



# summary

## **Liberty Township Comprehensive Plan**

Stakeholder Interviews and Focus Group Discussions

Wednesday July 31, 2019

Attendees: See attached sign in sheet

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### **1. PURPOSE AND FORMAT**

The project stakeholders are individuals who represent a wide array of community interests including major employers, developers, community organizations, and township leadership. By facilitating one on one interviews and group discussions the project team was able to learn more about the community and the specific opportunities, challenges and trends impacting Liberty Township.

On Wednesday July 31, the project consulting team facilitated seven group discussions focusing on the following topics:

- Housing, Real Estate and Neighborhoods
- Commercial Development
- Community Organizations and Special Interest Groups
- Business Owner Needs
- Public Infrastructure
- Public Serving Infrastructure
- Education, Economic and Workforce Development

The stakeholders were invited to participate in a 90-minute conversation specific to their area of interest.

### **2. SUMMARY**

Each focus group discussion utilized a series of prepared questions to guide the conversation. The discussion from each group has been summarized and is attached. In order to provide a level of anonymity to the group, the findings of the discussions have been summarized and presented as a whole.

### **3. FOLLOW UP**

In order to hear from as many stakeholders as possible the project consulting team will continue to reach out and conduct one on one follow up interviews with invited stakeholders who were unable to participate on July 31<sup>st</sup>. The summary from those interviews will be prepared separately from this document. Follow up interviews will be held via phone call and will be conducted through digital surveys depending on the stakeholder's preference.



**MEETING SIGN IN SHEET- JULY 31, 2019**

The following list was developed by the project consulting team and Liberty Township staff. The list below includes all invited stakeholders. Those who attended the meeting on July 31<sup>st</sup> are marked. Ongoing efforts continue to connect with those stakeholders who were unable to attend the meetings on the 31<sup>st</sup>.

<b>NAME</b>	<b>ORGANIZATION/ COMPANY</b>	<b>ATTENDANCE</b>
Aideen Briggs	MTCES	x
Alma Helpling	The Christ Hospital	x
Andrew Schweier	Board of Zoning Appeals	
Andy Fluegemann	ODOT, District 8	x
Ashley Clos	The Christ Hospital	
Betsy Fuller	Lakota Local School District	x
Bill Walker	Liberty Township Trails Committee	x
Brad Austing	MI Homes	x
Brandon Simmons	REDI Cincinnati/resident	
Brenda Bearden	West Chester-Liberty Chamber Alliance/Resident	
Brian Copfer	Chief of Real Estate & Construction, Mercy Health	
Bryan Behrmann	Liberty Township Director of Planning and Zoning	x
Caroline McKinney	Liberty Township Economic Development Director	x
Chris Dobrozsi	VP Real Estate Development, Neyer Properties	x
Chris Passarge	Lakota Local School District	x
Christy Gloyd	Liberty Township Marketing and Communication Associate	x
Christy Snelling	Business – Kroger	
Dale Kozma	Boys & Girls Club of West Chester / Liberty	x
Dale Schweiterman	Butler County Engineers Office	x

**Project Stakeholder List: July 31, 2019**

David Fehr	Butler County Community Development	
David Wittekind	Inline Development	x
Debbie Hayes	The Christ Hospital	x
Deborah Preston	MidPointe Library System	
Dr. Jeff Hartman	Business Owner – Wing Eye Care	
Dr. Keith Bricking	Premiere Health	
Erin Clemons	Community Foundation	
Ethan Klussman	Fire Chief, Liberty Township Fire Department	x
George Stinson	Senior VP / Broker, Lee & Associates	x
Jamie Theiss	Cincinnati Childrens	x
Jan Collins	Business Owner – Putters & Cozy's	
Jennifer Burcham	Premiere Health	
Jeff Hartman	Wing Eyecare	x
Joe Hinson	West Chester-Liberty Chamber Alliance	
John Schaller	Lakota Family YMCA, Executive Director	x
John Stretch	Real Estate Broker, North Ridge Realty Group	
John Taylor	Liberty Center	x
Kathy Kramer	Star One Realtors	
Kirk Ball	The Christ Hospital	
Kristen Bitonte	Township Administrator	x
Lauren Boettcher	Lakota Local School District	
Lisa Gear	Business – Lunatic Fringe Salon	x
Louis Dissel	Business Owner – Charles Schwab	
Mark Elma	Liberty Township Planning and Zoning	x
Mark Hequet	President and CEO, Butler County Visitors Bureau	x
Martha Shelby	Director, Butler County Water and Sewer Department	x
Mary Ann Went	Business – Arcadia Home Care	
Matt Dutkevicz	Butler County Regional Transit Authority	x
Matt Miller	Superintendent, Lakota Local School District	x

**Project Stakeholder List: July 31, 2019**

Michel Price	Liberty Township Parks Committee	x
Michelle Hopkins	Cincinnati Children's	x
Mike Doty	Director of Construction, Brandicorp	
Mike Stautberg	Premier Health	x
Mike Uhl	Premiere Health	
Morgan Dallman	Lieutenant, Butler County Sheriff's Department	x
Nick Rabin	Senior Vice President, North American Properties	
Noel Balster	Mother Teresa School	x
Patti Theiss	Cincinnati Childrens	x
Paul Stumpf	Liberty Township Historical Society	x
Ray D'Alonzo	Business Owner – Tide Dry Cleaners	x
Rick Drescher	Business Owner – Shooters	
Rick Plummer	Liberty Township Director of Services Department	
Ron Hotchkiss	Business – Valley Central Bank	
Sandy Likes	Coldwell Banker	x
Sarah Newsad	Liberty Center	x
Sheila Baker	Keller Williams	
Shelby Loudin	Star One Realtors	
Shelly Oneill	Business – Emery Federal Credit Union	
Steve Fahrnbach	VP / Principal Broker, Warm Realty + Development	
Steve Johnston	West Chester-Liberty Chamber Alliance/Resident	
Susan Stretch	North Ridge Realty Group	x
Taylor Hunker	Liberty Center	
Tim Cappel	The Christ Hospital	
Travis Bautz	MidPointe Library System	x
Zach Shunn	Retail Specialist Edge Real Estate Group	x
Zeb Acuff	Butler County Planning Department	



