

# Thinking Ahead A Comprehensive Plan For The Plains, Ohio 2020-2050

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## The Mission of Athens Township

### **“TO MAKE CERTAIN THAT THE TOWNSHIP WORKS FOR THE PEOPLE.**

We will make certain that the roads are well maintained and snow is removed quickly so people can get to work and the schools can remain open. We will meet regularly with the Township Fire Departments to see that emergency personnel continue to be properly equipped and trained. We will use all resources to determine “innovative” funding sources. A pledge of “Cost Effectiveness’ shall be our motto as we endeavor to do more with less.”

# Contents

The Mission of Athens Township.....	2
List of Figures .....	4
Chapter 1 – The Plains, Ohio - Background .....	6
Why Plan? .....	6
Athens Township and The Plains .....	6
Pre-history, History and Development .....	10
Civic Organizations.....	15
Previous Plans and Projects .....	16
The Planning and Zoning Initiative.....	17
Geographic Extent of the Proposed Zoning District .....	18
Chapter 2 - Existing Conditions and Trends.....	20
Government Services.....	20
Existing Land Use .....	20
Parcels Without a Classification.....	21
Agriculture .....	21
Residential.....	21
Commercial .....	23
Tax Exempt.....	24
Population and Housing.....	25
Environment.....	26
Soils .....	26
Streams, Floodplain, and Sensitive Areas.....	27
Hazards.....	29
Urban Forest and Greenspace .....	31
History and Culture .....	34
Infrastructure .....	39
Utilities .....	39
Transportation Infrastructure.....	41
Parks.....	44

Business and Economy.....	45
Chapter 3 - A Plan .....	46
What the Citizens Say .....	46
What Key Persons Say.....	47
A Plan for the District.....	50
A Framework for Planning .....	50
Expected Change and Growth .....	52
Setting Goals and Proposing Action.....	53
Context – Land Use and Development .....	53
Context – Transportation and Infrastructure .....	56
Context – Cultural and Historic Resources .....	57
Context – Environment and Natural Resources .....	58
Appendix 1 - Survey Results.....	60

## List of Figures

Figure 1 Athens County Townships, featuring Athens Township and The Plains .....	7
Figure 2 The Plains, a census designated place (CDP) .....	8
Figure 3 Demographic Comparison of The Plains, Glouster, Nelsonville, and the State of Ohio (Source: <a href="https://factfinder.census.gov">https://factfinder.census.gov</a> ).....	9
Figure 4 Aerial Photograph of The Plains, Ohio, 1964 .....	13
Figure 5 Modern Aerial Image of Approximate Area Shown in Figure 4 (orange dashes) (showing growth in residences and businesses both within the orange border and outside of it). .....	14
Figure 6 Population of The Plains .....	15
Figure 7 Proposed Zoning District.....	18
Figure 8 Existing Land Use Data for the District .....	21
Figure 9 Residential Land Use Sub-classifications .....	22
Figure 10 Commercial Land Use Sub-classifications.....	23
Figure 11 Perspective of the Proposed Limestone Apartments on Valley Drive .....	25
Figure 12 Soils in the District (data and soils information from <a href="https://soilseries.sc.egov.usda.gov/OSD_Docs">https://soilseries.sc.egov.usda.gov/OSD_Docs</a> ).....	26

Figure 13 Streams and Floodplains in the District .....	28
Figure 14 Abandoned Coal Mines Under the Proposed Zoning District.....	30
Figure 15 Landscape Planning for a Development in The Plains .....	32
Figure 16 Landscaping enhances property values and aesthetics .....	33
Figure 17 Tree Topping is Not a Recommended Practice.....	33
Figure 18 Mound Map by Samuel Hildreth, <a href="http://www.pinterest.com">www.pinterest.com</a> .....	34
Figure 19 Locations of Adena Mounds in The Plains .....	35
Figure 20 Four Prominent Structures, with Descriptions, in The Plains (information about the Wolf and Dreshler homes from Rose, Anna C., <i>Yesterdays of The Plains</i> , pp. 25-26.).....	36
Figure 21 Additional Old and/or Unique Structures in The Plains.....	37
Figure 22 Sewer Collection System in The Plains.....	40
Figure 23 Roads in the District .....	41
Figure 24 Average Annual Daily Traffic Counts ( <a href="http://www.dot.state.oh.us/Divisions/Planning/TechServ/traffic/Pages/Traffic-Survey-Reports-&lt;br/&gt;and-Maps.aspx">http://www.dot.state.oh.us/Divisions/Planning/TechServ/traffic/Pages/Traffic-Survey-Reports- and-Maps.aspx</a> ).....	42
Figure 25 Sidewalks are not available in most places.....	43
Figure 26 Typical alleyways in The Plains .....	44

# Chapter 1 – The Plains, Ohio - Background

## Why Plan?

A community of residents, businesses, and organizations can grow, change, work together, and become something of its own choosing. Within the framework of the laws we have chosen to live by, we aspire to be free to pursue our dreams and to be safe from harm both from within our community and from forces outside our community. We want our community to grow and prosper and be a fine place for our children and our children’s children to call home.

Planning can help to make this happen. It is a way to grow in an organized manner so that local resources such as good land for building, road networks, water and sewer networks, and natural resources like streams, forests, and wildlife are used efficiently and not wasted or ruined by haphazard development. Planning can ensure there is enough parkland, that schools are located in safe and convenient locations, that residents have good sidewalks and bikepaths, that residential areas are separated from business uses that may be noisy or emit odors, that the community has a variety of housing to suit many different needs, and a host of other essential goods and services to keep a community vital. Most importantly, good planning makes every effort to involve citizens and to get their input for what they need and want to see in their community.

We all plan in our lives. Every day we arise and have an organized idea of what we want to do with our precious time to maximize our productivity and happiness. We have financial plans, house and building plans, business plans, plans for raising a family, plans to take vacation and travel and the list goes on. A community also needs to plan and has tools available to it. Townships in Ohio have certain powers from the state to conduct the business of managing roads, cemeteries, fire departments, and land planning through zoning. Townships also have authority, if they choose, to provide emergency medical services, solid waste disposal, parks, and police protection.

A comprehensive plan looks at the various components that make up a city or county or region and integrates them so that there is coordination to assess needs, solve problems, seek funding, and implement projects. The various components that make up this Plan include land use, transportation, infrastructure, economy, population, housing, history, critical and sensitive areas, and natural hazards.

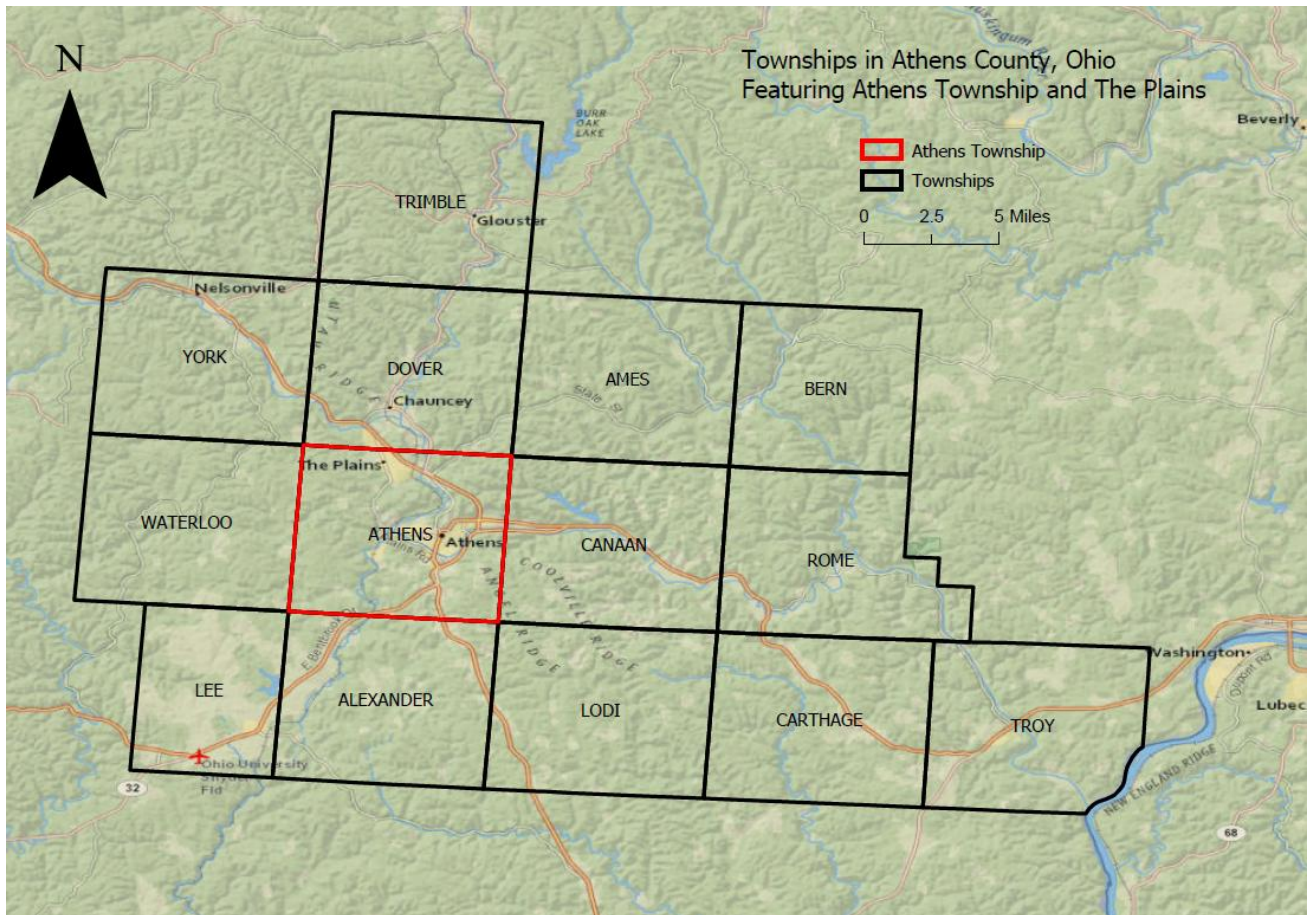
## Athens Township and The Plains

Athens Township is unique among the 14 townships in Athens County. It contains the City of Athens, the county seat and home to Ohio University. The 2010 population figure for the Township was 30,473 with 23,832 people living in the City of Athens. That leaves only 6,641 residents spread out in the remaining 26 square miles. With the exception of The Plains, an



unincorporated town on the north edge of the township, Athens Township is considered a rural place once you are outside the Athens City corporate limits. According to the 2010 census, The Plains is a census designated place (CDP) and contained 3,080 people, living in approximately 2.3 square miles. Even though it is unincorporated, The Plains has more residents than any of the eight incorporated villages in Athens County.

Figure 1 Athens County Townships, featuring Athens Township and The Plains



The Plains also extends northerly into Dover Township. Figure 2 shows the census designated place boundary for The Plains. Approximately 30% of the The Plains area on the north is in Dover Township and the southerly 70% is in Athens Township. The majority of the population of The Plains lives in Athens Township. It has fairly distinct regions dedicated to residential and business uses.

Figure 3 shows a comparison of three urbanized areas in Athens County: The Village of Glouster, the City of Nelsonville, and The Plains and also adds statistics for Ohio. Several statistics worth mentioning are that the population of The Plains is slightly older due to the presence of Hickory Creek and The Lindley Inn, assisted living facilities. The median household income in The Plains is also slightly higher than Glouster or Nelsonville, probably because many

Figure 2 The Plains, a census designated place (CDP)



(source: <https://ohio.hometownlocator.com/cities/map,n,the%20plains-oh,fid,1077041.cfm>)

of the residents work at higher paying jobs in the nearby City of Athens where Ohio University is located. The income level is still well below that of the state. The City of Nelsonville shows a larger population living in group quarters and a larger percentage of males in the population, probably because it housed a prison facility at the time of the 2010 census. It is also the home of Hocking College where students live in group quarters.

The Plains is densely settled with 1,353 people per square mile. This is 250 more people per square mile than the City of Nelsonville. It also has more housing units per square mile than do Glouster or Nelsonville. This is partly due to the large number of multifamily housing units. The median housing value is higher than its county neighbors but lags behind the state significantly. Rents between the different geographies do not vary quite as much. Housing in The Plains is significantly younger in age, especially when compared with Glouster and Nelsonville. This is not surprising since The Plains did not experience the same boom and bust economic situation as its coal mining neighbors that relied almost exclusively on coal revenues. The employment in



the City of Athens continues to drive some of the housing development in The Plains because new housing is needed and it is also where affordable housing can be found.

Figure 3 Demographic Comparison of The Plains, Glouster, Nelsonville, and the State of Ohio (Source: <https://factfinder.census.gov>)

(US Census 2010 and 2017)								
	Glouster		The Plains		Nelsonville		Ohio	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
<b>Statistics (2010 US Census)</b>								
Total population	1,791	100%	3,080	100%	5,392	100%	11,536,504	100%
Median age (years)	35.8		40.8		25.1		38.8	
Under 16 years old	441	25%	547	17.8%	827	15.3%	2,402,673	20.8%
65 years and older	213	12%	603	19.6%	484	9.0%	1,622,015	14.1%
Male population	856	48%	1,369	44.4%	2,954	54.8%	5,632,156	48.8%
Female population	935	52%	1,711	55.6%	2,438	45.2%	5,904,348	51.2%
Race - white	1,722	96%	2,833	92.0%	5,077	94.2%	9,539,437	82.7%
<b>Land area and density</b>								
Land area (sq. mi.)	1.33		2.28		4.89		40,860.69	
Pop. density per sq. mi.	1,349.3		1,352.6		1,102.1		282	
Housing units per sq. mi.	650.9		658.3		461.3		125.5	
<b>Total households and population in households</b>								
Total households	720	100%	1,385	100%	1,969	100%	4,603,435	100%
Population in households	1,791	100%	2,933	95.2%	4,401	81.6%	11,230,238	97.3%
Pop. in group quarters	-	0%	147	4.8%	991	18.4%	306,266	2.7%
<b>Statistics (2017 estimated)</b>								
Median household income	\$ 28,233		\$ 37,218		\$ 26,139		\$ 52,407	
Total housing units	844	100%	1,451	100%	2,212	100%	5,174,838	100%
Occupied housing units	649	76.9%	1,269	87.5%	1,693	76.5%	4,633,145	89.5%
Vacant housing units	195	23.1%	182	12.5%	519	23.5%	541,693	10.5%
Housing units built 2014 or later	0		0		0		25,334	0.5%
Housing units built 1939 or earlier	457	54.1%	132	9.1%	953	43.1%	1,061,319	20.5%
Owner-occupied housing units	401	61.8%	581	45.8%	740	43.7%	3,060,473	66.1%
Renter-occupied housing units	248	38.2%	688	54.2%	953	56.3%	1,572,672	33.9%
Median housing value-owner occupied	\$ 52,900		\$119,400		\$ 72,600		\$ 135,100	
median rent	\$ 652		\$ 706		\$ 707		\$ 764	
Occupied housing units lacking complete plumbing	12	1.8%	35	2.8%	0		17,102	0.4%
Occupied housing units lacking complete kitchen	12	1.8%	46	3.6%	0		44,374	1.0%

## Pre-history, History and Development

The Plains is a uniquely large, flat region formed by the outwash of the Illinoian glacial period. Deposits of sands and gravels filled the ancient river bed that originally flowed through where The Plains is today. “The abandoned valleys of ancient streams also contain areas of flat land, some of which are almost as large as those along the Hocking River. The best-known and one of the largest is the area called ‘The Plains,’ located 2 to 4 miles northwest of Athens in Athens and Dover Townships...”<sup>1</sup> “In the vicinity of The Plains, numerous road and stream cuts, and also gravel pits, expose these high level sand and gravel deposits, while well logs show that the fill is deeper than 100 feet. The surface of the outwash is relatively flat though it tends to slope down somewhat towards the center axis of the old valley.”<sup>2</sup>

The Plains and surrounding regions were the home to Adena native peoples. This culture constructed mounds to bury artifacts, their dead, and perhaps to conduct ceremonies. The Adena culture existed from approximately 1,000 B.C. to 100 A.D. Originally called the “Moundbuilders,” the term was changed to “Adena” when a large mound was excavated on the Adena plantation in Chillicothe.<sup>3</sup> Historians state, “The Plains was an important Adena center, thought to be the largest of three main ones identified. The other two are Chillicothe and Charleston, W. Va.”<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately, many of the mounds have been flattened or otherwise degraded from farming or excavations. The majority of those that remain are in private ownership with no formal protections. Two mounds are owned by organizations dedicated to preservation. The Woodruff Connett Mound on Adena Rd. and the Dorr Mound 1 between Johnson Rd. and 1<sup>st</sup> St. are owned by the Southeastern Ohio History Center and the Archaeological Conservancy, respectively.

Athens Township was one of two townships, the other being Alexander, that was formed as part of the original Ohio Company of Associates Land Purchase of 1787. The agreement with the United States that allowed the purchase stipulated that two townships were to be given free for the purpose of establishing a university. Athens Township was formally established on April 16, 1805 at the first meeting of the County Commissioners after Athens County became a political entity.<sup>5</sup> Alexander, Ames, and Troy Townships were also officially formed on that date.

“The Plains was first known as ‘The Hickory Glades.’ Later it was known as the ‘Wolf Plains,’ in commemoration of Christopher Wolf, who had purchased a large tract of land about 1804. This was purchased from William and Hannah Martin, and for payment, they received a pony, a pair

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<sup>1</sup> Sturgeon, Myron T. and Associates, *The Geology and Mineral Resources of Athens County, Ohio*, 1958, p.9.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p.31.

<sup>3</sup> Beatty, Elizabeth Grover and Stone, Marjorie S., *Getting to Know Athens County*, 1984, p. 13.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.2-3.

of buckskin breeches, and two gallons of whiskey.”<sup>6</sup> The Plains is on the National Register of Historic Places because of the significance of the Adena culture and the many mounds that they created.

