numbers of qualified workers.

If our proverbial site selector comes into town to locate a 200-job factory operation, from where would we source the workers? Where in our community would they live?

We know from planning studies the Columbus Region will grow by upwards of 500,000 new residents through 2050. To ready ourselves for that growth – because some of those new residents undoubtedly will seek out the rural lifestyle offered in Knox County – the Foundation has a role to play in improving and enhancing local communities. This realization follows that of Columbus2020, our regional economic development partner, which has voiced support for increased housing and sustainable communities to accommodate the growing need for workers; Columbus leaders believe the only impediment to their economic growth is insufficient population to fill available jobs.

**Pillar 3 Goal:
Ensure workers, from line staff to management, have good housing options**

Knox County must have good housing options that satisfy the needs of our residents, from high-quality rentals, mid-priced single-family houses, to housing for professionals, all located in intact and safe neighborhoods. The Foundation is aware of Knox County’s relative lack of available housing – of a good quality – for middle-income residents. And we are further aware that working-class neighborhoods in Knox County are suffering from disinvestment, neglect, and lower numbers of owner-occupants. Finally, we know managers and professionals are choosing to commute into Knox County from New Albany, Granville, and Delaware given the relative lack of high-end housing options in our community.

The Foundation understands the need to offer aesthetically pleasing, welcoming and safe downtowns and decent neighborhoods throughout Knox County. In this vein, attractive housing options will help lure new residents to the community, who in turn will add to our existing pool of workers and feed talent to our employers.

Pillar 2 Objectives:

(A) Make the Knox County Land Bank a full participant in the local real estate market

The Knox County Land Bank is uniquely positioned to push certain levers within the local commercial and residential property market. The non-profit organization serves to cleanse properties' titles, demolish structures that are cancers on their neighborhoods, and make land and buildings available at low-cost to homeowners and investors. The Land Bank can help meet our community's needs, in part, by working with young homeowners to sell them a first home, disposing properties to good-faith investors, and seeking out preferred developers for land opportunities.

During 2019, the Foundation will fully mobilize the Land Bank to deal with derelict properties that are the scourge of city and village governments, openly transact in land and buildings that come into its possession, and further open up the county's real estate market.

(B) Guide Knox County's villages through their own comprehensive planning processes

During the past several years, the Foundation has stepped into the role of helping local political jurisdictions and community groups with understanding core planning concepts and considerations, as well as obtaining professional planning services. In fact, the Foundation took a lead role in the Knox County Comprehensive Plan Update (2018), helping write several portions of the report. We acknowledge Knox County lacks a trained urban and regional planning expert. As the county is poised to grow in the coming decades, we note the need for planning-related advice will accelerate.

During 2019, and in partnership with the Community Foundation, we will guide Centerburg, Danville, Fredericktown, and Gambier through each of their own comprehensive planning exercises. This work will identify each village's existing conditions, opportunities for future growth, and recommended steps to best accommodate such growth. The Foundation will ensure the timely and professional completion of comprehensive plans for each community. Further, once such plans are complete, we will assist the villages with implementing their planning visions.