## 9:30-10:45: COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT

### Engagement Questions:

#### 1. What is Liberty Township's Identity?

Liberty Township can be identified as 'Pre Liberty Center' and 'Post Liberty Center'. 'Pre Liberty Center' there was a lack of central focus, or activity. 'Post Liberty Center' the Liberty Center development has become the heart of the community.

The identity that the community does have has come a long way. The "brand" has been developing and evolving from a residential only focus to something that involves development/ businesses such as Liberty Center, Cincinnati Children's Hospital, and the Christ Hospital.

Liberty Township can be described as the 'Newby'. Compared to adjacent communities such as West Chester, Liberty Township is young and has time to develop and evolve.

Currently the township is packaged with West Chester in marketing campaigns. It isn't necessarily done because West Chester is better than Liberty Township- it becomes a necessity for doing business.

Generally, when identifying the township, the multiple zip codes make it confusing.

While being packaged with West Chester has positives, being able to separately identify Liberty Township would be helpful so that residents/ business owners know who to call and/ or contact with questions.

In terms of developing a stronger township identity, the Liberty Center development has helped because of the name recognition.

Stakeholders did indicate that the township was doing an excellent job of pushing the brand that does exist. These efforts have made huge gains in terms of establishing a "location" within Liberty Township.

#### 2. Thinking about population growth in general for Liberty Township, where has recent commercial development been focused and why?

Stakeholders outlined that Liberty Township has several "good pockets" of development including the growing regional node at Liberty Center and smaller neighborhood nodes- some of which are still developing (new Kroger development).

Previous patterns (both in and outside Liberty Center) have focused on development occurring along the interstate traditionally. The I-75 corridor should be a huge component of the township's growth plan over the next 20 years. Union Center, in West Chester Township, is a development example that was mentioned.



Stakeholders outlined that having an interchange can be a huge catalyst for growth and development. Stakeholders outlined that traditionally high-end retail is located in close proximity to the interchange and then transitions out. In regards to the interchange that Liberty Township currently has, it was mentioned that limitations may exist based on allowable zoning districts.

Aside from interchanges and access points, commercial development typically follows density and high concentrations of people (users).

It was noted that while the Township has areas to focus on it also has time to grow. Everyone should realize that growth, especially at a large scale, will take years and even decades.

### **3. Are there areas that have NOT been considered for commercial development? Why?**

Generally speaking, there are no areas that are excluded from consideration. There are however areas that are more challenging than others given certain circumstances.

- The properties near the intersection of Cox Road and Liberty Way has proven difficult based on perceived property value and land cost.
- Properties near the overpass of Millikin Road and I-75 have utility challenges based on existing availability and feasibility for new systems.
- Township's current plan for downtown Bethany calls for first floor retail/ second floor residential with a very walkable set of transportation infrastructure. The stakeholders outlined that currently that development model "doesn't work" because it is not necessarily based in market realities. The proposed make up of development wouldn't be supported with the densities that currently exist. The group also indicated that given the development that is there now (suburban) it will be difficult to change this style/ character based on infill opportunities. The group did identify that the development model (mixed use, walkable) provided for optimal live, work, play opportunities which would allow residents to support the businesses within the area.

### **4. What are some of the challenges specific to development (commercial, retail, office) in Liberty Township?**

While not specific to Liberty Township, the stakeholders identified that when areas are not planned well, they generally don't succeed, or prosper as much as they could.

While not a specific challenge now, the stakeholders outlined that to be successful the Township needs to identify specific focus areas. The group outlined the following areas as possible focal points.

- Millikin Road interchange. All participants agreed that planning for this development now was critical to the success of the area in the future.



- Butler County Veterans Way and I-75 interchange. Participants agreed that this area (and surrounding commercial development) could benefit from added density. A specific density number was not mentioned, but the addition of apartments, or other multi-family uses was provided as an example of “density”.
- Neighborhood nodes. These smaller community developments located within Liberty Township are critical to the success of the I-75 corridor. These developments, when connected to each neighborhood with sidewalks/ trails can help build a sense of community.

Exploration Questions:

**1. What type of commercial development is in demand? (Retail, Office, Mixed Use, Warehouse)**

In answering this question, the group discussed/ reviewed a variety of development types and outlined the constraints and benefits of the following:

- a. **Office.** Much of the area (Liberty Township and adjacent communities) is overbuilt for office currently. Professionals within the development community are seeing higher vacancy rates for Class A and Class B office space. Several stakeholders mentioned seeing properties (10,000 SF +) sitting empty for 2-3 years.

It is believed that the higher vacancy rates are a product of a variety of issues, but focused on the lack of sustainability around the market/ development model. Stakeholders encouraged the township to look at ways to control or influence development to ensure that the market can support the projects being proposed/ built.