The Plains was fortunate to have relatively flat ground, free from periodic flooding, with decent agricultural soils. It is also situated between the City of Athens to the southeast and the villages that lie in the Sunday Creek valley to the north. It is on a state road that connects important areas of Athens County. Significant homes were built by some of the early settlers. Christopher Wolf built the large brick home on Hocking Hills Drive above Johnson Rd. and eventually owned by the Cottingham family when E.A. Cottingham was Superintendent of the Hocking coal mine. Christopher Deshler, born in 1797, built the brick house that sits at 82 S. Plains Rd. in 1833.<sup>7</sup>

Early residents were farmers. There were salt mines at Beaumont, formerly Salina, and there may have been some employment opportunities there. The coal mines in the early 1900’s brought many more people to the area. The Hocking Mine was located north of what is now the intersection of Johnson Rd. and U.S. 33. Housing and a company store were established along Johnson Rd. Remnants of this coal town have been preserved at the Eclipse Company Store and surrounding houses. This is another location on the National Register of Historic Places. Another mine was the Pittsburgh No. 10, located on Slater Drive. Many residents of The Plains were Union officials. In 1919 when the new high school was getting started, the School Executive who came to live here stated that all who lived on his street were coal miners except for him.<sup>8</sup>

According to Anna Rose in *Yesterdays of The Plains*, the population of The Plains was twenty five individuals in 1900. This was pre-coal mining and the area was exclusively farming. In the early 1900’s a post office was established. The regional post office had been in Beaumont prior to this. The first general store was owned by William Stiers circa 1900. The Johnson Brothers Coal Company had a general store, still in existence as the Eclipse Company Store, from 1905-1910. Mr. O.G. Tinker had a grocery store circa 1907-1912 near the Johnson Rd/SR 682 intersection.

Regional businesses that located in or near The Plains included the following:

1. The E.M. Poston plant owned by Columbus and Southern Ohio Electric Company that began operations in 1949. It was closed in approximately 1990 and is now where the Bill Theisen Industrial Park is located.

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<sup>6</sup> Rose, Anna C., *Yesterdays of The Plains*, 1971, p. 24.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

2. The Athens Messenger, a regional newspaper, opened new offices at the intersection of Johnson Rd. and U.S. 33.
3. Five trailer courts were established in the 1960's. Four of these still remain today. Valley Acres Court, later named Pine Aire Village, has closed.

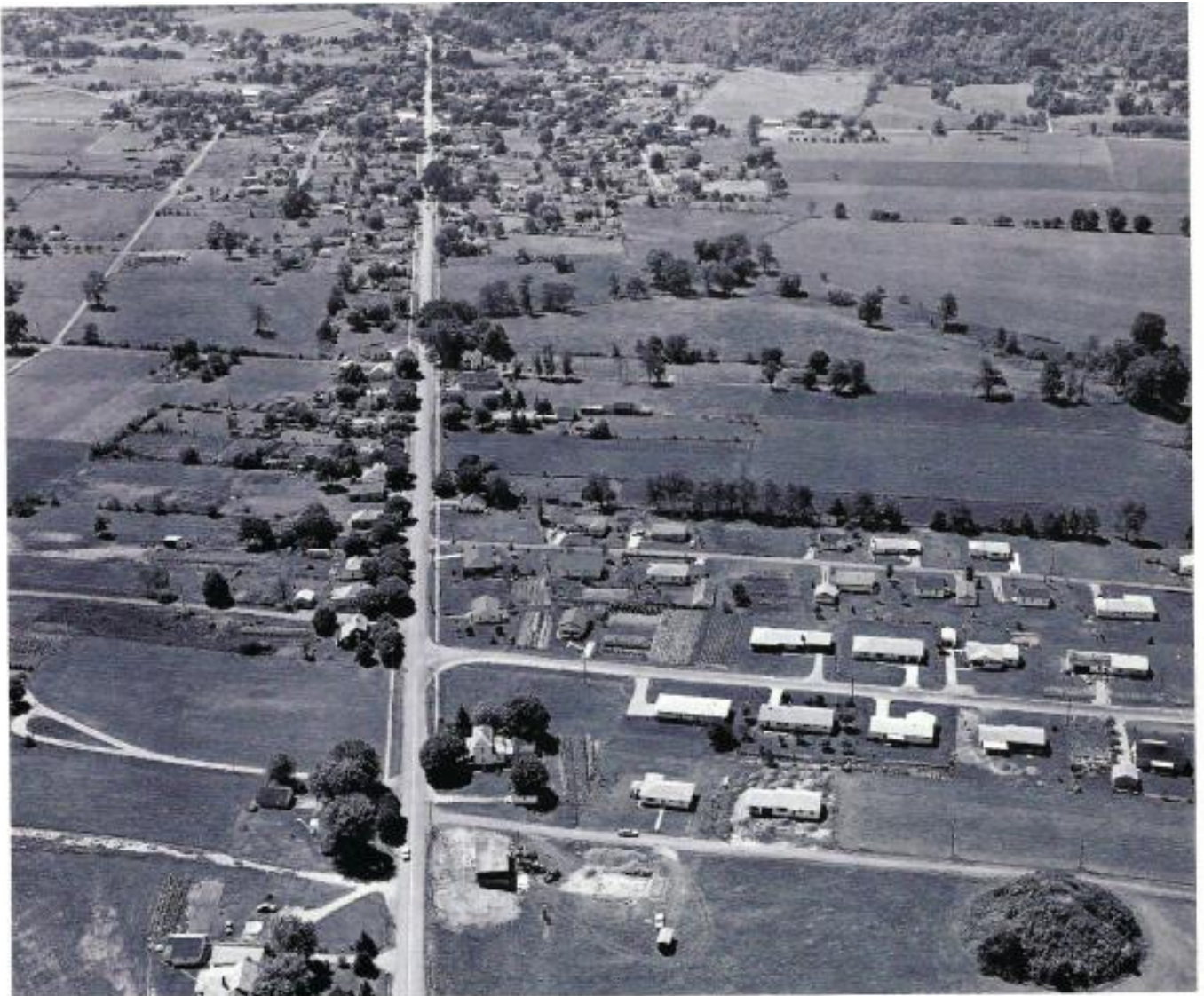
The Plains has had an interesting growth and development. Farming was the initial economy and even the aerial photograph from 1964 (Figure 4) shows agricultural land uses coming up to State Route 682. The old core around the Johnson Rd./SR 682 intersection is visible in the upper left of the photo. The Hartman mound and new housing along Poston Rd. (County Road 110) are visible in the lower right. Many residences on SR 682 had large gardens and it is clear that agriculture was still an active practice in most areas.

Several factors lead to the growth of The Plains beginning in the 1960's. These included:

1. Conversion of US 33 from a two-lane to a four-lane highway into Athens in the early 1960's.
2. Construction of The Plains Water and Sewer Plant starting in 1968 and ending in about 1975.
3. Growth of Ohio University enrollment through the decades from 1970-2010.
4. Construction of a new Athens High School with classes beginning in 1968.
5. Construction of a new shopping complex.
6. Construction of The Plains Elementary School.
7. Availability of flat land away from floodplain areas.

The two images that follow illustrate how quickly The Plains developed to be the third most populous urban place in Athens County. Figure 4 shows a 1964 aerial image looking south. The original core of The Plains can be seen at the top of the image with Clinton Street (white line in the top half of the photo on the far left). The future football stadium would be in the upper left of the image also. Figure 5 shows how many more businesses and residences were added both within the area covered by Figure 4 and areas outside of it. The main shopping area is in the center of the image in figure 5 and the long rows of white roofs above and to the right of it are storage units that were constructed adjacent to Connett Rd. The Elementary School is to the right of the storage units and Tomoko Trailer Court is above it. In the upper left of the image is Eclipse, the restored mining town that started its life in the early 1900's as the Johnson Brother's Coal Company. Just below Eclipse are the Lindley Inn senior housing complex and The Athens Messenger.

Figure 4 Aerial Photograph of The Plains, Ohio, 1964<sup>9</sup>

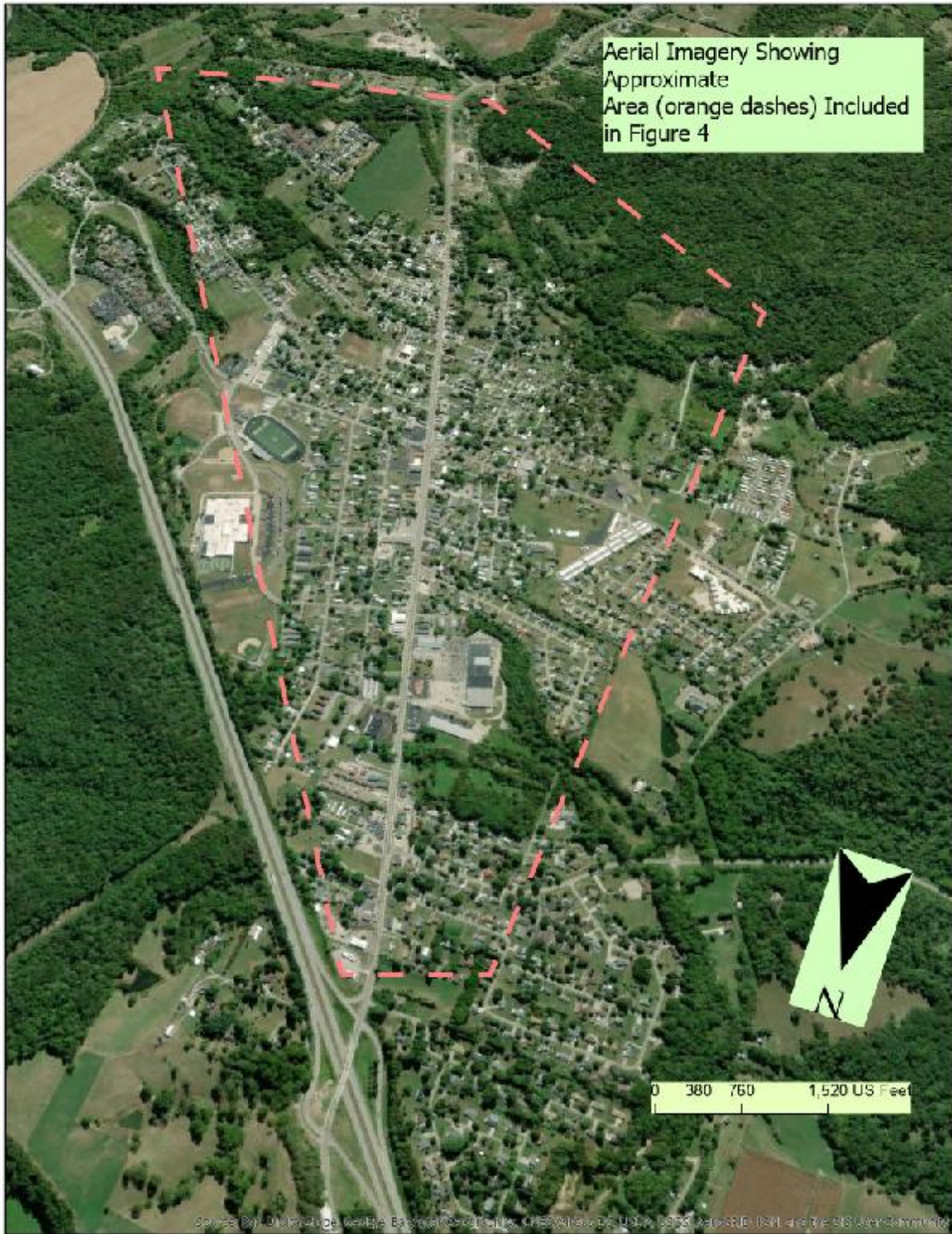


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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.



Figure 5 Modern Aerial Image of Approximate Area Shown in Figure 4 (orange dashes) (showing growth in residences and businesses both within the orange border and outside of it).





The population growth in The Plains is shown in the following table (figure 6):

Figure 6 Population of The Plains

Year	1900	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	2017
Population	25	1,004	1,148	1,568	2,044	2,644	3,276	3,080	3,147 <sup>10</sup>

The 1960's began a period of residential and business expansion that continued into the early 2000's. Population actually declined slightly during the period 2000-2017. Housing growth slowed in the middle of this period and The Plains is reaching a point of build-out on the easiest land to develop. There are still some large vacant tracts serviced by The Plains Water and Sewer District and these will likely see housing or business at some time. The Plains has proven to be a good location for the construction of affordable housing, most recently Sandstone Apartments just north of the main shopping center. The same developer has also proposed 46-unit Limestone Apartments on Valley Drive.

Rapid residential growth following establishment of The Plains Water and Sewer District, along with a lack of stricter planning regulations, lead to construction of subdivisions that did not have adequate pedestrian and bicycle facilities. In particular, sidewalks in most residential areas are lacking.

### Civic Organizations

The Plains has several active civic organizations working to improve the community. The Plains Community Improvement Committee (PCIC) is a group of volunteers that undertakes projects of interest. The PCIC has supported the following projects:

- Elm Street improvements being funded with Transportation Alternative Program funding through the Ohio Department of Transportation.
- Procuring used playground equipment from the Athens City School District for use at The Plains Park on Connett Rd.
- Construction of a kiosk at The Hartman Mound, the largest remaining Adena mound, to provide information about the Mound and the Moundbuilders.
- Developing a logo for The Plains.
- Provision of additional information kiosks at the Eclipse Company Store, The Plains Library, and The Plains Park.

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<sup>10</sup> An estimate from <http://www.city-data.com/zips/45780.html>

The Plains Lion's Club is a sponsor of The Plains Indian Mound Festival, an annual celebration of the Adena culture and the mounds that they built in the region. The Festival is an effort to promote The Plains and its unique attributes.

### **Previous Plans and Projects**

A comprehensive plan was prepared for Athens County in 2010 by the Athens County Regional Planning Commission. Since it is home to many of the County's residents, institutions, and businesses, The Plains was mentioned frequently in the Comprehensive Plan. Zoning was discussed as a key tool for planning, particularly for places that have public sewer since residential and business densities will be higher in these places. For The Plains specifically, gaps in pedestrian and bicycle facilities and related infrastructure were identified as problems that need to be addressed.

The Athens County Regional Planning Commission prepared a School Travel Plan (STP) in 2013 in an effort to encourage more pedestrian and bicycle use for the elementary school students who attend The Plains Elementary School on Connett Road. The STP analyzed the 5 E's: engineering strategies, education programs, enforcement strategies, encouragement activities, and evaluations. The STP reviewed a number of possible reasons why so few students walk or bike to school. These included:

- a lack of infrastructure that includes crosswalks, crossing lights, and sidewalks
- a concern about safety for small school children who may live far from the School and who are not capable of being on their own in areas with automobile and truck traffic
- a lack of education about the health benefits of walking and biking to school
- a policy restricting students from crossing State Route 682 en route to school or home.

The STP was a requirement if Athens County wanted to pursue funding through the federal Safe Routes to School program. This funding is still available should Athens County decide to pursue a specific Safe Routes to School project.

In 2014 Athens County received funding from the Ohio Capital Impact Corporation, an Ohio non-profit corporation, to construct two entryway signs leading into The Plains on State Route 682. The new masonry and metal signs replaced older signs that had stood for many years. A new location was also found for the sign on the southern end since more space was needed than the original location could provide.

Athens County received federal infrastructure funding approximately ten years ago to construct a bikeway spur connecting the Hockhocking Adena Bikeway with the Athens High School. This spur was intended to provide a means for high school students from the City of Athens to ride to school and also to provide an alternative means of accessing The Plains from the main

Bikeway. Johnson Road or a neighboring side street were the only previous means and traffic on Johnson Rd. can be dangerous, particularly since so many student drivers use Johnson Road.

### **The Planning and Zoning Initiative**

Unplanned growth and development in The Plains is a cause of concern for some of today's residents. While no single issue has led to a recent effort to develop a zoning code for the Athens Township portion of The Plains, a number of events have led to a desire for more planning and zoning as development continues. These issues include:

- An increasing number of mobile homes placed on lots, sometimes with two units placed on a small lot because sewage hookups are allowed by The Plains Water and Sewer District. Problems created by this include inadequate setbacks from neighboring properties, inadequate parking areas for residents, and inadequate storage areas for lawnmowers, tools, and other necessities of home and rental ownership.
- A mix of business and residential uses that leads to neighborhood degradation since there are lacking even minimal standards for development.
- Raising livestock in densely populated residential neighborhoods. Odors caused by livestock such as pigs and goats are an unpleasant circumstance with urban residential housing density that exists in The Plains.
- Storing of junk vehicles in plain view of neighbors.

In 2018, several interested residents of The Plains gathered petitions and presented them to the Athens Township Trustees and the Dover Township Trustees since The Plains straddles the township line between Athens and Dover Townships. The Athens Township Trustees had stated that if citizens in their Township gathered enough signatures then the Trustees would move forward with establishment of a zoning commission for the Athens Township portion of The Plains. This was subsequently done in 2019 and a planning consultant was hired by the Athens Township Zoning Commission to help steer the process. The planning consultant was hired to assist with preparation of a comprehensive plan and a zoning code. Signatures gathered in Dover Township were presented to the Dover Township Trustees also. The Dover Township Trustees were not comfortable with establishing a zoning commission in Dover Township due to cost factors.

Also discussed was the possibility of Athens County being a sponsor of the zoning initiative in The Plains. In the state of Ohio, areas outside of corporations can be zoned in several ways. Besides the township taking a lead, the county can initiate the process for a vote on a zoning plan. If zoning is adopted through the county process, then administration of the zoning would be by the County. Because the potential zoning district is relatively small in area, the County Commissioners believe the best entity for administration of zoning is at the township level.

