WASHINGTON COUNTY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIC PLAN

The strategic plan, developed by Ohio University’s Voinovich School of Leadership and Public Service, investigates strategies to enhance economic development for Washington County, Ohio as requested by the Washington County Board of County Commissioners. Washington County has key decisions to make to stabilize and ultimately reverse population decline and ancillary challenges. This plan specifically recommends three focus areas: 1) Infrastructure; 2) Workforce; and 3) Tourism. Concentrated strategic investment and support of these themes may help capitalize on emerging business opportunities, infrastructure improvements, and ways to retain and attract residents, workers, and visitors to the area. Washington County should focus on implementing the priorities put forth in this plan.

Economic Scan
The first task associated with this work involved a demographic and economic scan to compile a solid informational foundation on key economic and demographic descriptors of Washington County. Washington County has experienced a population decline, decreasing approximately 5.74% from 2004 to 2022. The figure shows the population distribution for Washington County which shows an aging population and loss of prime working age individuals. If Washington County does not attract new residents, this shows that there are not enough young residents to support natural growth and population decline will continue.

SWOT Analysis
The SWOT analysis identified the “Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats” for Washington County with input from a selected group of community stakeholders. Strengths are aspects that are positive and internal (such as a strong education sector), weaknesses are aspects that are negative and internal (such as a lack of broadband and tech infrastructure), opportunities are aspects that are positive and external (such as having the most Ohio River frontage of any county in Ohio), and threats are aspects that are negative and external (such as inflation related cost increases).

Public Engagement
Community meetings were held in Marietta and Belpre to present the results of the economic scan and SWOT Analysis. After the formal presentation, the research team led the community in a discussion around priorities for Washington County. During the discussion, ideas were written down on giant sticky notes and hung on the walls. Each attendee had the opportunity to vote for their top 3 priorities for the county. This became the basis for the Targeted Economic Development Strategy, a summary of which can be found on the other side of this document.
The Targeted Economic Development Strategy builds on the results of the Economic Scan, SWOT analysis, and Public Engagement to set out a strategic framework around identified priorities. To complete this work, community members were identified and recruited with subject matter expertise to sit on task forces for each priority area. These task forces first met in the beginning of 2023 to set out objectives and short-to-medium term action steps around each priority area and will continue to meet as this strategic plan moves into its implementation phase.

**Priority: Infrastructure**
A comprehensive plan for Infrastructure in Washington County including both big-ticket, complex projects and long-term planning in the following areas:
1. Water & Sewer
2. Natural Gas
3. Housing
4. Transportation
5. Electric
6. Broadband

**Priority: Workforce**
To enhance, build and encourage participation in the Washington County Workforce.
1. Increase young people's awareness of local opportunities
2. Help employers retain current workforce
3. Forge relationships between employers and government workforce entities

**Priority: Tourism**
Although Marietta ranks high in Appalachia Ohio as one of the most visited areas, we have much potential for growth. Our hotels are not at capacity on a full-time basis, our attractions and locally owned retail shops and restaurants are in need of more business. Most importantly, our Outdoor Recreation assets that are located within Washington County are underutilized and underdeveloped.
1. Hire and Outdoor Recreation Director
2. Riverfront Development in all cities connected to the Muskingum and Ohio Rivers
3. International Mountain Bike Association “Ride Center” designation (IMBA Ride Center) at Wayne National Forest