Stakeholders agreed that office space is of interest to some, but insisted that the model needed to be one that allowed for a live-work-play atmosphere. This point was supported by the need to drive density as outlined above.

- b. **Retail.** Stakeholders recognized that the retail development market is a swinging pendulum. While ecommerce is booming now, some are of the opinion that brick and mortar store fronts will come back, although the footprint may be different.
- c. **Entertainment.** It was noted that while some retailers within Liberty Township and Liberty Center specifically are struggling, restaurant and entertainment establishments are doing well. This could be because the Township offerings in the entertainment industry are limited. It was mentioned that Liberty Township is likely “missing out” on tourists utilizing the Spooky Nook Sports Facility in neighboring Hamilton due to the limited number of hotels in the area. Additional lodging facilities, restaurants and entertainment venues would likely be in high demand and would be utilized by local residents and regional visitors alike.
- d. **Flex or light industrial.** Currently Liberty Township has little flex or light industrial development. Neighboring communities are starting to limit the amount of light



industrial development within their communities so this could be a way for Liberty to capitalize on a growing sector of the market.

It was also noted that as you look along the I-75 corridor more flex/ light industrial development is occurring which might also offer opportunities for Liberty Township as they plan for new development along the I-75 corridor.

- e. **Multifamily Residential.** To drive density (as outlined previously) the stakeholders outlined the need for multifamily housing. Areas around the Christ Hospital and the I-75 interchange were named specifically. While the discussion did not focus on the style or character of the development, the group did offer that multifamily developments should be urban in scale, and would need to be focused on individuals/ families with disposable income. The units at Liberty Center were mentioned and offered as a minimum standard for rent prices (\$1,200/ month) and structure.

**2. Where are some commercial development focus areas (within the Township) that should be addressed in the comprehensive plan? What are the challenges of each area?**

The properties near the intersection of Cox Road and Liberty Way has proven difficult based on perceived property value and land cost.

Properties near the overpass of Millikin Road and I-75 have utility challenges based on existing availability and feasibility for new systems.

**3. What do these areas need to be attractive to commercial development?**

Cox Road and Liberty Way need assistance in negotiating reasonable prices. The stakeholder group encouraged the use or development of tools for the Township to control property.

**4. What kind of development is ideal for the Cox Road and Millikin Interchange Area?**

**Flex or light industrial.** Currently Liberty Township has little flex or light industrial development. Neighboring communities are starting to limit the amount of light industrial development within their communities so this could be a way for Liberty to capitalize on a growing sector of the market.

It was also noted that as you look along the I-75 corridor more flex/ light industrial development is occurring which might also offer opportunities for Liberty Township as they plan for new development along the I-75 corridor.

**5. How much does development in surrounding areas impact development in Liberty Township?**

There are numerous developments outside of Liberty Township that offer both opportunities and constraints. If the Township is interested in diversifying their tax base and encouraging new development, efforts should be made to utilize the surrounding areas to either identify gaps in the market, or to identify opportunities for the Township to focus development initiatives.



**6. Are the current standards for private development working well? Are there construction standards or policy changes that should be considered?**

Liberty Township has no light industrial development footprint which could be caused by the current zoning standards. Current zoning standards dictate high end materials and finishes. These requirements drive the construction prices up. It's hard for developers to mitigate these higher construction prices because they cannot charge adequate rents for light industrial tenants.

The stakeholder group did understand that visual aesthetics are important in certain areas. The group does see the need for zoning controls and strict requirements.

In regards to other standards that pose challenges for developers, tap fees required by Butler County for multi-family developments was a concern.

**7. Are there specific improvements related to transportation/ utilities that would improve the commercial development market here locally?**

The stakeholder group outlined that inter township commuter programs and/or circulator programs would be valuable to allow residents to get to places, destinations and nodes with greater ease. They suggested forming or strengthening partnerships with the Butler County Visitor's Bureau and destinations such as Spooky Nook Sports Park.

**8. Has there been any effort or interest in the development of market research that could provide detailed analysis and recommendations for individual sectors of business?**

Specifically mentioned was the need to determine or share data on commuting traffic. Understanding how many vehicles are entering, driving by Liberty Center and/ or Liberty Way could be helpful in development processes and implementation.

Exit Questions:

**1. Is there anything else related to commercial development that we haven't discussed and should be included in the comprehensive plan?**

The following items were offered as closing thoughts and items that the comprehensive planning process should review and/ or address:

- a. The future second phase of Liberty Center should have a focus on multi family to help drive density in the area.
- b. Liberty Township needs to create "the experience" in order to entice new residents (younger residents) and tourism.
- c. The planning process, and ultimate comprehensive plan needs to account for flexibility in the long term. Building a vision takes 10+ years, and the plan should be able to work towards the vision while allowing for a flexible market.



- d. As new development is planned for the Township should take great care in educating the residents on what will (or could) occur in the future. That way no one is surprised by what is built adjacent to them.
- e. The process and the final plan should discuss walkability and appropriate infrastructure improvements. Improvements should focus on connecting real populations though- not just areas on a map.



## 9:30-10:45: HOUSING, REAL ESTATE, AND NEIGHBORHOODS

### Engagement Questions:

1. **Thinking about population growth in general for Liberty Township, where has recent housing development been focused and why?**
  - Eastern and southern parts of the Township. Mason (to the east) is largely built out, and development is spilling over from that direction.
2. **Are there areas that have NOT been considered for housing development? Why?**
  - Access to surface transportation is important, so northern parts of the Township are less developed.
3. **What are some of challenges specific to neighborhoods and housing in Liberty Township?**
  - Small lots are generally not available. This makes it hard for first-time homebuyers and elderly households that want to downsize.
  - Ironically, large lots are also harder to find; there is a significant market for families that want to assemble multiple units on larger properties.
  - Assembly of land needed to secure a financial feasible development. A single builder needs at least 75 lots, and a developer wants to have several options for builders, so a subdivision has to have around 400 units to be feasible. You also need larger lot subdivisions to be able to absorb costs of neighborhood amenities.