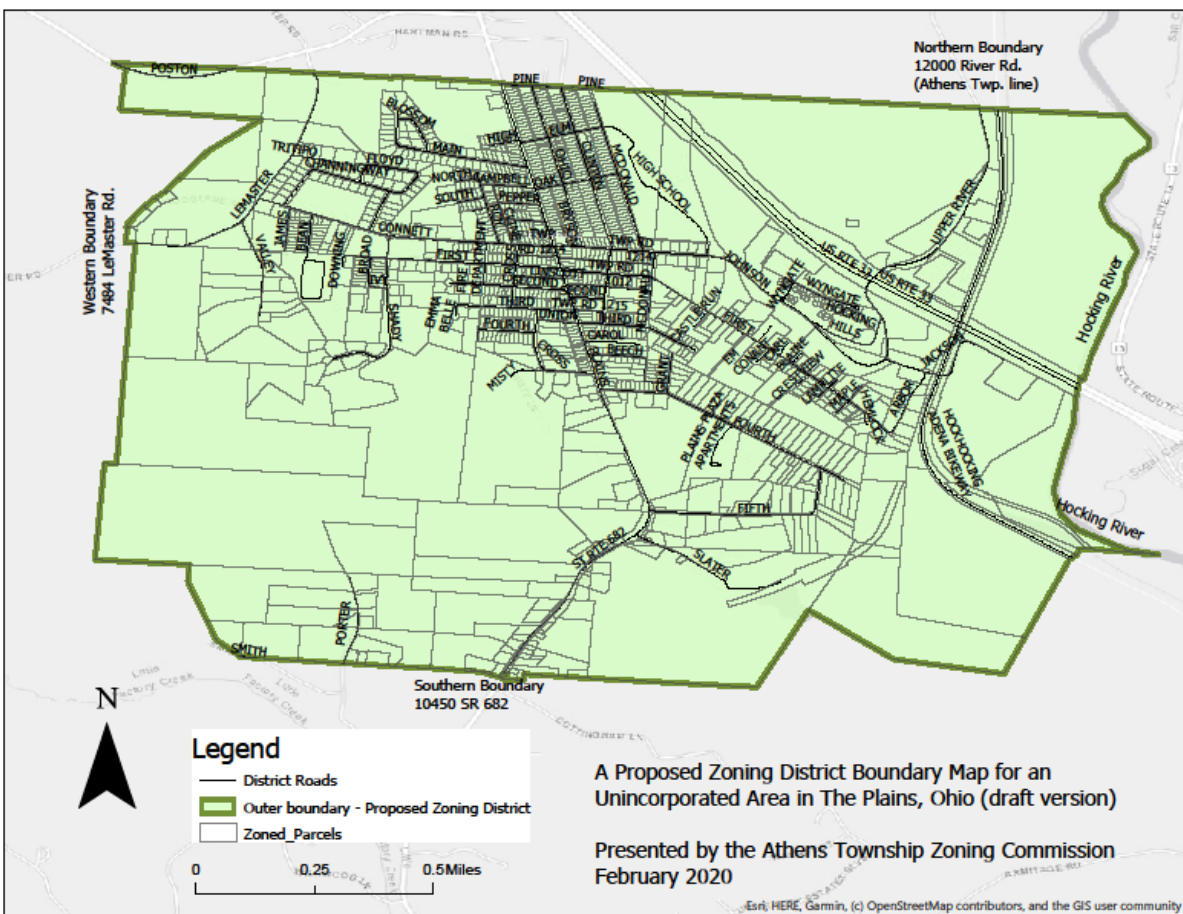
## Geographic Extent of the Proposed Zoning District

The Zoning Commission has to choose a geographic area to be considered for the proposed Zoning District, hereinafter “District,” since The Plains is unincorporated and has no corporate limits. The Zoning Commission considered a number of factors in deciding where the District boundary should be placed. These factors included:

- Utilizing the Athens County Auditor’s parcel boundaries
- A desire to keep the overall shape roughly rectangular for simplification with public understanding and mapping
- Zoning Commission member knowledge about what areas are considered The Plains and what areas are generally beyond the region associated with The Plains
- Areas served, or that could be served, by The Plains Water and Sewer District
- Areas likely to see residential or business growth

The following map shows the proposed Zoning District for The Plains.

Figure 7 Proposed Zoning District



The proposed District encompasses 3.09 square miles or 1,978 acres, all within Athens Township. While this Comprehensive Plan discusses many aspects of the larger area

surrounding The Plains and the larger area that makes up the Census Designated Place named The Plains, the primary planning focus is on the land within the District.

## Chapter 2 - Existing Conditions and Trends

### Government Services

The Plains is unincorporated and does not have its own form of government. Most of its government services are provided by either Athens Township or Athens County, but other entities also provide essential services. The Township provides road maintenance on township roads, including public alleyways. The Township also maintains park grounds and The Plains Volunteer Fire Department buildings, grounds, and equipment. Athens County provides road maintenance on County roadways, including Johnson Rd. and Poston Rd. The County also operates The Plains Water and Sewer District and provides police protection through the Sheriff's Department. The Plains Water and Sewer District buys water in bulk from the City of Athens and its Water Department. The State of Ohio maintains State Route 682, the principal north-south route through The Plains. Public transportation is managed by the Hocking, Athens, Perry Community Action Program. As with all of Athens County, a variety of services are provided through various county, state, and non-profit organizations.

Intergovernmental cooperation in Athens County is good and functional. There are many elected officials and employees who serve on a variety of boards to insure efficient delivery of goods and services. Since most land use planning and development takes place at the local level, cooperation between local governments is key. The Athens County Regional Planning Commission has representation from many governments, institutions, businesses, and non-profit organizations and serves an important coordinating function to help residents secure specific planning and development assistance. The Athens County Regional Planning Commission will work with Athens Township and The Athens Township Zoning Commission as they move forward with planning and zoning in The Plains.

### Existing Land Use

In order to properly plan for a community's future, it is important to know what presently exists. Athens County Auditor's parcel data and land use coding is an official designation of land use and consistent for all counties in Ohio.

The Athens County Auditor utilizes a standard classification system for assessing a particular parcel's land use. This system is a requirement of Ohio Revised Code section 5713.041 Classifying Property for Purposes of Tax Reduction, which reads in part, "Each separate parcel of real property shall be classified by the county auditor according to its principal, current use. Vacant lots and tracts of land upon which there are no structures or improvements shall be classified in accordance with their location and their highest and best probable legal use." Major land use categories with this system are residential, agricultural, industrial, commercial, mineral extraction, tax exempt properties, and utilities.



Using these categories and the Athens County Auditor’s parcel data provides the following information concerning the District:

**Figure 8 Existing Land Use Data for the District**

Parcel Classification	Parcel #	Appraised Value	Acreage
Parcels Without a Classification	46	\$0	34.7
Agricultural Parcels	42	\$2,933,410	1,124.4
Residential Parcels	1,201	\$78,851,690	423.0
Commercial Parcels	162	\$22,612,74	169.6
Exempt Parcels	166	\$27,771,640	225.1
Total Parcels	1,617	\$132,169,480	1976.8

**Parcels Without a Classification**

A total of 46 parcels do not have a classification and research indicates there are no owners listed for these parcels. These parcels are likely involved with tax and legal issues that make it impossible to assign an owner.

**Agriculture**

The outer borders of the District are where agricultural parcels are located. On the east and in the Hocking River floodplain is cultivated land devoted to grain production. Livestock grazing takes place on the northwest and the southeast. The majority of the land classified as agriculture is in a forested land cover.

**Residential**

There are a number of sub-classifications in the residential land use category.

Figure 9 Residential Land Use Sub-classifications

Sub-classification	# of Parcels (Lots)
Platted, vacant land	317
Unplatted, vacant land less than 10 acres	64
Unplatted vacant land between 10 and 19.99 acres	2
Single family dwellings on platted lots	388
Single family dwellings on unplatted land less than 10 acres	94
Single family dwellings on unplatted land between 10 and 19.99 acres	1
Two family dwellings on platted lots	19
Two family dwellings on unplatted land less than 10 acres	3
Three family dwellings on platted lots	23
Condominium units	46
House trailers or mobile homes affixed to real estate on platted lots	42
House trailers or mobile homes affixed to real estate on unplatted land less than 10 acres	17
House trailers or mobile homes affixed to real estate – other	12
Other residential structures	173

The residential classification contains 317 parcels listed as platted, vacant land. In most of these cases the parcel with a vacant listing is owned as a grouping of several adjacent parcels with a residence constructed on one or several of the parcels. Only one parcel is listed as being the parcel taxed with the residence built on it. The adjoining parcels are classified as vacant. This is important for determining potential future use because in many of these circumstances it is unlikely that the “vacant” parcel will be sold to a different owner for purposes of constructing a new residence since the existing residence, yard, and outbuildings occupy these parcels. In other words, most of these parcels are built out more than the “vacant” description might indicate.

The sub-classification “House trailers or mobile homes affixed to real estate-other” pertains to former mobile homes that are now attached to permanent foundations and considered real estate.

The sub-classification “Other residential structures” pertains to mobile homes on individual lots.

Several conclusions can be drawn concerning residential parcels in the District:

- The majority of residences are on platted lots.
- There is a variety of 1, 2, and 3-family units although single family units greatly outnumber 2 and 3-family units.

- From aerial photography, it appears The “Other residential structures” parcels sub-class contains a majority of mobile homes.
- Parcels that contain apartments are not listed in the residential land use classification, but in the commercial classification (see below)

## Commercial

There are a number of sub-classifications in the commercial land use category.

Figure 10 Commercial Land Use Sub-classifications

Sub-classification	# of Parcels (Lots)
Vacant land	71
Apartments with 4 to 19 rental units	10
Apartments with 20 to 39 rental units	1
Apartments with 40 or more rental units	2
Nursing homes and private hospitals	1
Trailer or mobile home park	19
Community shopping center	1
Other retail structures	1
Restaurant, cafeteria, or bar	1
Dry cleaning plants and laundries	1
Office buildings-1 and 2 stories	7
Automotive service stations	2
Car washes	1
Automobile car sales and services	1
Parking garage structures and lots	3
Commercial warehouses	3
Mini warehouse	1
Other commercial structures	36

The commercial classification contains 71 parcels listed as “vacant.” However, many of these parcels are developed, but are not the primary parcel for taxation purposes. Adjoining parcels are owned by one entity and only one parcel is shown as having an improvement on it.

The Plains Limited Apartments is the entry with 20-39 units. Lindley Inn and Hickory Creek Estates are listed as the commercial parcels with 40 or more rental units. Hickory Creek Nursing Home is the nursing home sub-classification. The “Other retail structures” parcel is the Heiner’s Bakery. The “Restaurant, cafeteria, or bar” sub-class is Little Italy Pizza restaurant. One of the two automotive service stations has been removed. Two of the three parcels listed as sub-class “Parking garage structures and lots” are parcels associated with the Auto Exchange on Johnson Rd. and State Rt. 682. One of the three parcels is associated with a residential rental unit. The “Mini warehouse” parcel contains storage units with access on First Street.

“Other commercial structures” includes a variety of commercial uses. The following partial list is intended to show the variety of uses included in this sub-classification:

- Storage units on Connett Rd. and Pine St.
- Athens County Shrine Holding Corporation
- Tomoko Rentals shop and related businesses
- Wingate Condominiums land
- Cochran Excavating
- Slater’s Building Supplies
- A child care facility
- A veterinary clinic
- Ohio Council 8 American Federation offices
- Bargain Billy’s general store
- A tanning salon
- Spice of Life Restaurant

The Plains has a variety of commercial establishments and many goods and services can be purchased by residents right in their community. The “Community Shopping Center” sub-class does not indicate what specific stores reside there including a health care clinic, grocery , hardware, discount store, insurance office, and two fast food stores.

### **Tax Exempt**

Of the 166 tax exempt parcels, 50 belong to the Ohio Department of Transportation and involve relatively small parcels that make up the state highway system, mostly along State Route 682. Thirteen parcels belong to Athens County and make up the offices and treatment plant for the Water and Sewer District and an assortment of parcels that make up the Hockhocking Adena Bikeway. Nineteen parcels are owned by Athens Township and include roadways, the Fire Station, and The Plains Park on Connett Rd. Four parcels are owned by the Public Library. One parcel is owned by the City of Athens and is the location of the water tank that supplies The Plains Water and Sewer District. Thirty nine parcels are owned by the Athens Metropolitan Housing Authority and most have housing built on them. Eighteen parcels are owned by the Athens City School District and comprise the High School, Elementary School (eventually to be a middle school), open space property on Poston Road, and the old school building on State Route 682. Two parcels comprise land owned by the Athens Conservancy on Johnson Rd. Five parcels are owned by the Athens County Board of Developmental Disabilities. One parcel is owned by Rural Action Agency. Twelve parcels belong to six different religious organizations and are church sites. One parcel is The Plains Cemetery and one parcel belongs to the Archaeological Conservancy and is the site of a native mound.

## Population and Housing

Assessing present and future population is important to be able to plan. Population numbers can tell what level of service is needed or will be needed. In 2017, The Plains CDP had an estimated 3,147 people, 1,451 total housing units, and an 87.5% occupancy rate. With 1,269 occupied housing units there are 2.5 persons per housing unit. Using Auditor's housing data to estimate 939 total occupied housing units in the District and the 2.5 persons per household figure, a population estimate for the District is 2,348.

Housing choices in The Plains are varied. With 939 occupied housing units in the District and the owner occupied percentage of 45.8%, there are an estimated 430 owner occupied housing units. With the renter occupied percentage of 54.2%, there are an estimated 509 renter occupied housing units. The Plains has a renter-occupied rate almost as high as the city of Nelsonville, home of Hocking College, and much higher than the state of Ohio which is 33.9%. Rental prices are affordable and approximately 10% below the state average. The median housing value at \$119,400 is also good for southeastern Ohio, even though it is below the state median of \$135,100<sup>11</sup>.

A recently constructed low and moderate income housing development, Sandstone Apartments, just north of the proposed Zoning District, filled up quickly showing there is both demand for this type of housing and that The Plains is a popular location. Sandstone Apartments advertises twenty 2-bedroom units, twenty-one 3-bedroom units, and ten 4-bedroom units. The same developer has proposed something similar for a five acre parcel on the west central portion of the District.



Figure 11 Perspective of the Proposed Limestone Apartments on Valley Drive

This development proposes sixteen 2-bedroom units, and thirty 3-bedroom units for a total of 46 units. Seven of the units will be fully accessible mobility units.

<sup>11</sup> 2010 figures



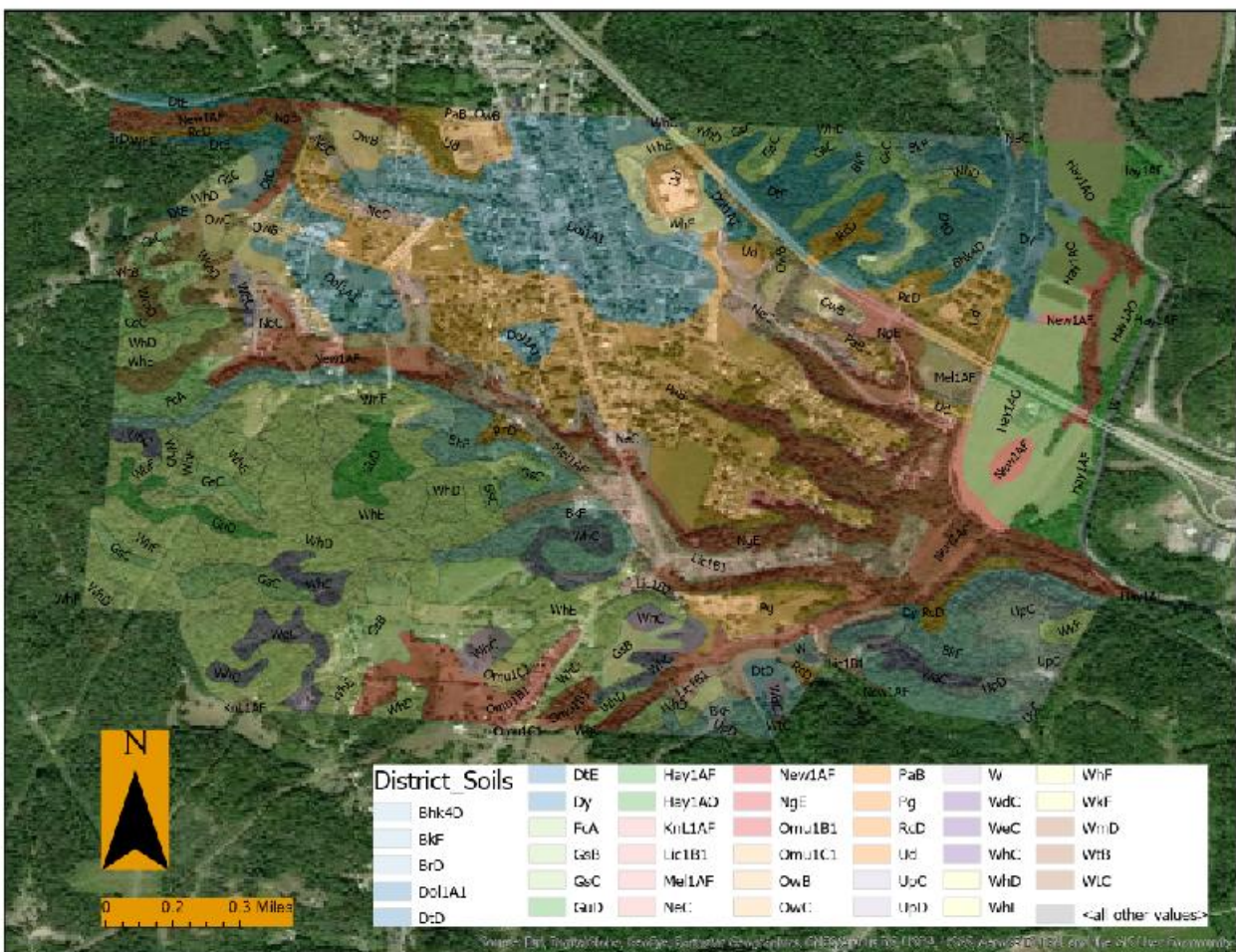
## Environment

This section will review natural resources of The Plains and human-generated impacts, such as noise, air, and light pollution on the environment and that affect The Plains. It will also discuss potential natural hazards faced by The Plains.

## Soils

Soils in the District can be seen in Figure 12, Soils in the District. The majority of the soils in the District are in the Parke Silt Loam (PaB)(light brown area in a band through the middle of the map), 2 to 6 percent slopes, and the Doles Silt Loam (Do11A1)(blue area on the center-north), 0 to 3 percent slopes. The Parke soil is deep and well-drained and formed in loess over glacial outwash materials. Loess is the fine grained silt that was deposited by wind after one of the glacial epochs deposited material as sand and gravel outwash from all the drainage created by melting glaciers to the north in Ohio.

Figure 12 Soils in the District (data and soils information from [https://soilseries.sc.egov.usda.gov/OSD\\_Docs](https://soilseries.sc.egov.usda.gov/OSD_Docs))



The Doles soil is deep, somewhat poorly drained, slowly permeable soil formed in loess and alluvium. Alluvium is sand, silt, or clay deposited on land by streams. The Parke soil is suited



for a variety of uses including crops, forestry, and urban uses. The Doles soil, because it is not as well drained, is less suited for urban uses since additional precautions and expense should be taken to allow for drainage of roadways and building basements and foundations. As the aerial photography on the map indicates, urban density is just as great on the Doles soil as on the Parke soil. Soil types were not always considered when subdivisions were platted. It is likely that the infrastructure on the Doles soils has more problems than on the Parke soil because of the drainage issue. The Parke and Doles soils are not unique to The Plains but the large size of the geographic area containing them is. For comparison, Ohio University's College Green and much of College Street in Athens is built on the Parke soil. The historic Kirkbride building, site of the former Athens Mental Health Center, was constructed on Parke soil. These areas are flat and elevated out of modern floodplains so it makes sense that people would choose them as places to build towns and institutions.

The soils in the District are typical of what one finds in the floodplains, on the hill slopes, and on the hilltops of Athens County. More information about the soils on the map can be found at <https://soilseries.sc.egov.usda.gov/osdname.aspx>.<sup>12</sup>

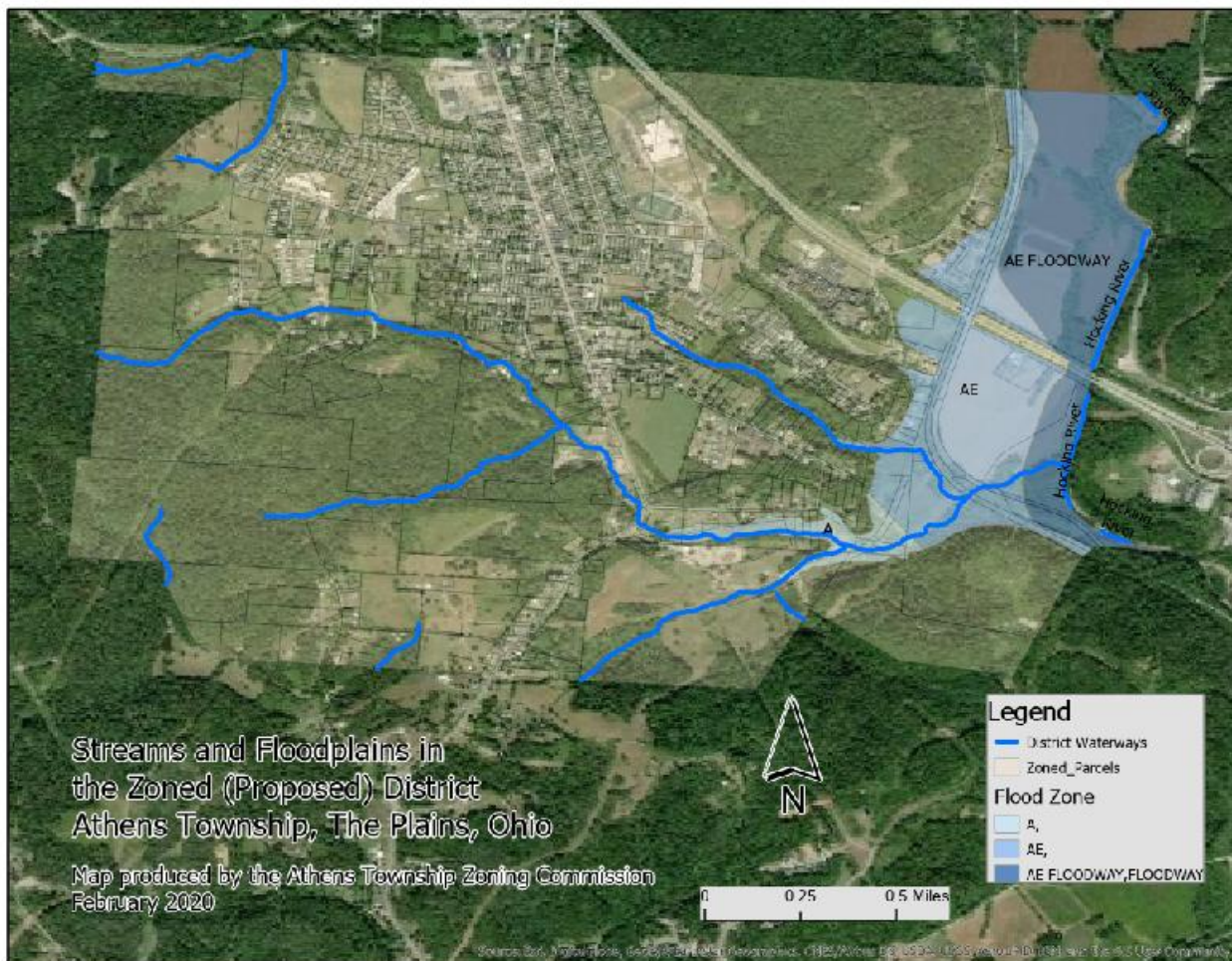
### **Streams, Floodplain, and Sensitive Areas**

The Plains is a relatively level and elevated location and an extensive drainage system with high volume flows never developed. The District does border the Hocking River on the east and therefore a well-developed floodplain exists there. Figure 13 shows the locations of streams in the District. All the streams shown, with the exception of the Hocking River, are considered to be intermittent streams meaning they do not flow during dry periods. The stream channels are regulated by the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency. Just because they are intermittent does not mean that they are not important features in the environment. Because The Plains is flat and runoff leaves slowly, it is important for The Plains that these drainages properly function to keep water flowing during wet periods and heavy rainfall. Streams also serve an important ecological function in that plant and animal species are normally more abundant and diverse in these areas. Being less suitable for development due to the presence of water, these areas are more apt to be in a natural condition and serve as important wildlife corridors. For urban people who like to watch wildlife, these corridors can help funnel a wider variety of birds to the feeder and allow occasional glimpses of foxes, coyotes, and other large mammals. As the climate warms, streams are also locations where more abundant trees help to lower temperatures during the warmer months. The condition of these waterways also is a determinant of water quality since riparian corridors left in a natural condition help to filter water and keep water temperatures lower.

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<sup>12</sup> When searching for soil descriptions on the NRCS website, only the first two letters should be used. The third letter, when provided, is a measure of slope steepness, "A" being relatively flat, up to "F", being relatively steep.

Figure 13 Streams and Floodplains in the District



The District has three different categories of floodplain; A, AE, and Floodway. The A-zone indicates areas that are flooded by the 1%-chance flood. This is a very large flood that has a 1% chance of occurring in any given year. There are no flood elevations determined for this A-zone area. The AE-zone is the area that has a 1%-chance of flooding in any given year and has flood elevations associated with it. The Floodway area has a 1%-chance of flooding in any given year, has flood elevations associated with it, and is a particularly hazardous area because the Floodway is where water velocities are highest during a large flood. The Floodway is narrow at US Rt. 33 because the Hocking River flows under a bridge at that location.

These various floodplain distinctions are important because of government regulations that affect how land use is permitted in these areas. Development in these areas requires a permit from the Office of the Planning Director for the Athens County Regional Planning Commission. In the A-zone, lowest floor elevations (including basements) have to be built to an elevation

determined by the Planning Director. In the AE-zone, lowest floor elevations (including basements) have to be built to an elevation that is six inches higher than the elevation of the 1%-chance flood. These elevations are shown on FEMA flood maps and will be determined by the Planning Director. The Floodway has additional restrictions requiring developers to indicate, by performing a hydraulic and hydrologic study, that any proposed development will not raise the elevation of the 1%-chance flood by any amount.

The floodplain is mostly being used for agriculture, one of the most appropriate uses for these floodplain areas. The Plains Water and Sewer District's sewage treatment plant is also located here, on an elevated area, allowing for gravity flow for The Plains sewer collection lines. The western edge of the floodplain has some development; scattered housing, the businesses in the Eclipse Company Town, and a new equipment and storage yard for Columbia Gas.

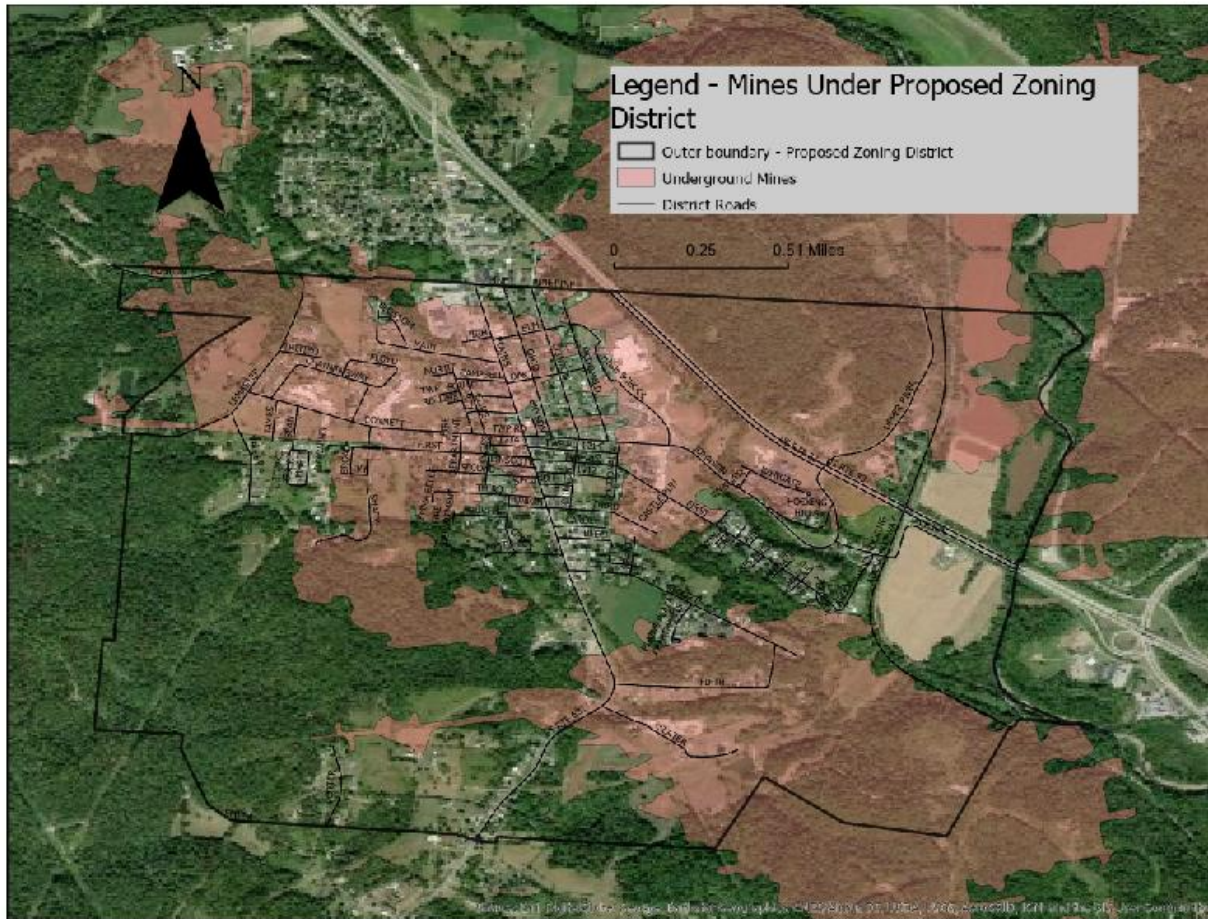
At the northern tip of The Plains CDP (Dover Township) is a unique ecological feature known as a fen. Fens are wetland areas characterized by alkaline or higher pH water chemistry. They are home to unique plant species because of this. The glacial outwash geology of The Plains creates the unique chemistry as groundwater percolates through the silts, sands, and gravels and flows to this area adjacent to US Rt. 33.

### **Hazards**

Figure 13 indicates areas of the District underlain by abandoned coal mines. These are areas that require investigation before any development activity takes place above them. These areas can be unstable with surface subsidences due to mine roof collapse. Some of the factors that affect mine instability include depth of the mine, type and thickness of the roof rock overlaying the mine, amount of groundwater in the mine and surrounding it, and the type of system used to shore up the mine roof.



Figure 14 Abandoned Coal Mines Under the Proposed Zoning District



A

A Project Officer with Ohio Department of Natural Resources Division of Mineral Resources Management says that in his 20 years experience, there have been no reports of mine-related problems in The Plains. That so much of The Plains is built on top of the mines and there are no reports of mine subsidence is reassuring up to a point. An engineering analysis is still always recommended before any construction project is started.

While often more of a nuisance than a serious hazard; light, noise, and air pollution need to be considered in an area where urban development is occurring. Large scale light pollution is usually associated with signage, street lighting, stadium lighting, and shopping areas. Light pollution can also occur on a smaller scale with just a neighbor's stray spotlight. Being an urban area, The Plains is no different than most urban areas and is subject to a fair amount of light pollution.

Noise pollution is usually associated with traffic, business and industry, loudspeakers, or large crowds. Truck and auto traffic on US Rt. 33 and State Rt. 682 are contributors. The Plains does not have any industry and few businesses that generate much noise. Building supply

companies that utilize large vehicles for loading and hauling are generators and auto repair facilities that utilize pneumatic tools can also be contributors. Noise pollution can be generated in neighborhoods by home repair and hobby shops, lawnmowers and yard maintenance equipment such as leaf blowers, and pets that bark or crow.

There are no significant point sources of air pollution in The Plains. Automobiles and trucks are likely the heaviest contributors and they are disbursed sources. The Plains Water and Sewer District's sewer plant can be a source of odor if there is a problem at the plant. However, the sewer plant is located far from any development except the Eclipse Company Town and several homes in that vicinity. Prevailing winds from the west are also helpful. Air pollution in the form of obnoxious odors can be generated at the neighborhood level by the keeping of farm animals, illegal trash burning, and wood smoke from fireplaces.

Light, noise, and air pollution are issues that we all live with because they are often necessary components of modern life. When the amounts go beyond a certain level or the length of time is excessive or, in some cases, constant, then individuals or populations can suffer physical and emotional damage. Proper land use planning can help address some of the negative aspects with good regulation.

The Plains is no more prone to natural hazards than other areas in southeastern Ohio. The floodplain affects very few people and businesses directly. Climatic extremes of weather and climate have impacted The Plains but there is no way to predict such things as tornadoes with any accuracy. An F0 tornado did impact areas around the High School and east to Eclipse Company Town in 2010. While there is no way to predict such events, it is important that local governments remain cognizant of the possibilities and are prepared to act in an emergency.

### **Urban Forest and Greenspace**

Tree and shrub canopy is an increasingly important concern for planners and government leaders in this era of climate change. Urban trees and shrubs are important to provide shading and water purification. Negative effects of large parking lots can be mitigated with well placed trees. Trees and shrubs also help to prevent erosion as roots stabilize the soil and serve as filters for the water. Trees generate oxygen so they are obviously good for humans.

Trees also add an aesthetic element in the landscape. They provide form and color in an otherwise bleak, hard, urban landscape. Spring flowers, summer greenery, and autumn leaf color are important aspects of any urban landscape.

Figure 15 shows a perspective of the recently constructed Sandstone Apartments in the Dover Township portion of The Plains. It shows the importance of trees and greenspace in a development scheme and something that should always be encouraged. Maintenance of a



planted landscape is also important for the long term. Particularly when young, plants require attention with watering and nutrients to thrive.

Figure 15 Landscape Planning for a Development in The Plains



An analysis of a 1939 aerial photograph obtained from the Athens Soil and Water District and the images in Figures 4 and 5 show that the amount of tree cover in The Plains has probably increased slightly from its agricultural period in the early and mid 1900's. Residents in some subdivisions have planted trees that have developed nice crowns in 30 to 40 years. Unfortunately, these tend to be individual crowns that don't touch to become continuous crowns so the tree density is still not very high. Many of the largest trees in The Plains are Silver Maples. This is not the most desirable species as its wood has less strength than other hardwoods like oaks. Since the Silver Maples are old and will continue to die, it is important that some replacements be planted in order to maintain an urban landscape.

Figure 16 shows several examples of individual site landscaping. A little goes a long way and it doesn't have to be expensive or highly maintenance intensive.

Figure 16 Landscaping enhances property values and aesthetics



There are instances of tree topping where mature trees are severely pruned to minimize size and reduce the hazard of tree limbs dropping or getting into utility lines. Professional arborists are opposed to this practice as it stimulates growth of even weaker limbs and has a very bad appearance. It usually weakens the tree and makes it susceptible to disease.

Figure 17 Tree Topping is Not a Recommended Practice



Another trend that has reduced the urban forest has been commercial development, particularly along State Route 682, where the land has been cleared for buildings, parking, and highway widening without regard for landscaping. In some cases, parking lots are paved continuously into the public

roadway without even a grass planting strip to serve as a visual and aesthetic buffer and an important water filter for parking lot runoff. Highway widening and drainage work has also contributed to a loss of landscape. This leads to an unappealing appearance of many properties along State Route 682. Additionally lacking almost any type of landscape planning are the main shopping center complex and the Athens High School grounds.

A large parcel north of US Rt. 33 was recently clearcut to prepare a property for commercial development. It is not known whether there are any definite plans or any prospective

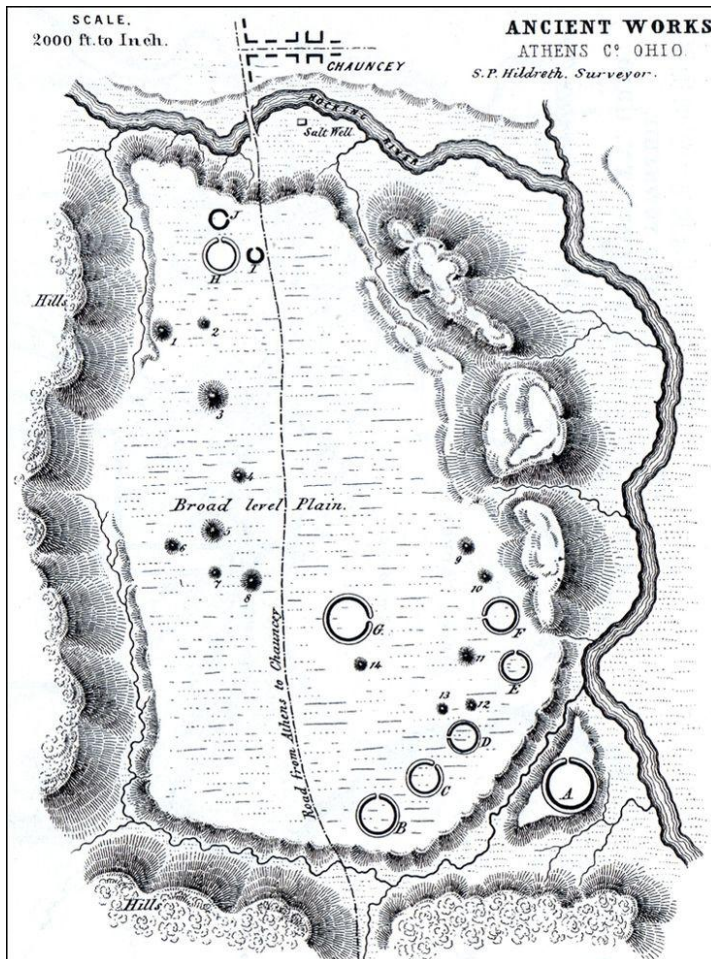


developers of this parcel. A significant amount of canopy was lost in this process. Remaining large swaths of tree canopy remain on several large parcels in the southwest corner of the District and adjacent to some of the drainageways. This land tends to have a steeper slope and less potential for more intense development.