### Exploration Questions:

1. **How long do residential properties normally remain on the market?**
  - a. Often sell the same day; usually sold in 1 to 5 days.
2. **What type of houses are in demand? (square footage, amenities, price-range, etc.)**
  - a. \$400,000 or higher, 20,000 s.f. lots., 3,000-4,000 s.f. buildings. A \$300,000 unit is considered “first-time-homebuyer” range.
3. **Do you see any trends in the local housing growth or decline?**
  - a. Lack of supply for first-time homebuyers. The Township has essentially specialized in housing for families with children.
4. **What type of amenities should be improved in Liberty Township to help attract new residents (or retain the residents you have).**
  - a. Community amenities like parks. Swimming pools (at least within subdivisions) are less in vogue than they used to be.



- b. The trails system was cited as being an increasingly important amenity for households moving into the Township. Connectivity between neighborhoods is currently lacking.
- 5. Are there groups of people, such as young professionals, or seniors that are underserved by the housing options in Liberty Township?**
  - a. Seniors – master bedroom on first floor, smaller units with smaller yards.
  - b. First-time homebuyers don't have many options; houses can start at \$300,000. Rents can be \$3,000 a month.
- 6. Are there groups of people such as teenagers or seniors that are underserved by parks or programming?**
  - a. None noted.
- 7. Are there areas of preferred utility expansion for the development of housing and neighborhoods? Are there specific neighborhoods with utility issues?**
  - a. Sewer systems function quite well. Utilities are generally not seen as a problem.
  - b. Transportation is being addressed. The Millikin Road interchange will change the dynamics of the eastern part of the Township.
- 8. Are the current standards for private development working well? Are there construction standards or policy changes that should be considered?**
  - a. Architectural controls seem to be working well. There should be allowances for greater residential densities.
- 9. Has there been any effort or interest in the development of neighborhood planning that could provide detailed analysis and recommendations for individual neighborhoods, or individual sectors of the population (i.e young professionals or seniors)?**
  - a. Liberty Center is emerging as a community center for the Township – hub of social life.
  - b. Millikin Road Interchange and surrounding areas will be a focus area, although it will be primarily commercial in nature.

Exit Questions:

- 1. Is there anything else related to neighborhoods, housing, utilities, or neighborhood amenities that we haven't discussed and should be included in the comprehensive plan?**
  - a. Utility connection fees are quite high for multifamily.



## 12:45-2:00: PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE

### Engagement Questions:

#### 1. **Where are the current roadway issues? (High traffic areas, collision areas, inefficiencies)**

The stakeholder group offered the following challenges during the conversation:

- a. **Parallel I-75 Corridors.** Currently the Cincinnati Dayton Road corridor acts as a relief for I-75 when the interstate is inefficient due to construction, accidents or high traffic levels. The corridor, at times cannot adequately handle that capacity which causes congestion within Liberty Township.
- b. **“Mouse Holes” Railroad underpasses.** The Township has two railroad underpasses that offer limited site distances and the inability for two vehicles to pass comfortably. Mauds Hughes Road and Kyles Station Road have both been studied but the fiscal concerns of improving these intersections has previously outweighed the benefits.
- c. **Liberty Fairfield Road and Route 4.** Due to the bridge crossing the river, this corridor becomes congested. Until improvements are made to the bridge itself no major modifications or improvements will occur with congestion (real and/ or perceived). While the challenges are predominately congestion focused, safety challenges could be forthcoming based on traffic level.

#### 2. **What are some current transportation needs? (More sidewalks and trails, public transit, new roadways etc.)**

Trails and sidewalks are still a priority. Generally, these are developed with the subdivision (internal network) and the Township is working to connect the systems and provide infrastructure between subdivisions and neighborhoods. It was noted that the County doesn't specifically do much implementation related to trails/ sidewalks but instead they support the Township as they are able.

Safe Routes to School are becoming more of a focus and is an option to fund infrastructure improvements.

The group noted that generally speaking throughout the Township trail systems and pedestrian connectivity infrastructure is becoming more of a focus than roads and corridor improvements.

Generally speaking, the focus has been on pedestrian infrastructure and/ or shared use facilities. Dedicated bicycle facilities such as bicycle lanes have not been well received previously.

The group outlined that from their perspective there is no large demand for public transportation. Not only is the demand minimal, existing zoning regulations make implementing public transportation (i.e. commuter routes) challenging. Developments with large parking lots, set far back from the roadway increase the costs of public transportation services which then



make it hard to recapture user fees. The West Chester hospital route and Cox Road, Tylersville intersection was an example provided.

### 3. What are some of the challenges related to transportation/ utilities in Liberty Township?

The properties around the Millikin Road and I-75 overpass are a challenge for utilities. The area is not serviced by utilities (water, storm sewer, sanitary sewer) now and the properties at the northeast corner of the overpass are furthered hindered because of access issues. The area is located at the “top” of the system, meaning infrastructure to this area will be costly and will require development to contribute to greater system improvements outside of their site-specific needs.

No other specific challenges were outlined for utility systems. Currently the capacities are good and the systems can meet the demand necessary.