## History and Culture

The Adena Culture left us with many burial and ceremonial mounds in the vicinity of The Plains. Figures 18 and 19 show approximate locations of Adena mounds in the vicinity of The Plains.

Figure 18 Mound Map by Samuel Hildreth, [www.pinterest.com](http://www.pinterest.com)



The locational accuracy of the Hildreth map in figure 18 has been questioned and its inclusion is only to give a general idea of how many mounds existed in the area. Some have been destroyed by farming, road development, or inappropriate and unskilled excavation. Many still remain. Figure 19, with the road network illustrated, helps one orient the locations of the mounds, several of which no longer exist or have been greatly diminished.

The large grouping of these mounds has attracted archaeologists and tourists from around the world, making this location one of international significance. Preserving what remains of these resources needs to be a planning priority.

Figure 19 Locations of Adena Mounds in The Plains<sup>13</sup>

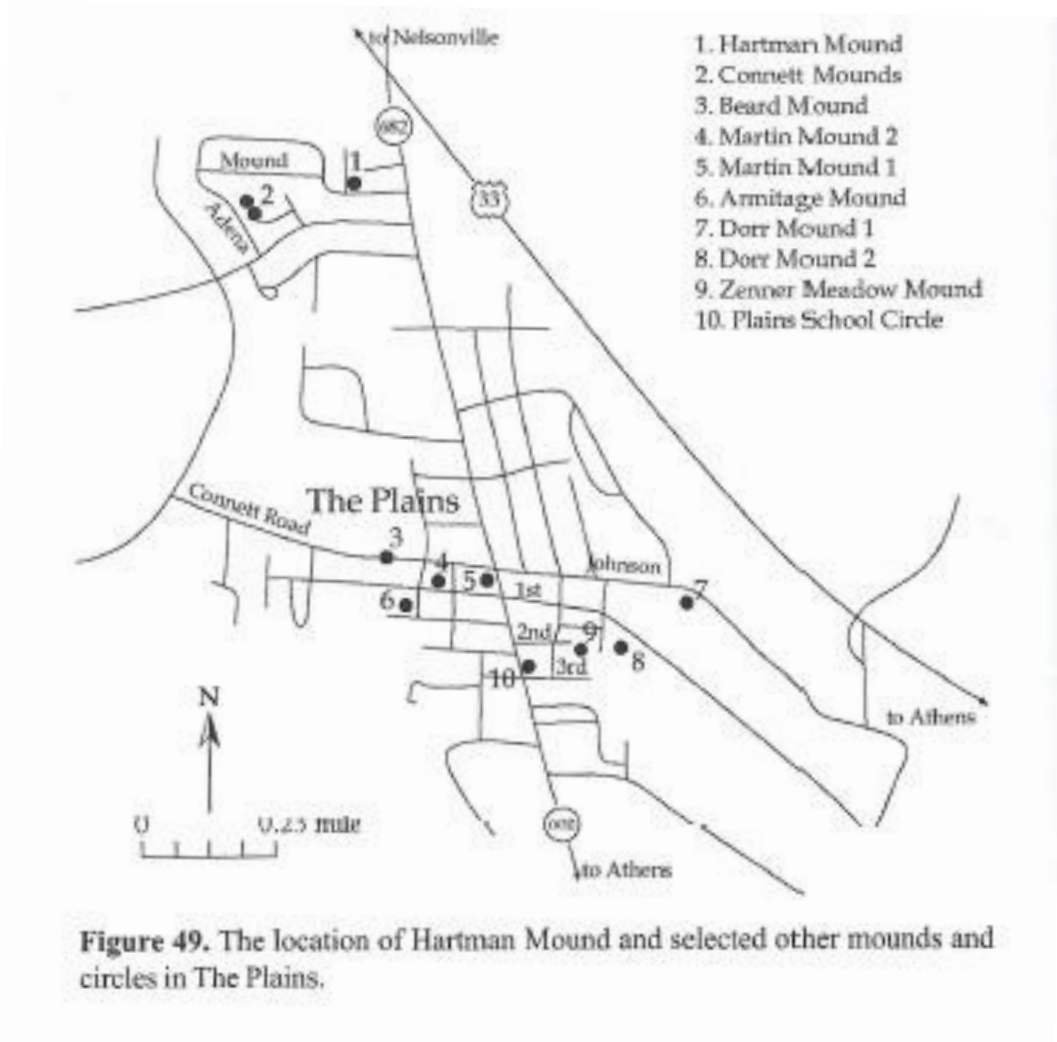


Figure 49. The location of Hartman Mound and selected other mounds and circles in The Plains.

Early settlers of The Plains were pioneers that settled here in the early 1800's. Farming and mineral extraction were early livelihoods. While many homes and other buildings have disappeared, there are still some fine old structures that preserve history and help to give The Plains an important sense of place. These structures may have been built or owned by a prominent individual, represent a regional architectural style, been made with local materials, or been the location of important events in local or regional history. While this is far from an all-inclusive list, some of the key buildings are listed here:

<sup>13</sup> Woodward, Susan L. and Jerry N. McDonald, *Indian Mounds of the Middle Ohio Valley*, p. 128.

Figure 20 Four Prominent Structures, with Descriptions, in The Plains (information about the Wolf and Dreshler homes from Rose, Anna C., *Yesterdays of The Plains*, pp. 25-26.)



This home belonged to Christopher Wolf, namesake of Wolf's Plains. Mr. Wolf purchased a large tract of land, later to become The Plains, about 1804. The home was built a number of years after that. It presently serves as offices for a local not-for-profit, Rural Action.



The restored Company Store is a portion of the old coal town started by the Johnson Brothers in 1902. The Store dates to about 1907. It is privately owned and a part of the Eclipse Company Town, a mixed-use grouping of restored miner's homes. This site is on the National Register of Historic Places.



The former High School in The Plains, built in 1917, is owned by the Athens Board of Education. It has potential for redevelopment into housing or offices and serves as a key remaining landmark in The Plains.





This home was built by Christopher Deshler in 1833 and is sometimes referred to as the Michael Place. It is privately owned. The interior was finished in walnut and the bricks were made just down the hill from the house location. The home was used as part of the underground railroad.

Figure 21 Additional Old and/or Unique Structures in The Plains







The oldest cemetery in the area is the Wolf Cemetery or The Plains Cemetery on Johnson Rd. It was started in the early 1800's and prominent people buried there include Matthew Dorr, a Revolutionary War soldier; John Coe, a veteran of the War of 1812, and Christopher Armitage, a veteran of the Mexican War. Mr. and Mrs. Deshler are buried there along with William Young who was born in 1797 and migrated here from Virginia (now West Virginia). He was a farmer and a hunter.<sup>14</sup>

Another cemetery, not being used as of 1971, is the Barker Cemetery on Fourth St. A cemetery in what was the Zion Free Will Baptist Church on the Lower Plains had burials from the mid to late 1800's. There was also a Zenner family burying plot across the road from the Michael House. "David Zenner purchased a farm at the edge of The Plains many years ago while he was starting his business in Athens (15-17 North Court Street). He came to the area from Cincinnati in 1853. His son, Henry Zenner, continued the retail department store and he also later developed the McBee Company."<sup>15</sup>

## Infrastructure

### Utilities

The Plains receives electricity from American Electric Power Company (AEP), natural gas from Columbia Gas, broadband service from Spectrum and Nelsonville TV Cable, phone service and DSL from Frontier, and water and sewer service from The Plains Water and Sewer District. For electrical service, AEP is available in all areas of the District. If additional equipment is required to reach a particular location, AEP may need to charge the customer for the additional expense. This is normally the case for remote locations.

Columbia Gas provides natural gas to customers in The Plains. Due to security concerns, the Company cannot provide detailed maps of where its main lines exist. However, natural gas was recently made available in the Meadows Subdivision adjacent to Connett and Lemaster Roads. The Company performs an economic and engineering analysis when deciding how and where to expand its service. The decision is made, in part, on expected future demand levels and how close existing gas mains are located to the end user.

Broadband services are provided by Spectrum and Nelsonville TV Cable. The Spectrum standard for downloading data is 100 Mbps. Local internet provider, Intellwave, also has a robust signal in the area. Frontier Communications provides land line phone service and DSL.

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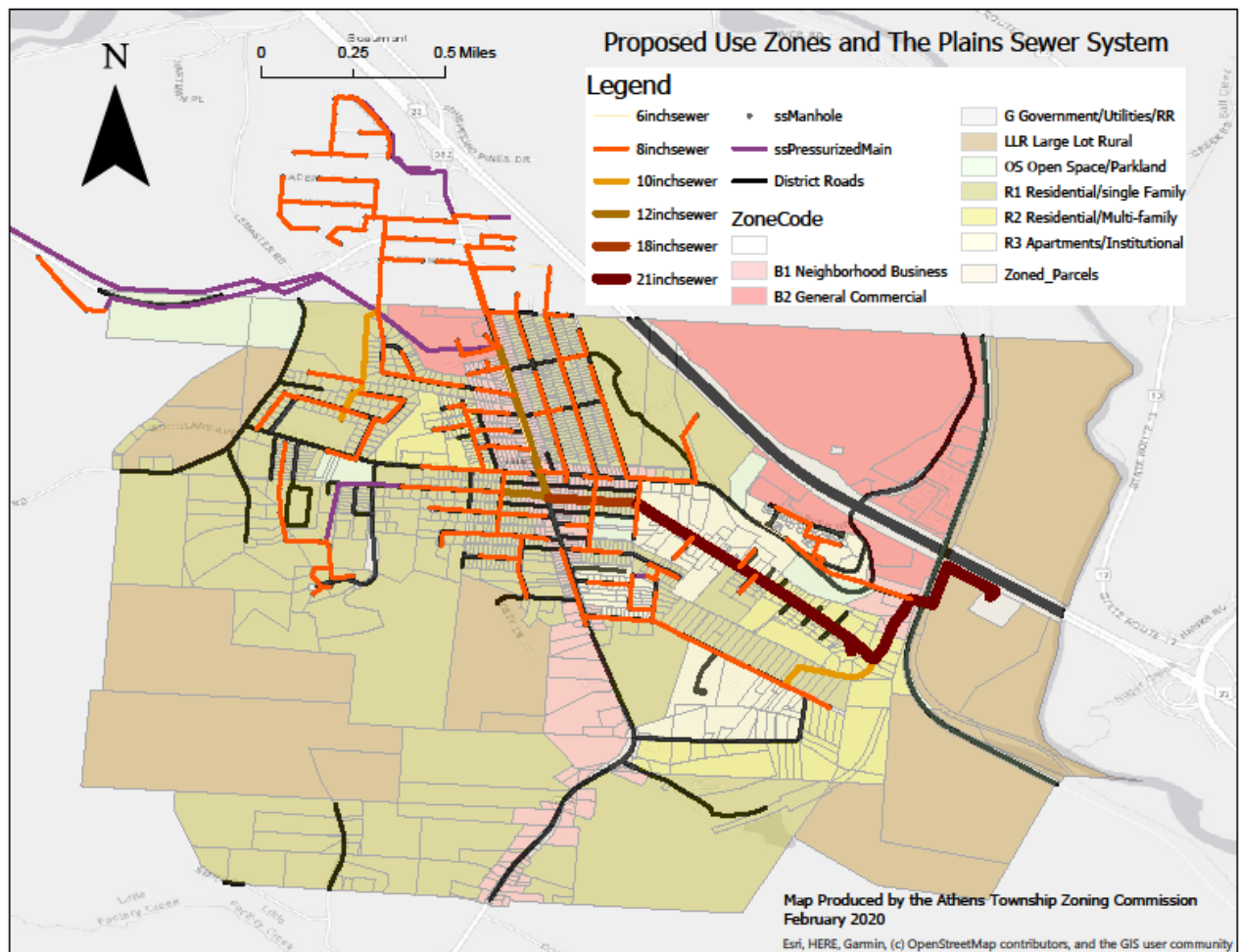
<sup>14</sup> Rose, pp. 26, 45.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p.25

The Plains Water and Sewer District provides public water through a bulk water purchase contract with the City of Athens and maintains a sewage treatment facility and collection system. Figure 20 shows the collection system.

Water and Sewer District records were provided for January to September 2019. The low consumption month, January, saw 139,223 gallons of water consumed per day and the wastewater plant processed 134,432 gallons per day. The high consumption month, September, saw 173,427 gallons of water consumed per day and the wastewater plant processed 168,210 gallons per day. The capacity of the sewer plant is 600,000 gpd. The maximum water consumption available is 10,000,000 gallons per month or approximately 333,000 gpd. Water usage is about 52% of capacity and sewer usage is about 28% of capacity.

Figure 22 Sewer Collection System in The Plains



According to Rich Kasler, Administrator of the District, most of the land available for gravity flow has been developed. Depending on location and topography, lift stations may be necessary for new developments.



## Transportation Infrastructure

Figure 21 is a map that shows the roadway network in the District. The Plains is located in close proximity to the County seat, Athens, and has a good system of maintained public streets and roads. State Route 682 bisects The Plains on a north-south axis and U.S. Rt. 33, travelling between northern Indiana and Richmond, Virginia, is on the northern border of The Plains. The following list shows road length, by jurisdiction, in the District:

- Bikepath and Bikepath Spur (maintained by Athens County) 3.58 miles
- Township Roads 16.14 miles
- County Roads 2.12 miles
- State Roads 1.94 miles
- Federal Roads 3.24 miles
- Private Roads 1.98 miles

Total Roads in the District: 29.00 miles

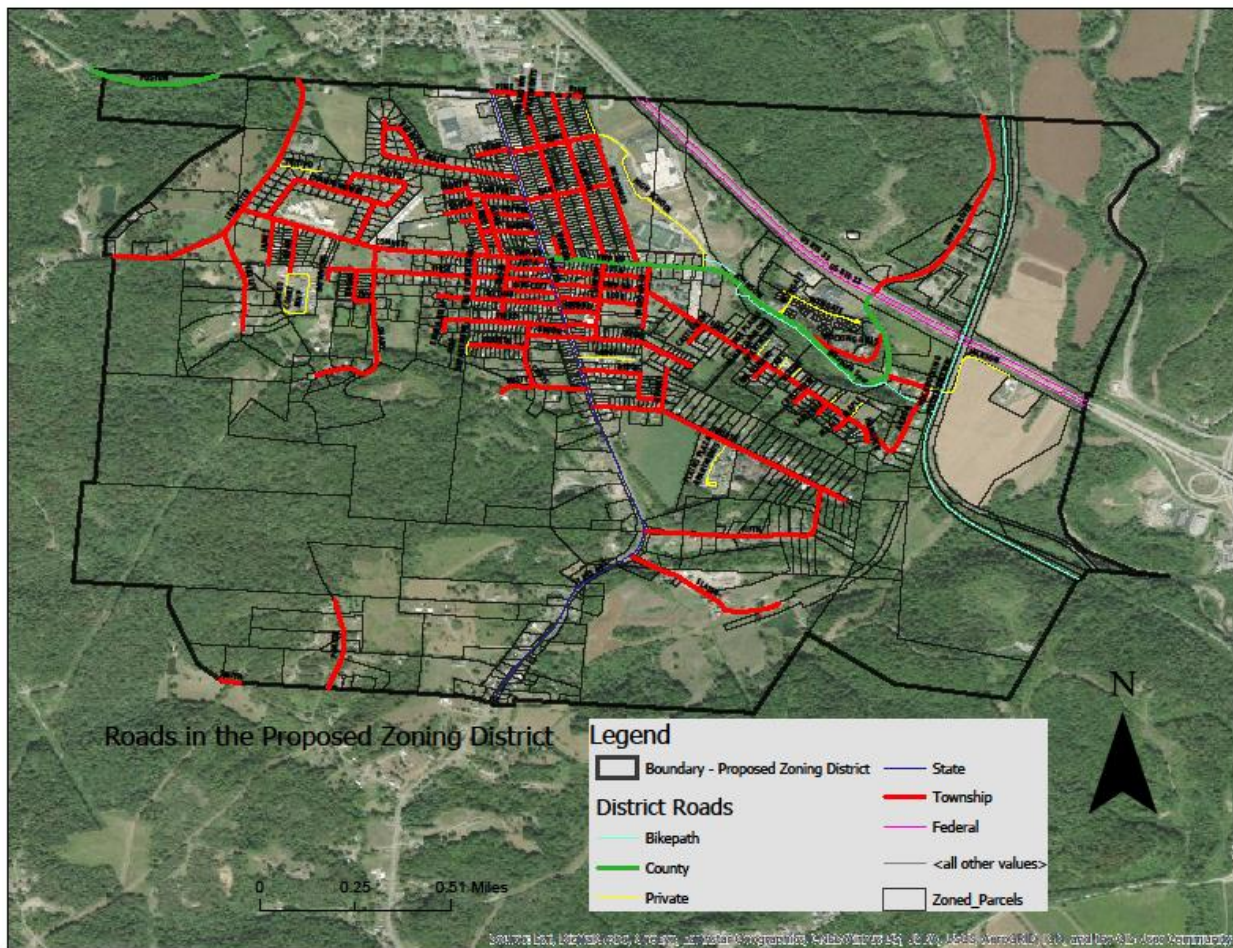


Figure 23 Roads in the District



The Ohio Department of Transportation conducts periodic traffic counts on state routes. The average annual daily traffic (AADT) count is the statistic that is used. It is the total annual traffic divided by 365 to get a daily use number.

**Figure 24 Average Annual Daily Traffic Counts**  
<http://www.dot.state.oh.us/Divisions/Planning/TechServ/traffic/Pages/Traffic-Survey-Reports-and-Maps.aspx>

<b>Year</b>	<b>AADT Count SR 682 in The Plains</b>	<b>AADT Count US 33</b>
2000	5,680	16,730
2003	10,490	16,790
2006	10,270	18,140
2009	9,160	17,840
2012	8,590	19,960
2019	9,469	19,320 <sup>16</sup>

For comparison, the 2012 AADT on SR 13 north of Chauncey was 6,400, on SR 56 within the City of Athens was 7,910 and on US 50/32 at Dow Lake, east of the City of Athens was 12,470. SR 682 has a high traffic volume but it is spread out over the day such that flow is maintained. The addition of a turn lane is of great assistance with all the business activity along SR 682.

There was one fatal crash in 2019 on US 33 between Johnson Rd. and the SR 682 interchange. There have been a number of crashes at the Johnson Rd./US 33 interchange and ODOT is analyzing whether to close this intersection. The left turns off of US 33 are problematic, particularly with young drivers going to the High School on Johnson Rd. The County Engineer has analyzed an alternative route for getting to Johnson Rd. without the necessity of a left hand turn off of US 33. However, this option is expensive and will likely involve right-of-way purchases. Any decisions about this interchange have an impact on businesses in that area, particularly The Athens Messenger, Eclipse LLC, and several churches on Johnson Rd.

Public Transportation is available through Athens Public Transit, a transportation resource administered by the Hocking-Athens-Perry Community Action Program (HAPCAP) through its Athens Mobility Management system<sup>17</sup>. Buses are available in The Plains with two loops running in opposite directions along SR 682 on an hourly basis for each loop. Stops are at:

- SR 682 and Poston Rd. intersection (Dover Township)
- The Plains Plaza Mall
- The Plains Library

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<sup>16</sup> This count was taken between Johnson Rd. and Columbus Rd. intersections. The remaining US 33 counts were taken between SR 682 and Johnson Rd. intersections.

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.athensmobility.com/>

- Loop #5 also travels down Connett Rd. to Bean Rd. and travels down 4<sup>th</sup> St. to Hickory Creek Nursing Home.

Loop #6 travels to the Village of Chauncey and also stops at the former County Home where the Department of Jobs and Family Services has its offices.

Standard bus fare is \$1.00 per one-way trip, transfers are free, and anywhere along the routes in The Plains you can wave to the driver and he or she will pick you up at the nearest safe place.

According to the mobility management website, additional public transportation is available through GoBus with service between the “...City of Athens and Columbus, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Parkersburg, Van Wert, and beyond. Buses run 7 days a week, 365 days a year. GoBus can be used to travel within Athens County with stops in Athens City (Baker Center and the Community Center), Nelsonville, Coolville, and Albany.” There is also Athens on Demand Transit that “provides transportation to seniors, individuals with disabilities, and low-income individuals anywhere in Athens County for only \$2.00 per one-way trip.”

The Plains is not a community that is very bicycle or pedestrian friendly. This is not unusual, particularly in more rural communities, since our modern life has been very automobile-



Figure 25 Sidewalks are not available in most places

oriented. However, with health issues such as obesity and the growing concern about climate change, more communities are paying attention to how to get around without having to drive a car all the time. The Hockhocking Adena Bikeway travels on the eastern side of the District and there is a bikeway spur that travels up to the High School. Beyond that there is very little in The Plains to help make pedestrians and bicyclists feel safe.

Sidewalks were not required when housing developments were

constructed and pavement markings and crosswalks are limited. Most township roadways have a low speed limit so this helps quite a bit. However, a lack of sidewalks means that the street is the only paved way to get around.

The Plains has a number of alleyways, many of which are public. These alleys can provide efficient access to properties, be an alternative location for deliveries to a property, serve as a

safer way for people to move within the community by avoiding main streets and traffic, and be a place where garages and shops can have access and storage with less visual blight.

The Plains has an active commercial rail line that parallels the County Bikeway, near its eastern border. Traffic volume is low and includes coal and chemicals.

Figure 26 Typical alleyways in The Plains



## Parks

Urbanized areas such as The Plains require parkland for residents to have a place to play, relax, congregate, enjoy nature, or get away. A variety of park types allow people of different ages and interests to find what they need with recreation. Active recreation involves ball sports, skate boarding, bike riding, hunting, hiking, paddling or other activities with a high degree of physical activity. Passive recreation involves nature watching such as birding, educational activities in a park, or simply sitting and enjoying peace and quiet. Large urban parks often combine all or many of these activities. Smaller places like The Plains do not have the luxury or the need for large parks and can meet some of the needs for parks and recreation in a multitude of ways.

While The Plains is mostly considered an urban place, being in a rural county it has close proximity to a variety of outdoor recreation opportunities with State parks such as Strouds Run and Burr Oak. The Wayne National Forest is also only several miles away where a full suite of outdoor activities is available. The 20-mile long Hockhocking Adena Bikeway cuts through The Plains and a bikeway spur can get bicyclists to the High School without having to be on public roadways.

The Athens Township Trustees manage a 5.5 acre park on Connett Rd. that has a shelter house, indoor community space, and some used playground equipment from the Athens School Board that will soon be erected. The two bikepath sections in the District add up to 10,897 linear feet

and, with a 50-foot average right-of-way width, comprise 2.2 acres. Therefore, the public park space is a total of 7.7 acres for a District population of 2,348 residents. The Plains Elementary School, across Connett Rd. from the Township Park, also has a playground and large fields that are available to area residents. Behind the old High School on SR 682, the Athens School Board also has several large parcels with open fields. The 7.7 acres of dedicated public parkland in the District only calculates to 3.3 acres per 1,000 population. This is low compared to the 100 largest cities where the median acreage is 13.1 per 1,000 population.<sup>18</sup> Mitigating factors are that a variety of recreational land is in close proximity to The Plains and the City of Athens, only several miles down US Rt. 33 has a variety of parkland that residents of The Plains can utilize.

There are no playgrounds east of SR 682 in the District. There are no facilities for skate boarders or pump tracks for bicyclists anywhere in The Plains. Ball fields available to the public are not available.

### **Business and Economy**

The economy of The Plains can be described as a variety of services and housing rentals. The population is large enough to support a large grocery store. Proximity to US Rt. 33 allows several fast food restaurants to have a good business. Several other businesses, such as gas stations, a feed store, and a carry out, in Dover Township, pick up business from US Rt. 33 also. Residents in Athens Township benefit from their existence.

In the District there are an estimated 939 total housing units. With a rental rate of 54.2%, there are an estimated 509 rental units in the District. These rentals range from single family units to multi-unit apartment buildings. The Plains is considered an affordable place to live. The proposed Limestone Apartments on Valley Drive will add an additional 46 rental units.

Being close to the City of Athens and its commercial districts, many business services are close to The Plains and not needed in The Plains. Many businesses in the Plains cannot be easily reached by walking or bicycling so that automobile travel is necessary to purchase groceries, hardware, and other necessities.

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<sup>18</sup> [https://www.tpl.org/sites/default/files/files\\_upload/CityParkFacts\\_2017.4\\_7\\_17.FIN\\_LO\\_.pdf](https://www.tpl.org/sites/default/files/files_upload/CityParkFacts_2017.4_7_17.FIN_LO_.pdf)

## Chapter 3 - A Plan

### What the Citizens Say

Outreach and citizen participation are an important part of planning in a Democracy. Elected officials and public policy organizations rely on feedback from citizens to ascertain needs and wants and to chart a course of action. To insure that citizens have an opportunity to comment on the future of their community, a public survey was conducted through social media utilizing a standard survey product (Google Forms). Results of the survey can be seen in Appendix 1. The survey received 125 responses, or 6.4% of the District population, and was intended to focus on just residents in the District. This level of response is a good one and adequate to get a sense of concerns and issues. A District map was provided in the survey so residents could see if they are in the District before proceeding to take the survey. The availability of the survey was advertised on the Athens Township website, by word of mouth through the Athens Township Zoning Commission, and in an article about planning in The Plains that appeared in the local newspaper.

While all the results can be analyzed in Appendix 1, the following highlights stand out:

- 79% of respondents have lived in The Plains for over 5 years.
- 78% of respondents are over the age of 35 years.
- 72% think the focus of development should be on both residential and business, not just one or the other.
- 69% like the small town feel in The Plains and 72% like the easy access to surrounding areas. Other likes checked by at least 30% of respondents are the school system, affordability, proximity to employment, and proximity to Ohio University and Hocking College.
- In the category of what do you like least about living in The Plains, 84% have concerns about drug usage, 65% cited safety, and 76% cited concerns about property crime like theft and break-ins. Other responses that garnered over 30% of respondents are concerns about property values, concerns about the homeless population, and taxes that are too high. 30% cited a lack of sidewalks and bike lanes.
- When asked “It would concern me if my neighbors had,” 97% said a buildup of trash or debris piles, 77% cited inoperable cars or other vehicles on their property, 66% cited a business that generates noise, traffic, odors, or light, and 61% said large livestock like pigs or cows. Other responses with over 30% of respondents were RV’s or large work vehicles parked in their yard, chicken or other poultry, and a building too close to my property.
- Residents would like more of the following in The Plains: 48% chose more retail stores, 69% said more dine style restaurants, 60% said more single family homes, and 59%



chose more trees and landscaping. 33% chose more fast food restaurants (with or without drive-throughs).

- Residents would like less of the following: 55% said fewer duplexes and triplexes, 61% cited fewer apartments, and 59% chose less low income and moderate income housing.
- 84% are in favor of limiting land use to help protect health, safety, and property values.
- 80% are in favor of zoning.
- What is favorable about zoning? 68% said protection of property values, 60% stated building rules that are clearly defined and applied to all, 65% said to keep outside developers from taking advantage of neighbors by putting profit over community, 83% said to curb neglected property, 74% cited regulation of junk vehicles, and 69% chose limiting the maximum number of structures on a single lot.
- Aspects of zoning that are a concern are: 30% said lack of clarity in building rules, 41% chose too much bureaucracy, 52% cited too many forms, fees, and filing limitations, 61% said concerns of fairness in enforcement, and 46% cited restrictions of property usage.
- 51% of respondents did not realize that a Board of Zoning Appeals is mandated in order to resolve applicant concerns or denials.
- 70% of respondents felt that property setbacks are a medium-high or high priority.
- 72% of respondents did not realize that Athens Township has a Facebook page.

Several broad conclusions can be drawn from these results. The majority of residents in the District enjoy The Plains for easy access to services within and outside The Plains, its affordability, and its small town feel. They are concerned about quality of life issues such as crime, blight, noise, livestock such as pigs in neighborhoods, and excess traffic. Residents would like to see more retail opportunities, dine-style restaurants, and single family homes. There seems to be some concern with duplexes, triplexes, apartments, and low and moderate income housing. Most are in favor of some regulations to protect health, safety, and property values and almost as many, 80% support the idea of zoning.

### What Key Persons Say

Part of the outreach for the planning effort involved reaching out to several individuals who, due to their unique positions or experience in the community, have information or opinions worth noting.

- **Rodney Smith, Sheriff**

The Sheriff discussed safety issues in The Plains. His Department has been very proactive having a visible presence and enforcing drug violations. He believes there has been a reduction in drug activity over the past several years. He believes The Plains does not have any more crime than any similarly populated place in the County. He or staff attend the monthly Neighborhood Watch meeting.

- **Rich Kasler**, Administrator, The Plains Water and Sewer District

Mr. Kasler provided mapping, rates, and water and sewer use. He also pointed out that development areas that will be able to utilize gravity flow for sewer are very limited. Most new development will require use of lift stations.

- **Alan Craig**, ODOT District 10 Planning Engineer

Mr. Craig said ODOT is involved with the Elm St. Improvement Project, sponsored by the Athens Township Trustees. This project will provide improvements to the street that connects Athens High School to SR 682. One of its purposes is to direct more traffic into and out of the School using SR 682 instead of access from the east using Johnson Rd. and its dangerous intersection on US Rt. 33. Improved pedestrian crossings on SR 682 will be a part of the Project.

- **Keith Andrews**, former Director of the Athens Metropolitan Housing Authority

“Athens MHA is not working on and does not have any current plans for any new projects that would have an effect on The Plains. Athens MHA believes the recent development of a tax credit project known as Sandstone Apartments (Dover Township) was a positive land use for The Plains as well as some recent construction of some tiny homes. A negative impact of land use is the infiltration of mobile homes into single family areas. The Zoning Commission should consider controlling the location of mobile homes to dedicated areas of The Plains. The Zoning Commission should take into consideration how zoning would impact housing development in general, but especially affordable housing, creating regulations that will encourage both types of development creating mixed income areas so as not to displace lower income families with types of development for higher income families. This can help to prevent a shortage of affordable housing. Learn from the City of Athens where there is currently a serious lack of affordable housing. This has resulted in pushing lower income families, special needs families and elderly families farther away from access to medical care, banking, stores etc. This is the basic access that most families want and need.”

- **Jeff Maiden**, Athens County Engineer

Mr. Maiden hopes to keep the Johnson Rd. intersection open for right-hand turns. ODOT will likely close the left turn option and has discussed eliminating the intersection completely because of its high-profile accident history. There is a long term plan to develop a pedestrian/bicycle path on Johnson Rd. from the High School entrance to SR 682. This is a major project with utilities that will have to be relocated and a storm sewer system that will have to be reconstructed. Two positive trends have been purchases and renovations of properties along SR 682 and the construction of the bikeway spur to the High School. Negative trends have been unlicensed mobile home parks going in adjacent to quality homes, deflated real property values coupled with high taxes, and uncontrolled development. Additional advice was, “Do not strong arm the Dover Township Trustees to

implement zoning. Do not attempt to annex Dover Township. Lead by example- move forward with a zoning plan and get it on the ballot. Be positive about it and it will be a good thing for the Athens Township portion of The Plains. If it goes through and is approved, then there are many possibilities going forward. If it is successful, those without the strength of character to do the right thing might find the courage to provide the leadership to implement a zoning plan for the entire Plains..... One step at a time. “ (Mr. Maiden is a resident of the District).

- **Steve Pierson**, Athens Township Trustee (Mr. Pierson has held positions as Athens City Director of Code Enforcement and City of Nelsonville Code Director)

Mr. Pierson discussed the projects of The Plains Community Improvement Committee including a bus shelter project at the Library. The Township has been directly involved with the Elm St. Project and a Township right-of-way permit system for utilities, curb cuts, and culverts. He is concerned about future traffic issues when the elementary school gets an addition and converts to a district-wide middle school. He sees a positive as the affordable housing construction at Sandstone Apartments (Dover Township) and the proposed Limestone Apartments. He sees a need for more senior housing. One idea he proposed is construction of mini-homes in proximity to the Bikeway. A final word of caution is a reminder that zoning cannot fix nuisances such as backup beeper noise from trucks and the number of days a neighbor does laundry.

- **Clyde Baker**, longtime resident of The Plains, active member with the Lion’s Club, volunteer fire department, and The Plains Community Improvement Committee (PCIC)

Mr. Baker discussed the projects supported by the PCIC: a sidewalk as part of the Elm St. Project, donated playground equipment in the Park, a new shelter house and basketball court at the Park, a bus shelter at the Library, possibly new signs for service groups at the entry monuments, an information kiosk to be built at the Hartman Mound, additional kiosks proposed for places like Eclipse, the Library, and the Park, and a logo project for The Plains involving a Hocking College student, an Athens High School student, a Library employee, and several PCIC members. Needs for The Plains are a bikepath extension to SR 682, grading in the Park and gravel for the parking lot, and more sidewalks everywhere. A concern is derelict buildings and also that many existing uses will be grandfathered, and therefore change and improvements will be slow, if zoning is adopted.

- **Kelly Hatas** , Executive Director, Hocking, Athens, Perry Community Action Program and staff members **Glen Crippen**, **Jessica Stroh**, and **Carolyn Conley**

Since The Plains Elementary will convert to a middle school with grades 4-6, these students will come from a wide area and have to rely on busses for transportation to and from the School. This makes walking and bicycling to school very difficult.

Public transit runs on Connett Rd. so that is good for any future residential development that might occur on the western edge of The Plains. For planning purposes, avoid situations where busses have to go into parking lots for access to patrons.

Be prepared in the event that the Bailey's Trail System Project materializes since The Plains is so close to the Project area. There is concern about the impact of regulations on poor people, specifically regulations concerning junk vehicles since poor people may rely on these for parts.

Open space is important. Insure that enough park and recreation space is created along with construction of low and moderate income housing. Skate parks and pump tracks should be considered. Rules of thumb are that parks should be within a 10 minute walk or  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile from residents' homes.

There has been some relocation of residents from the Glouster-area to The Plains because of affordable housing and a better social life.

- **Don Linder**, Broker, LCR Realty

Mr. Linder stated that there is a perception that The Plains has too much uncontrolled and unregulated growth. This can create concerns in the real estate market that without zoning there may be too much conflict between business and residential uses.

## **A Plan for the District**

### **A Framework for Planning**

With all the challenges faced by communities, a strategy named Smart Growth was promoted by planning and development professionals. Smart Growth put forth a positive aspect that communities can allow growth and development in order to accomplish employment goals and provide housing, infrastructure, and amenities, but can do so in a "smart" way. Some of the principles of smart growth are utilized here to help establish some broad goals and policies for The Plains. While some Smart Growth principles are more applicable to larger urban areas, most are applicable to The Plains. The Athens Township Trustees, their Athens Township Zoning Commission, the County Commissioners, the Athens County Regional Planning Commission, and other elected officials, organizations, and citizens who live and work in The Plains can benefit from an organized set of goals and policies to go forward in a more unified and organized fashion. Smart Growth can help inform this planning.

Smart Growth attempts to utilize scarce resources such as funding, volunteer time and energy, and natural and cultural assets in a way that minimizes waste. Ideas such as efficiency, quality of life, effective citizen participation, employment opportunity, fairness, diversity, choices, and good health all play a role and need to be woven into policies.

The ten principles of Smart Growth are:



- Mix land uses.
  - The idea is to create housing, work, shopping, public transit, recreation, and entertainment that are close enough together so that people don't need to drive everywhere to accomplish daily activities. Mixed-use developments include quality housing, varied by type and price, integrated with shopping, schools, community facilities, and jobs. This is more easily done in a large city but is a worthy goal.
- Take advantage of compact development.
  - The high cost of providing basic infrastructure and services in rural communities demands efficient use of existing facilities, compact development as well as land conservation. Sprawl development can be inefficient and therefore expensive.
- Create a range of housing opportunities and choices.
  - Everyone deserves safe, adequate, and affordable housing and it is up to community leaders to help make this happen by providing as many choices as possible.
- Create walkable neighborhoods.
  - Citizens should be able to safely walk to get basic necessities, to obtain transportation, and to get exercise. Neighborhoods should be connected with sidewalks and trails.
- Foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place.
  - A sense of place results when design and development protect and incorporate the distinctive character of a community and its unique context, whether urban or rural. Geography, natural features, climate, culture, historical resources, and ecology each contribute to the distinctive character of a region. Smart Growth principles contribute to a sense of place that differs from the "Everywhere USA" model and anonymous architecture that dominated the last quarter of the 20th century and first decade of the 21st.<sup>19</sup>
- Preserve open space, farmland, natural beauty, and critical environmental areas.
  - These are desirable land uses or amenities that can be lost without a proactive program such as Smart Growth.
- Strengthen and direct development towards existing communities.
  - The idea is to utilize infrastructure that already exists rather than developing in new areas. The goal is to eliminate sprawl-type development and to keep development more compact.
- Provide a variety of transportation choices.