In the future, development will continue to drive the extension and expansion of the area’s utility networks.

### 4. What are some current initiatives that are in the works?

Multiple initiatives are currently underway (in construction and in the planning phase) the stakeholder group made specific mention of the following:

**Ohio 129, Liberty Way and I-75.** The first phase of a proposed project would extend Ohio 129 to a multi-lane roundabout at Cox Road in Liberty Twp. The second phase of the project would extend Ohio 129 to a second roundabout and connect back to Liberty Way across from Voice of America MetroPark. In addition, the plan would eliminate the current off-ramp from Ohio 129 west to Liberty Way as well as the current on-ramp to I-75 north from Liberty Way. It would add a new flyover ramp from Liberty Way to I-75 north.

**Pedestrian Infrastructure Improvements.** Improvements as outlined in the Township’s pedestrian plans and initiatives.

**Pedestrian infrastructure improvements over I-75.** Providing better connectivity across the interstate corridor.

**Millikin Interchange.** The Millikin Way Interchange will open more than 700 acres in Liberty Township for commercial development along the I-75 corridor. The proposed interchange is a critical strategy to support the community's growth and encourage economic development within Liberty Township. The goal of the interchange is to alleviate traffic congestion as the community grows, improve safety, support development, increase job opportunities and diversify the community's tax base.

**Butler Warren Road.** Roadway expansion north to outlet mall in the City of Monroe. This project is currently included in the Butler County Long Range Plan.



Exploration Questions:

**1. What type of improvements (transportation or utility) should be made for commercial and residential expansion long-term?**

The stakeholders identified the following items that could be implemented to improve connectivity within the Township:

- a. **Transportation to public amenities.** Additional pedestrian connections between neighborhoods and to public destinations (schools, shopping areas etc.) would allow residents to commute for local errands.
- b. **Senior living opportunities.** Senior living opportunities was mentioned outside of any broader transportation project. Providing centrally located senior living areas that are connected to grocery areas, medical facilities and within close proximity to the hospital could be necessary in the future.
- c. **Commuting network.** While currently the demand is limited, the group identified that as populations grow and densities increase commuting infrastructure will be beneficial. Currently there is a growing demand for commuter services in neighboring West Chester.

Additionally, expanding commuter services along I-75 (between Cincinnati and Dayton) could be necessary to service the workforce.

**2. Are there system-wide improvements that need to be made that provide a consistent level of service throughout the entire community?**

While no specific improvements were outlined, the group did point out that access management techniques and improvements are important. The group outlined that the Township should consider developing a hierarchy of roadways and access management tools for undeveloped areas.

The group identified the need to include everyone (Butler County, CRTA, ODOT, Liberty Township) should be included in large development decisions to make sure that services are being provided efficiently. All agreed that the process seems to be working well and that all participants have the opportunity to weigh in at appropriate times.

**3. Are there specific intersections (or corridors) that you perceive to be especially dangerous for motorists? What about for pedestrians or cyclists?**

No specific locations were noted.

**4. In terms of utility expansion are there areas that make the most economic sense to expand utilities? What are the challenges with these areas?**



The properties around the Millikin Road and I-75 overpass is a challenge for utilities. The area is not serviced by utilities (water, storm sewer, sanitary sewer) now and the properties at the northeast corner of the overpass are furthered hindered because of access issues. The area is located at the “top” of the system, meaning infrastructure to this area will be costly and will require development to contribute to greater system improvements outside of their site-specific needs.

**5. Is there a way to encourage water conservation and energy conservation technology in new construction and large-scale renovations?**

Generally speaking, broad conservation policies are not necessary at this time. The utility department(s) are seeing less water use per household primarily because of high efficiency appliances. They are seeing an increase in use, but the growth curve is not as steep as it previously was.

Exit Questions:

**1. Are there any big ideas for transportation in Liberty Township that we haven’t talked about?**

The stakeholder group offered the following “big ideas”:

- a. **Address and improve the “mouse holes” (railroad underpasses).** These pose more of a safety problem than a congestion problem.
- b. Extending the Ohio 129 corridor east to I-71.
- c. **Adding (or improving existing) arterial corridors on either side of the I-75 corridor.** These parallel routes could be coordinated through ITS systems and serve as a relief when the I-75 corridor is inefficient due to construction, accidents or high traffic. Currently the I-75 corridor is used as an arterial- not just for regional commuting traffic. Having parallel roads on either side would allow this to be more efficient.
- d. **Autonomous vehicles planning.** Technologies are changing so quickly all parties are a bit stuck on what to plan for and what to implement. Currently no one is really planning for any infrastructure specifically because the timelines, technology and demand are unknown.

In terms of autonomous vehicles infrastructure, transit pickup/ drop offs are probably the lowest hanging fruit. Small, incremental investments could be made rather than responding to the bigger demand planning issues. These improvements could also be used in the short term.

**2. Anything else related to transportation that should be addressed in the plan that hasn’t been discussed?**

Nothing else was added.



**3. Is there anything else related to utilities that we haven't discussed that should be included in the comprehensive plan?**

Nothing else was added.



## 12:45-2:00: PUBLIC SERVING INFRASTRUCTURE

### Engagement Questions:

#### **1. What are some of the biggest threats to public safety in Liberty Township?**

- Commercial development along I-75 corridor might change police needs, since there is an expected increase in rush hour traffic.
- Commercial development along I-75 might change fire and EMS needs depending on the nature of the development. Nighttime staffing might need to be increased if there is an increase in the number of second- and third-shift workers in these areas. The east side (#112) station is the busiest station, and is in the highest-growth area of the Township. It also has more aged households, who generate a higher frequency of EMS calls.

#### **2. What are the social service gaps in Liberty Township – is there a particular need that isn't currently being addressed?**

- Even though no members of the social service community were present at the meeting, the police and fire representatives were asked about the provision of social services, as police and fire personnel often act as a point of entry for these facilities. Gaps were not discussed, but most public service needs are addressed by institutions outside of Liberty Township proper.

### Exploration Questions:

#### **1. What are the current and future facility and operational needs for public safety? What type of programs or facilities outside of the police, ems, fire and communications are needed for public safety?**

- Police staffing levels appear to be good relative to other Townships and jurisdictions, but will need to increase as population grows. The substation Lieutenant indicated that he would like to increase his unit's investigation capabilities.
- Liberty Township provides its own Fire Department, with three fire stations and 72 firefighters that are cross-trained with EMS. A minimum of 13 firefighters are on-call at any one time. Firefighter staffing is fine given current demand levels, but will need to increase as population grows.

#### **2. Are there ideas on how to better address substance abuse in Liberty Township?**

- There are pockets of substance abuse problems within the Township, but cases are managed by agencies outside of the Township. The Countryside Mobile Home Park within the Township generates higher calls, as do some (not all) of the Township's Section 8 housing developments. These Section 8 units are either duplexes or garden apartments. The calls to these areas are higher frequency, and have a higher proportion of serious calls, including fights and drug offenses.



**3. Are there specific technological needs to modernize public safety?**

- The Fire Department is leading the implementation of an Opticom traffic-signal timing system in the Township, and receives technical support by the Butler County Engineer's Office. These systems will be eventually implemented at all the intersections of the primary arterials; currently nine (9) traffic signal locations are connected, and another fifteen (15) that will be connected. The Fire Department is also looking at partnerships with other townships for funding Opticom units that are close to the Township's boundary.

**4. Do people in need know about the social service opportunities available?**

- Unknown.

**5. What are some of the barriers that prevent people from seeking, obtaining help? (Transportation, Communication, etc.)**

- The changing demographics of the Township, particularly the increase in Hispanic populations, sometimes poses a language barrier to the provision of services, but the Fire Department uses a translation line to communicate in these circumstances.
- Often times the Department is contacted via 911 when there is not a true emergency. The Fire Department is working with Township communications staff to increase awareness of the full scope of their services.

**6. Are there issues with providing for transportation needs? Access to health care? Access to healthy food? Access to affordable housing? Access to community facilities and services?**

- Generally, the staff relies upon the Children's Hospital for juvenile issues, and upon the court system for domestic violence and other home-based support needs; the court system has a number of victim's advocates for assisting in domestic violence cases.

**7. What type of healthcare issues are most common in Liberty Township and how is that being addressed?**

- Unknown.

Exit Questions:

**1. Are there any other ideas or items related to public safety that we haven't addressed that should be included in the comprehensive plan?**

- a. The Fire Department reports no problems with design standards for residential streets, which are managed by the County and which are more restrictive than what the Fire Department allows. Water pressure for fire suppression seems to be adequate. Consultation with planning staff on new developments occurs early in the permitting process.



2. **Are there any other items related to social services that haven't been discussed that should be included in the comprehensive plan?**
  - a. None noted.



## 2:15-3:30: COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS AND SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS

### Engagement Questions:

- 1. What are some of the existing community services available in Liberty Township?**
  - a. Boys and Girls Club – supplementing the schools, latchkey programs, homework help, mentoring.
  - b. Liberty Township Historical Society – maintaining an old school, operating a museum.
  - c. Liberty Township Parks Committee – promoting the Township’s park system and providing programming, like nature walks, maintaining vegetation, etc.
  - d. Friends of Metro Parks in Butler County – lead nature walks, fishing training classes.
  - e. YMCA – recreational and fitness programming; also the largest child care provider for Butler County, and manages after-school programs.
- 2. What are the social service gaps in Liberty Township – is there a particular need that isn’t currently being addressed?**
  - a. Transportation is a need. The Boys and Girls Club contracts with Butler County Transportation to transport students from Lakota High School to their facility. Elderly households are often unable to drive.

### Exploration Questions:

- 1. Do your organizations/ boards have long range plans outlining your goals and aspirations for programming/ improvements?**
  - a. YMCA – expansion of facilities.
  - b. Friends of Metro Parks – seeing the continuation of trails development, including the Little Miami Bicycle Trail.
- 2. What are some of the short-term goals of your organization?**
  - a. Boys and Girls Club -- maintaining service levels.
  - b. Historical Society – communicating with new residents about the history of the area.
  - c. Parks Committee – letting people know about opportunities, including pocket parks.
- 3. Are there specific programming needs/operation needs/maintenance needs?**
  - a. Educating motorists about driving safely around cyclists.
  - b. Programming for music and the arts, particularly for children, seems to be lacking.
- 4. Are there specific properties that are desired for new facilities? (Potential new parks, facilities etc.)?**



- a. Little Miami Bicycle Trail, with a number of spurs coming off of it.
- 5. Are there specific needs for older residents that should be addressed through the comprehensive plan?**
- a. The YMCA is a major focal point for elderly residents.
  - b. Transportation services for elderly residents are lacking.
- 6. Do people in need know about the opportunities (amenities, programming) you offer?**
- a. Outreach to the public was seen as a continuing need. School emails help, but there really isn't a clearinghouse for disseminating information about services.
- 7. What are some of the barriers that prevent people utilizing your programs/ amenities? (Transportation, Communication, etc.)**
- a. The fact that Lakota Schools does not provide transportation for high school students is seen as a severe barrier for many households, and students walking on streets without sidewalks is a common sight.