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<sup>19</sup> <https://www.planning.org/policy/guides/adopted/smartgrowth.htm>

- Disadvantaged and elderly people have different transportation needs than younger and more affluent citizens. It is important to ensure that all citizens have a means of travel to meet basic needs.
- Make development decisions predictable, fair, and cost effective.
  - How development proposals are reviewed and approved or disapproved should be the same for everyone and the process should be clearly spelled out.
- Encourage community and stakeholder collaboration in development decisions.
  - Appropriate citizen participation requires an open process by which all stakeholders are free to participate regardless of their position on planning policies or their socio-economic status.<sup>20</sup>

Smart Growth principles are not the only ones that can guide development, but they serve as a good general framework to make a Plan. This Plan will present goals and actions that attempt to meet the Smart Growth principles in The Plains, where and when those principles make sense.

Another planning concept worth consideration is that of Complete Streets. Complete Streets are streets for everyone. They are designed and operated to enable safe access for all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists and transit riders of all ages and abilities. Complete Streets make it easy to cross the street, walk to shops, and bicycle to work.

What does a Complete Street look like? There is no singular design prescription for Complete Streets; each one is unique and responds to its community context. A complete street may include: sidewalks, bike lanes (or wide paved shoulders), special bus lanes, comfortable and accessible public transportation stops, frequent and safe crossing opportunities, median islands, accessible pedestrian signals, curb extensions, narrower travel lanes, roundabouts, and more.

A Complete Street in a rural area will look quite different from a Complete Street in a highly urban area, but both are designed to balance safety and convenience for everyone using the road.<sup>21</sup>

### **Expected Change and Growth**

Whether a community gains or loses population is determined by birth and death rates and in and out migration. The Plains is affected by student enrollment and employment opportunities

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<sup>20</sup> <https://www.planning.org/policy/guides/adopted/smartgrowth.htm>

<sup>21</sup> <https://smartgrowthamerica.org/program/national-complete-streets-coalition/publications/what-are-complete-streets/>

at Ohio University. Ohio University and many institutions of higher learning are experiencing reduced enrollment at present and this can have a large ripple effect throughout Athens County. Any new housing, such as the Limestone Apartments, also can have a significant impact on a small community. Forty six new housing units will add about 115 people to the population.

Small communities can be greatly influenced by a large scale project such as the Bailey's Trail System in the Wayne National Forest only several miles from The Plains. The trail system was designed to be the largest contiguous mountain bike trail system east of the Mississippi River. It is also available for hiking and nature viewing. Phase 1 construction of 14 miles is complete and fundraising for phase II construction is underway. This trail system is designed with trail heads in three small communities adjacent to the Wayne National Forest, Athens Unit. Funding has been secured to connect the Hockhocking Adena Bikeway to the primary Baileys Trail System Trail Head, located in the village of Chauncey, just north of The Plains.

There is also a large parcel of land adjacent to and north of US 33 that is advertised for commercial development. Whether this or any other large development proposals come to fruition is speculative and difficult to predict. At the time of this Plan's preparation, the Coronavirus Pandemic is in full swing and the economy is already suffering in many ways. The long-term impacts of this are also very difficult to predict.

With so much uncertainty and speculation, the most reasonable assumption seems to be that the population will hold steady for the near-term of 5 to 10 years. Should the population grow, there appears to be enough capacity with local utilities to handle some expansion. There also appears to be enough land available within the water and sewer service area to accommodate growth. Some of this can be infill on vacant land within older, platted subdivisions and some can be on larger tracts of vacant land that are reasonably close to existing sewer lines.

### **Setting Goals and Proposing Action**

The previous two chapters established how The Plains has developed and what resources and issues exist in The Plains. With that foundation and some insight into what citizens and leaders think about The Plains, it is possible to suggest and encourage direction for government, businesses, and citizens to take. What follows is a format that sets the stage for key planning topics such as development, infrastructure, or cultural resources under the heading "Context." Each of these context areas then has Goals and proposed Actions to achieve those Goals.

### **Context - Land Use and Development**

The Plains grew as a community because land is flat, fertile, and fairly well-drained. This appealed to early settlers for farming, and later, to housing developers. The coal mining industry grew around The Plains and miners needed homes and services. The Plains is also

conveniently located between the City of Athens and the towns in the Sunday and Monday Creek valleys.

The Plains never really had a town center. The intersection of SR 682 and Johnson and Connett Roads is where the original Post Office was located and several stores in that vicinity lead to some commercial activity. With the addition of public water and sewer, The Plains grew mostly as a residential community with accompanying businesses to service that growing residential sector.

The scale of development greatly increased with public sewer availability. This growth happened with minimal planning and without zoning so that a mix of land uses has occurred, not all necessarily negative. One goal of Smart Growth is to mix land uses and many areas of The Plains have such a mix. With better planning, this mixing is hopefully done so that certain business uses have necessary distance and screening from residential areas so as not to be a liability.

There is a growing concern that a lack of planning and zoning threatens people's investments and the small town character of The Plains. Examples of this include placement of two mobile homes on small lots only because public sewer is available, keeping farm animals in densely settled areas, and inadequate property setbacks for buildings.

***Goal – Provide a Strengthened Framework for Planning and Development***

**Action** – Athens Township has established a Zoning Commission to draft a zoning code, based on research performed to prepare this Plan, for the Athens Township portion of The Plains. This will allow local residents to have a more direct say in how The Plains grows. Particular attention will be paid to concerns raised by citizens in any public surveys and other public engagement.

**Action** – Local government (Athens Township, Dover Township, Athens County, Athens City, Regional Planning Commission, Zoning Commission), when feasible, will encourage future development in The Plains to utilize existing infrastructure, including water, sewer, roads, and other utilities rather than sprawling onto adjacent lands that do not have these services.

**Action** – Athens Township will prepare a 5-year capital improvements plan for infrastructure in the District, paying particular attention to sidewalk planning and construction.

**Action** – Work with Athens High School students and teachers on a branding effort for The Plains.



**Action** – Encourage enforcement of existing planning regulations for The Plains, particularly subdivision regulations whereby developers can be required to install sidewalks, landscaping, and other amenities, and have to post a bond to guarantee that improvements are constructed and maintained, for a specified period of time, before being turned over for maintenance by local government.

**Action** – Utilize Ohio University and Hocking College students to gather data about waterline locations, storm sewer locations, and other utilities and incorporate the data into a GIS program for The Plains.

**Action** – Recruit individuals to run for elected office so that The Plains is well represented by agencies and departments that provide services there.

**Action** – Recruit individuals to volunteer for positions on the Zoning Commission, The Plains Community Improvement Committee, and other civic organizations active in The Plains. Senior citizens often have time and experience to offer.

**Action** – Work with the Athens County Regional Planning Commission and the Athens County Commissioners to insure that all available grant funding sources have been utilized to get projects implemented.

**Action** – Work with local hero Joe Burrows to establish a foundation to provide funds for worthy projects in The Plains.

***Goal – Provide a range of housing options and opportunities***

**Action** – Insure that there is land available for duplex and triplex housing, apartments, and senior and assisted living.

**Action** – Monitor the progress of the Bailey’s Trail System in the Wayne National Forest as this will bring an influx of visitors looking for lodging, restaurants, and other services.

***Goal – Insure that rental housing is safe and adequate***

**Action** – Provide a permit and inspection program for rental properties to insure that all rentals meet the same basic minimal standards.

**Action** – Require that mobile homes only be allowed in state-licensed mobile home parks.

***Goal – Provide opportunities for business***

**Action** – Establish a Farmer’s Market for the Plains.

**Action** – With zoning, insure there is enough land area available for the business use categories.

**Action** – Work with the Chamber of Commerce and local business leaders to have a business plan in preparation for the Bailey’s Trail System.

### **Context – Transportation and Infrastructure**

The Plains evolved as a community that relies on cars and trucks to get around. While being auto-centric is not unusual, The Plains is, in large part, a community that has developed along its main roadway corridors that split The Plains into roughly equal quarters. US 33 is an arterial roadway on the northern edge. SR 682 is an arterial roadway running north-south and serves as the main face of business in The Plains. Connett Rd. is an east-west township road and Johnson Rd. is an east-west County Rd. and they meet at an intersection that is close to the center of The Plains. These two local collector roads also have some business frontage and provide access to some key facilities including the Fire Station, the Elementary School, the High School, the Township Park, Eclipse Company Town, and the Lindley Inn assisted living facility.

The Plains is largely built out for development that can gravity-flow to the sewer collection system. A large parcel of land to the north of US 33 is one of the few remaining areas that could gravity flow to the treatment plant. There is ample capacity remaining for both public water and sewer.

#### ***Goal – Minimize Congestion on SR 682, Johnson Rd., and Connett Rd.***

**Action** – Encourage ODOT, Athens County, and Athens Township to require businesses to share access points to minimize the number of curb cuts.

**Action** – Require a planting strip between parking lots and public road surfaces so that access has to be at designated driveways.

#### ***Goal – Improve pedestrian and bicycle opportunities***

**Action** – Work with the County Engineer on a plan for a bicycle and pedestrian path along Johnson Rd. from High School Drive to SR 682.

**Action** – Use alleyways to design some connections so residents can walk to services and between neighborhoods.

**Action** – Insure that new developments are designed to be pedestrian and bicycle friendly.

**Action** – Request that ODOT evaluate SR 682 for designated pedestrian crossings and find funding to build them.

**Action** – Conduct a Complete Streets program for The Plains. This should include additional bus shelters at key locations such as on Connett Rd.

***Goal – Encourage development on parcels already served by The Plains Water and Sewer District***

**Action** – Development outside of the existing system will be pay-as-you-go whereby developers pay for extension of the new infrastructure.

***Goal – Explore funding options to expand bus route frequency***

**Action** – Based on demand, see if route frequency can be increased to 30 minutes from 60 minutes.

***Goal – Assist disadvantaged individuals with services.***

**Action** – Encourage the Library system to continue provision of the Library as a local hotspot for internet.

**Action** – Insure that citizens are aware of programs available through the Department of Jobs and Family Services; the Athens Metropolitan Housing Authority; and The Hocking, Athens, and Perry Community Action Program.

***Goal – Insure there is enough parkland and open space for residents.***

**Action** – Find resources to build a playground park in the neighborhoods east of SR 682, perhaps on land owned by the School District.

**Action** – Add a skate park or pump track park in The Plains

**Context – Cultural and Historic Resources**

The Plains is fortunate to have two National Register of Historic Places designations. The “Wolf Plains” is a designation of the large area that encompasses 22 conical mounds and 9 circular enclosures. Some of these earthworks are outside the area considered The Plains, but most are within it. Some have been partially or totally destroyed by modern activities. The Hocking Valley Coal Company Town Historic District, today called Eclipse, is a group of restored coal miner’s houses, many in their original locations, and a restored Company Store. It is a good example of a mixed land use. Eclipse is on the eastern end of the District.

The historic structures still remaining in The Plains warrant special consideration because they help retain a sense of place in a community that has undergone change in several decades. Particularly the structures shown in Figure 19, but also those in Figure 20, help preserve a bit of history.

### ***Goal – Plan for cultural and historic preservation***

**Action** – Utilize overlay zoning to protect remaining earthworks and historic properties.

**Action** – Help find funding for The Plains Community Improvement Committee to construct historic markers and informational kiosks at key sites.

**Action** – Support continued tax funding for the Township Cemetery budget.

**Action** – Work with and encourage the Athens City School Board to repurpose the old High School on SR 682.

**Action** – Identify and map the private cemeteries in The Plains.

**Action** – Work with the Southeastern Ohio History Center to have tours of earthwork sites lead by trained docents, knowledgeable about Adena and other native cultures.

### **Context – Environment and Natural Resources**

Natural resources can be taken for granted in an urban or built up environment. However, they greatly contribute to quality of life and enhance property values. Some property owners have made some appropriate investments in landscaping, others have inappropriately destroyed the natural landscape. Without some regulatory controls, natural resources can be damaged or destroyed.

### ***Goal – Protect existing natural resources***

**Action** – Consider overlay zoning for protection of drainageways and accompanying riparian corridors.

**Action** – Work with the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) Urban Forester to inform residents about proper tree management.

**Action** – Encourage Athens County to actively maintain floodplain regulations for mapped floodplain regions on the eastern edge of The Plains.

**Action** – Utilize zoning to protect large parcels of undeveloped land, including agricultural use.

### ***Goal – Improve the urban forest***

**Action** – Work with the ODNR and the Soil and Water Conservation District to implement a tree planting program in The Plains. There can be bulk purchases of larger trees and a mix of species to enhance the environment in The Plains for many decades in the future.



**Action** – Encourage the Athens City School Board to have a detailed landscape plan and maintenance program at the new High School and the middle school campuses.

*Goal – Utilize planning and zoning to minimize light, noise, and air pollution*

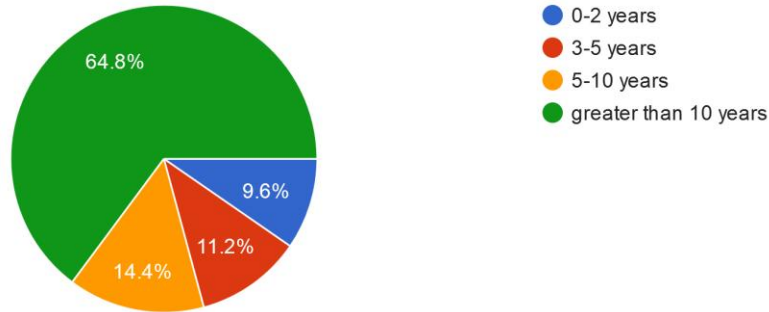
**Action** – Incorporate rules in a zoning code to address pollution issues.

**Action** – Require that new parking lots be landscaped for provision of shade and aesthetics.

## Appendix 1 - Survey Results<sup>22</sup>

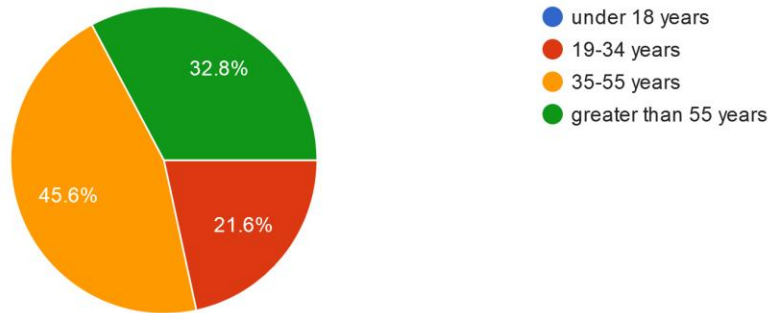
How many years have you lived in The Plains?

125 responses



What is your age?

125 responses

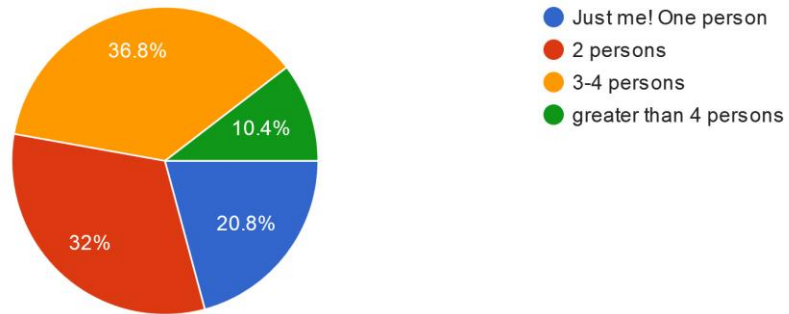


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<sup>22</sup> The horizontal bar charts (pages 61-66) produced by Google Forms did not print all the survey choices due to space limitations. In cases where choices were not printed to the left of the bar and when there were multiple respondents for that choice, a text box and arrow were added to describe the choice associated with the corresponding bar and response rate.

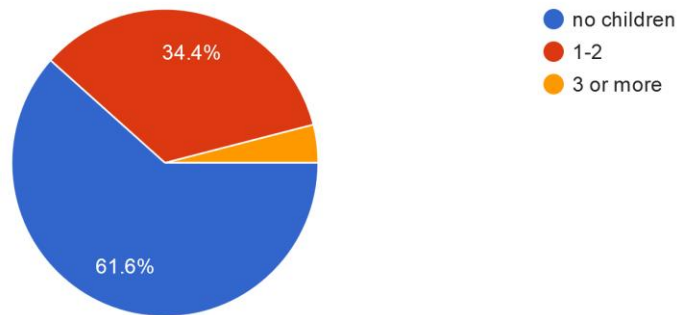
What is the size of your household (including children)?

125 responses



How many children (below the age of 18) live in your household?