Exit Questions:

- 1. Are there any other items related to social services that haven't been discussed that should be included in the comprehensive plan?**
- a. Liberty Township has not historically had much of an identity. Liberty Center seems to be emerging as a "Downtown", and the places where a lot of youth "hang out". The fact that it is on the extreme southeastern part of the Township poses challenges for accessibility to other Township areas.



## 2:15-3:30: EDUCATION, ECONOMIC AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

### Engagement Questions:

#### 1. What are some of the biggest challenges related to education in the community?

The biggest challenge noted is handling and managing the growth in the school systems. Some portions of the township are growing quicker and faster which stretches some facilities farther than others. Cherokee Elementary school was mentioned specifically as having capacity challenges both in the short and long term.

#### 2. What are some of the priorities that the Township is focusing on in terms of economic development (business attraction and retention)?

The group noted the following priority topics in the discussion:

**Quality of life and amenities.** The group made mention that this is a focus of discussions and improvement projects. They also acknowledged that they understood that these types of projects are important due to the growth of the community.

**Development and Growth.** The group generally understood that there is a focus on future development- primarily located along the I-75 corridor. The Millikin Interchange was mentioned and was highlighted as being able to provide numerous opportunities to the area.

In addition to the two key topics, the group also noted that there is a clear focus on the east side of the township. While they understood why, they cautioned the Township to not forget about the West side of the community.

#### 3. What are some of the priorities that the Township is focusing on in terms of workforce development?

No specific priorities were outlined but the group did point out that there has been a clear shift in focus- from residential priorities to development (or future development). As the Township focuses more on attracting new development and businesses, they pointed out that the Township will need to ensure that the infrastructure (transportation, utilities, amenities, public services) can meet the needs of new users.

#### 4. Have these priorities changed over the past five years? If so, why? What achievements, successes, and/or challenges has the Township had that might have changed the priority areas?

As outlined above the priorities are beginning to shift which is in response to the growth of the area.



Exploration Questions:

- 5. What are the current education gaps in Liberty Township? (age group, type of education, degree or skills training) What current initiatives are in place to address this issue?**

The Township has progressive, high quality educational facilities and programs. As the Township continues to grow efforts should be made to make sure that the educational curriculum and facilities maintain their quality.

- 6. In our upcoming steering committee meeting we will be discussing the challenges facing the township- would you consider employee attraction, retention & training as a challenge for the community? What are some initiatives in place right now, and what are items identified for the future?**

The school system has and is ramping up their STEAM curriculum and programming in the K-12 schools. They utilize maker spaces and real-world learning programs through the high school level.

While not specifically related to educational programs, during the discussion the group did point out that service jobs are hard to fill within Liberty Township, predominately because it is difficult for those workers to live in or near Liberty Township.

- 7. Why do you think Liberty Township students are not returning home post-graduation?**

During the conversation the group pointed out that most Liberty Township students left for either high education opportunities, trade skill development or job opportunities and did not immediately return home. Causes for this were outlined as follows:

- Not many homes at a “starter” price point.
- These individuals haven’t started having families- Liberty Township might be a location to “settle down”.
- The environment isn’t set out to meet the needs of a young professional; Offers minimal locations to meet people, limited cultural or entertainment venues and has limited “experience” offerings.

- 8. What do you think the township should be?**

After discussing that the Township needed to determine “what it wanted to be” the question was posed back to the stakeholder group. They offered the following thoughts:

- The township doesn’t have a heart. There is no center where you feel like home which produces a missing sense of belonging. The “lack of center/heart” is viewed by some as an opportunity. Churches and parochial schools see this as a way to serve as the “center” of the community and often become the hub of activity for their families.
- The Township should be a highly walkable community.
- The Township should be a good residential space for families with strong green spaces.



- The Township should be a good place to live and raise a family.

As a component of this discussion the stakeholder group also discussed what they wished the Township had. They offered the following:

- Greater connectivity
- More walkability options
- Access for lower income families; Provide more ways for lower income areas to be a part of the broader Liberty Township community.
- More transportation options
- More park space- owned and maintained by the township
- A venue, convention/ meeting space
- Pavilion with concerts- community events.

#### **9. Are there key challenges related to economic development?**

Predominately, Liberty Township isn't equipped to handle new development right now due to the existing infrastructure (transportation, utilities, public service infrastructure). Other surrounding communities can provide services and amenities much faster and on a more affordable basis making them more appealing for new development.

#### **10. What is the Township's role in the economy and growth for Butler County and how do Liberty Township and Butler County work together to create economic development priorities?**

The group acknowledged that the Township staff is using all the tools available to them and are working to partner with appropriate agencies.

#### Exit Questions:

##### **1. Are there any other items related to education, economic and workforce development that haven't been discussed that should be a part of the comprehensive plan?**

The group discussed how the entertainment sector could and should respond in the future. The group felt that more offerings might be necessary to provide venues and options for future users/ residents.

It was also mentioned that the Lakota School District has recently completed an enrollment forecast. Currently they are seeing higher enrollments but also project for them to decrease in the short term.



### **3:45-5:00: BUSINESS OWNERS AND REPRESENTATIVES**

#### Engagement Questions:

#### **1. What motivated you to want to start a business in Liberty Township?**

The group offered the following comments:

- They lived here initially and made decisions to personally invest here for ease.
- They lived here initially and through work with economic development group(s) knew the market was good/ ideal for their business and client base.
- They understood that the required/ necessary demographic conditions existed in the community. Primarily focused on residential needs rather than commercial clients. Liberty Township's demographic fit the need well.
- Previous talk of Liberty Center development coming into play- they knew this could plan into their business and client base.
- At the time they opened the business (or planned to open the business) they felt competition was weak.
- Business expansions is currently being further supported by new Kroger Marketplace development.
- Locations supported by other adjacent development (i.e. weekly errands)
- Good traffic flow for in- out commuting traffic.
- Wanted to be centrally located to where patients live. Market area- local 10-mile radius
- Close proximity to Dayton and Cincinnati.
- Square footage and rents were good- the economics fit well.
- Wanted to provide jobs in their neighborhood.
- Atrium Health- natural progression to expand from Middletown into Liberty

#### **2. Where do you draw your customers from?**

The group outlined that customers/ clients come from Mason, Fairfield, Monroe, Springboro, the Tri-County area, Hamilton, West Chester, broader Butler and Warren County in addition to Liberty Township.

#### **3. As a business owner, what specific challenges do you face?**

Currently there is difficulty getting employees for some businesses- primarily lower wage, service-oriented positions. The Township, and the local businesses could benefit from better or more transportation options including commuter routes that would allow the workforce to come to Liberty Township easier. Currently some of the lower wage, service-oriented employees are coming from the Cincinnati area.

More or better transportation options could also assist lower income hospital inpatient care situations; providing affordable and efficient options that would allow their family easier access back/ forth.



It was noted that business pay scales are such that people living within the immediate Township area are above the lower paying wage jobs on a socioeconomic front. The workforce for some businesses isn't living here and likely cannot live here based on housing prices and general cost of living. Transportation is expensive.

Workers coming into the community in portions of the Township are also facing an income tax which could be a deterrent.

**4. What are assets in Liberty Township that make it easier to do business here (access to I-75, proximity to city centers, proximity to workforce, resources, quality of life, etc.)?**

The group offered the following comments:

- There is available space in Liberty Township which makes building (developing) a business easier.
- The I-75 corridor is a benefit for businesses that pull from a more regional center for clients/ users.
- The relationship to Mason and West Chester helps build a larger client base. Transportation routes make it easier to move to and from these areas.
- The people that are here and the socioeconomic makeup of the community benefit local businesses.

**5. What exists here that makes your business a success?**

The group offered the following comments:

- The proximity to both the Cincinnati and Dayton markets. This allows the client/ customer base to be larger.
- The current infrastructure provides efficiencies for business (transportation corridors, utilities, etc.)
- The emphasis on walkability and pedestrian infrastructure connects local businesses to one another.
- The area has good partnerships and attitudes- There is a general sense of "How can we make this happen" rather than "We can't make this happen."
- There are numerous neighborhoods that are all in the same school district. People are doing things at the same time. There is the appearance of connectivity (culture).
- There are growing rooftops of certain income levels which support the various local businesses.
- Liberty Township is a community-oriented area.
- The population of Liberty Township is young, family friendly oriented.

**6. What are some initiatives that have contributed to success for your business and/or other large businesses located within the Township?**



Highway improvements on interchanges along with the improved access to the community was specifically noted since these improvements are not only functional but noticed and appreciated by clients/ users.

**7. What are some future projects or programs that will benefit your business and/or other large businesses?**

The following project ideas would be a benefit to the local businesses and employment centers:

- Liberty Fairfield Road and Route 4 bridge improvements
- Commuter program between the Cincinnati/ Dayton markets

Exploration Questions:

**1. What challenges in general are there to opening a business in Liberty Township?**

At times the overall vision for the community from the leadership can be a constraint. The Liberty Township trustees have a strong sense of what they want and if your idea is outside of their vision there can be pushback.

**2. Are their specific improvements related to transportation that would improve connectivity for your company?**

The following project ideas would be a benefit to the local businesses and employment centers:

- Liberty Fairfield Road and Route 4 bridge improvements
- Commuter program between the Cincinnati/ Dayton markets

**3. What type of skills are you looking for in your employees? Are you experiencing trouble finding new employees?**

Entry level workforce is difficult to find- especially within Liberty Township. Service positions, at lower wages are often hard to fill.

**4. What does future expansion of your businesses look like for your companies and are there any related needs such as utilities, transportation, ability to hire, or land availability that go along with that?**

The group offered the following comments:

- Currently they are more focused on expanding hours, less about expanding facilities.
- The Christ Hospital is currently going through a 10-year strategic planning process; Liberty Township campus likely won't stay as it is now. In the future the campus could provide services or change services at this location.
- Focusing on expanding occupancy at Liberty Center, with a primary focus on the Foundry. There is room to expand Liberty Center and through this future expansion Liberty Center could become a stronger entertainment corridor.



- Expanding on tourism opportunities (hotels, destination experiences, restaurants) here and within the region would do well.

**5. What would be helpful to other businesses to know when locating in Liberty Township?**

The group agreed that Liberty Township is full of “wealthy, young families”, and the area is growing which is a benefit to businesses. They also noted that the area is “vibrant” and you get the best of both worlds with opportunities of a large city with the character of a more rural, smaller community. The area is known to have excellent schools and is within close proximity to cultural destinations.

Exit Questions:

- 1. Are there other needs specific to your company or others like you that should be addressed in the comprehensive plan that hasn’t already been discussed?**

None were noted.