125 responses



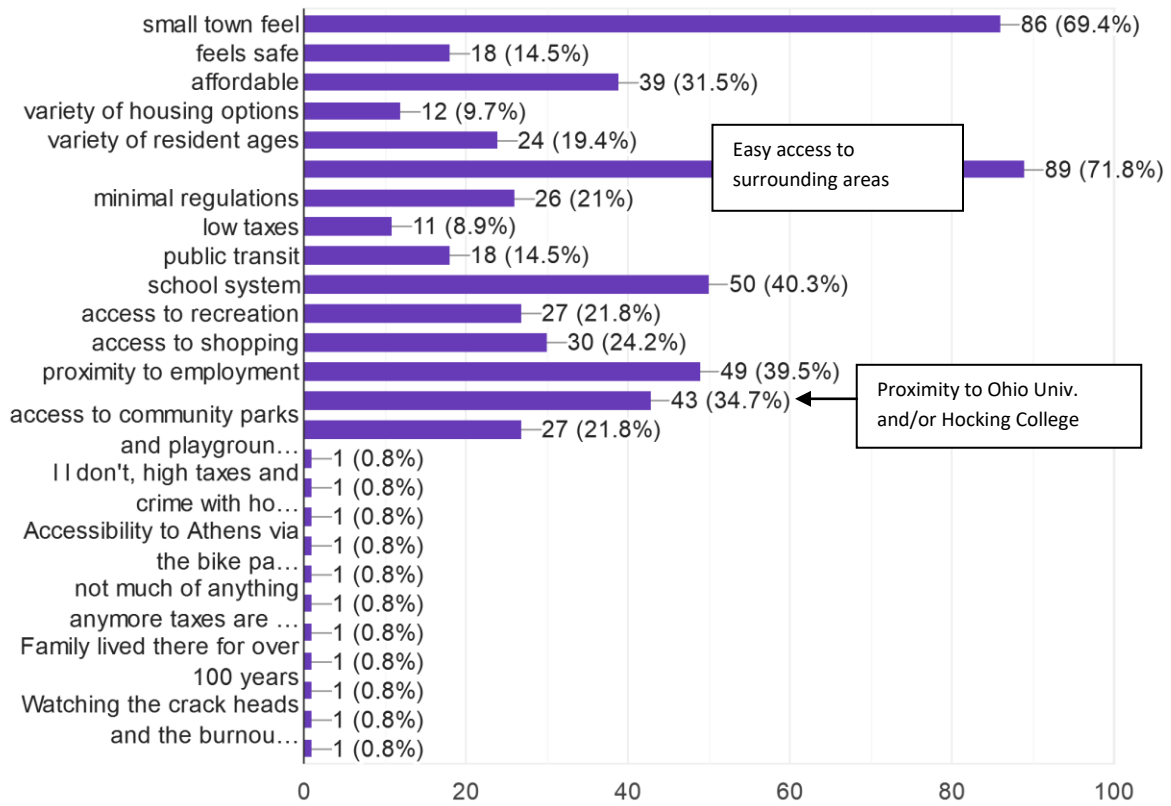
When you think about the future of The Plains. Do you think the focus of development should be on which of the following?

122 responses



What do you like best about living in The Plains (check all that apply)?

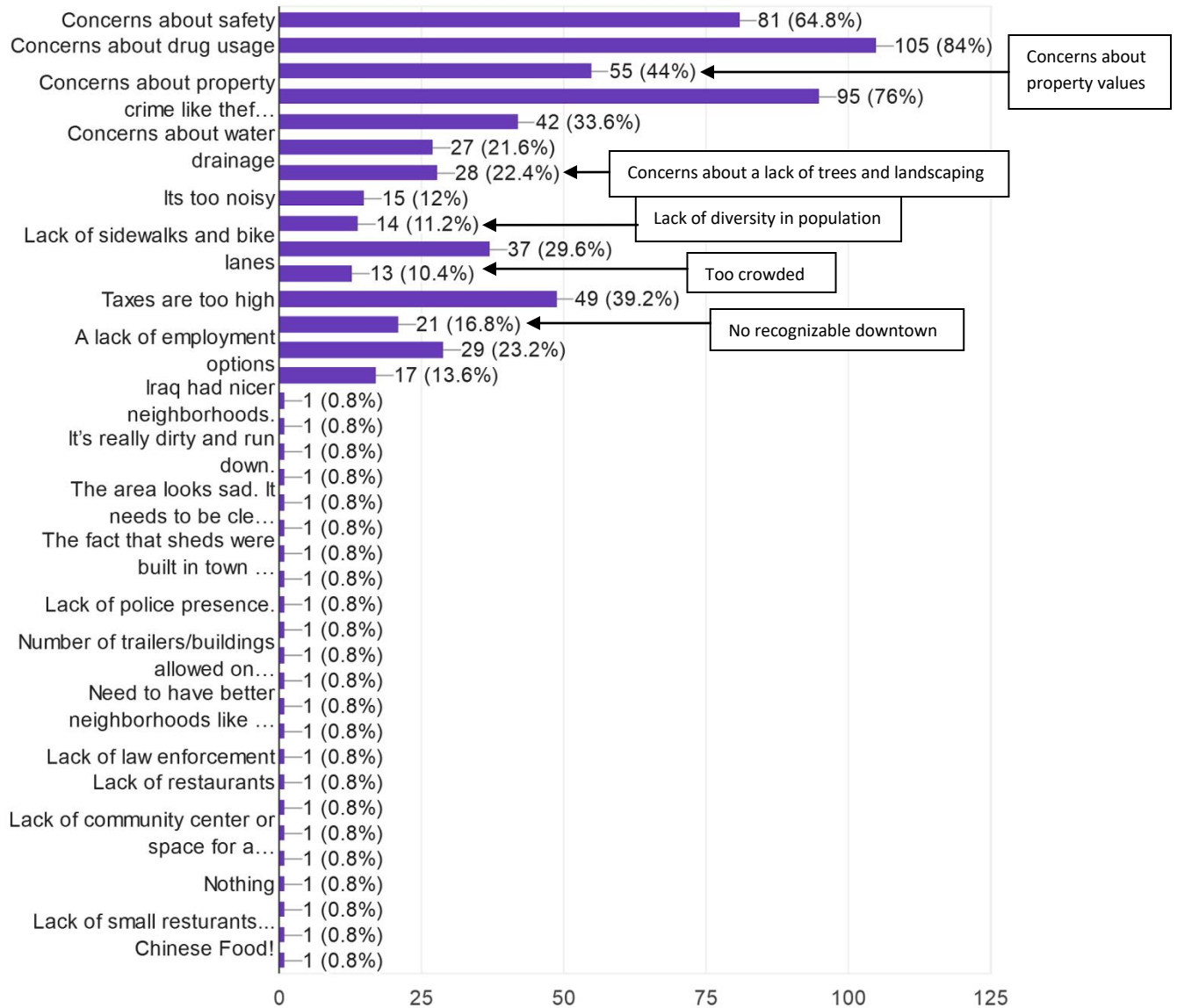
124 responses





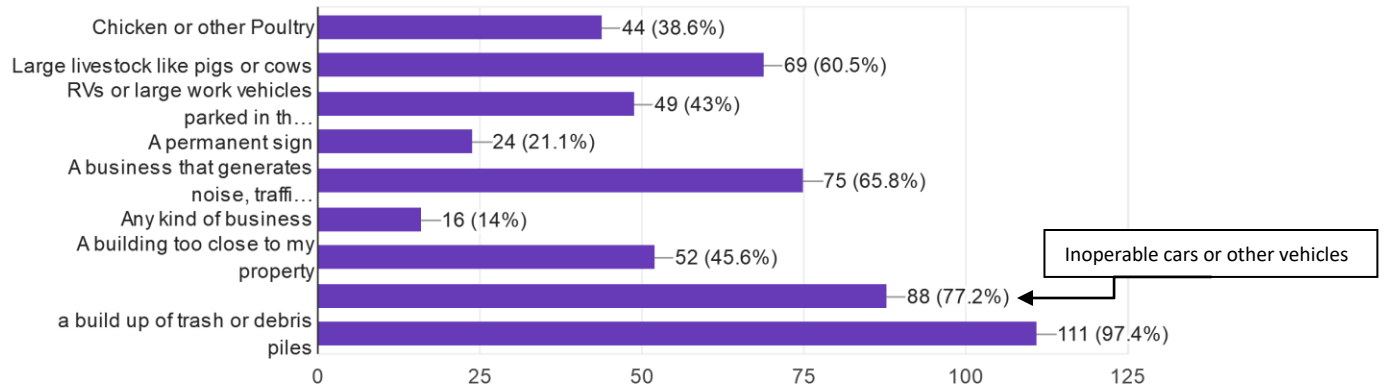
### What do you like least about living in The Plains (check all that apply)?

125 responses



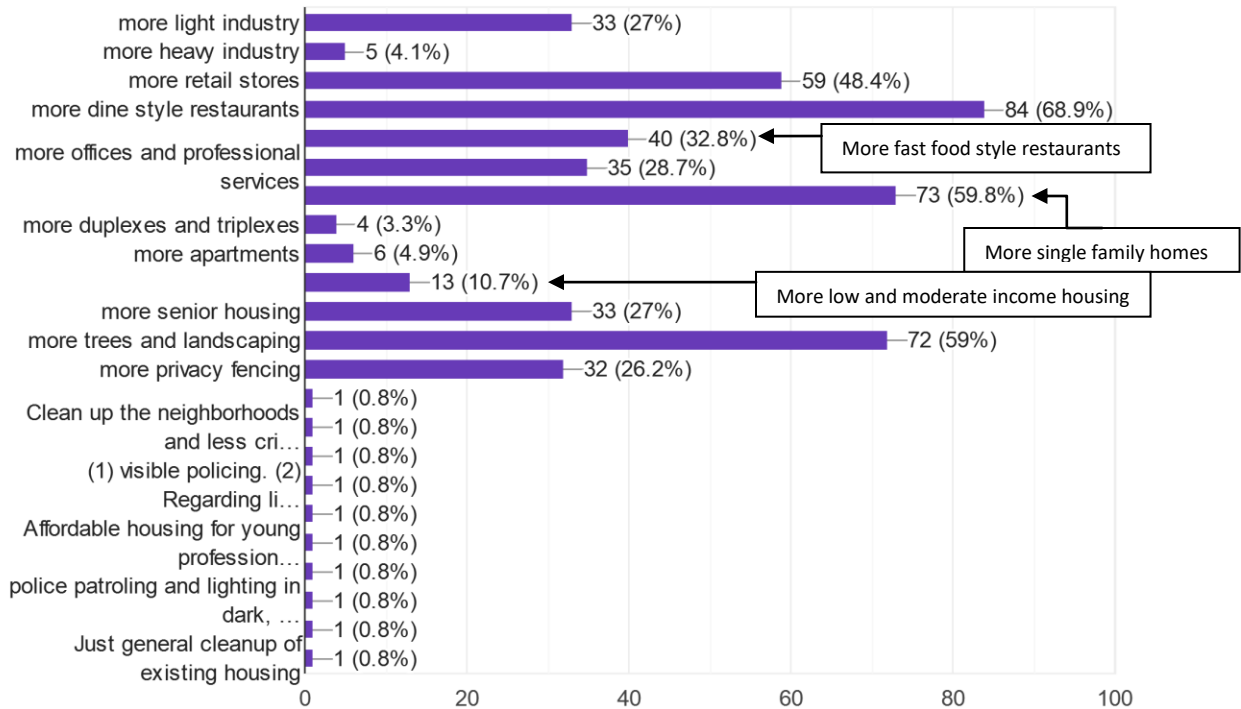
It would concern me if my neighbors had (check all that apply):

114 responses



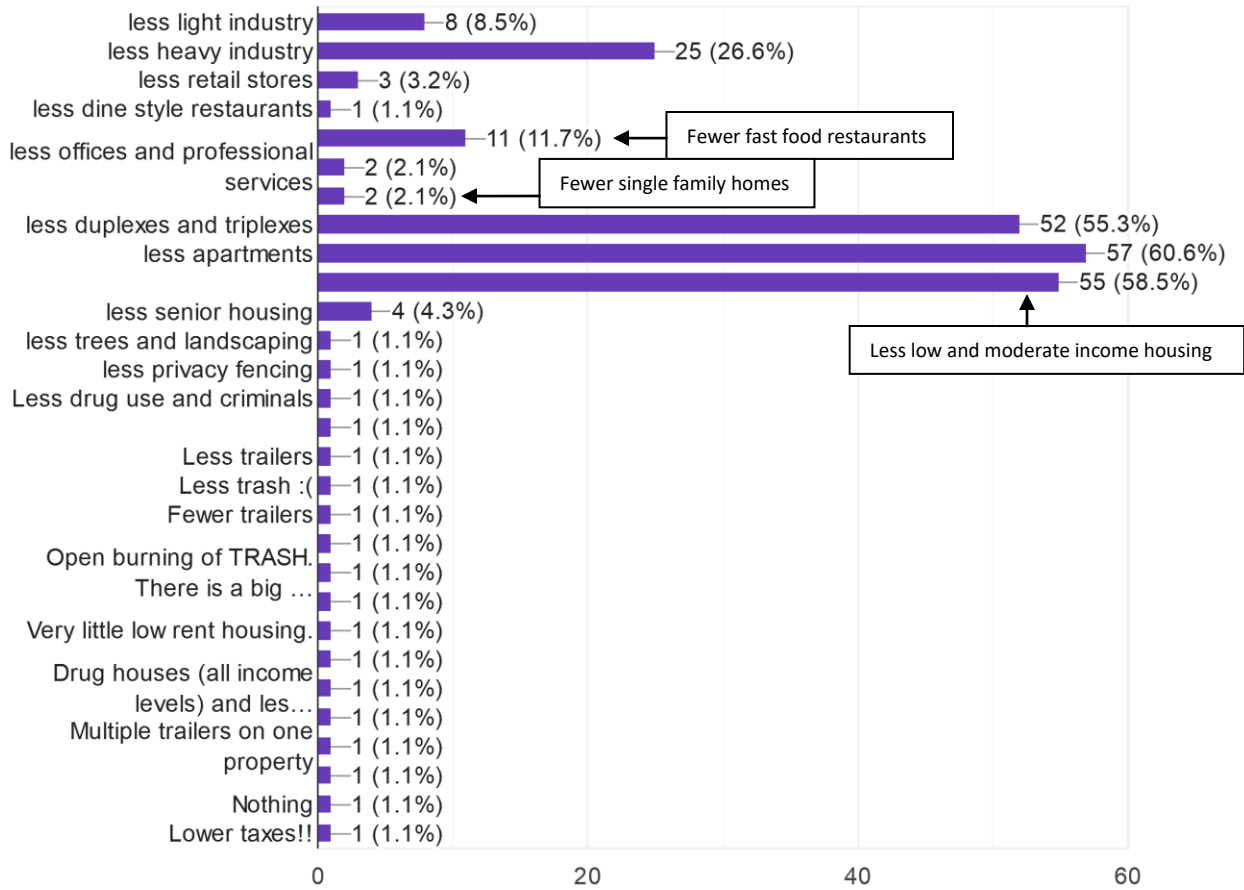
I would like to see MORE OF THE FOLLOWING in The Plains (check all that apply):

122 responses



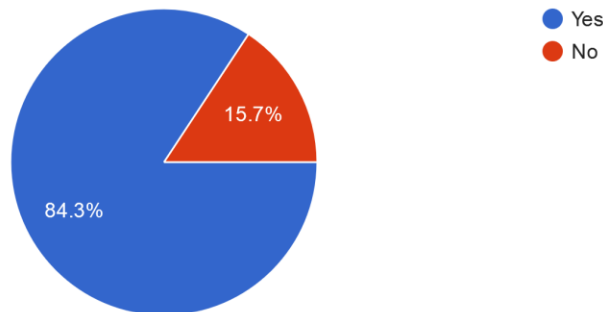
I would like to see LESS OF THE FOLLOWING in The Plains (check all that apply):

94 responses



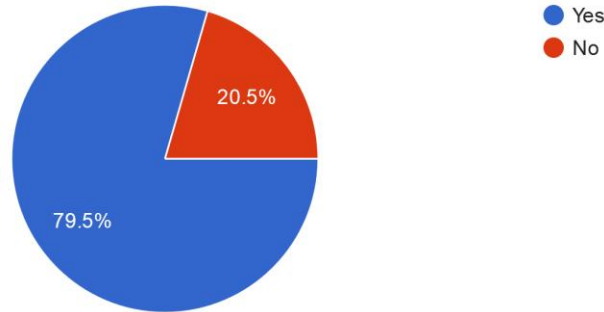
I am in favor of limiting land use to help protect health, safety, and property values in The Plains.

121 responses



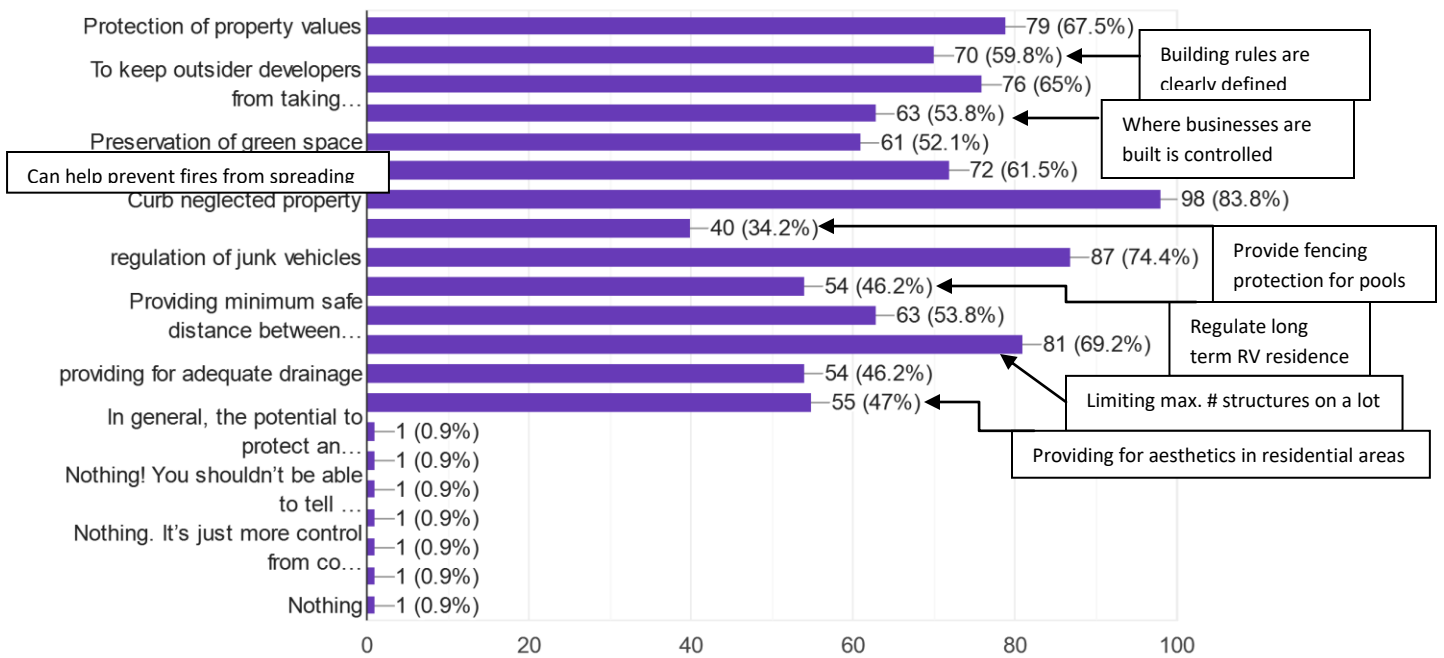
I am in favor of zoning in The Plains.

117 responses



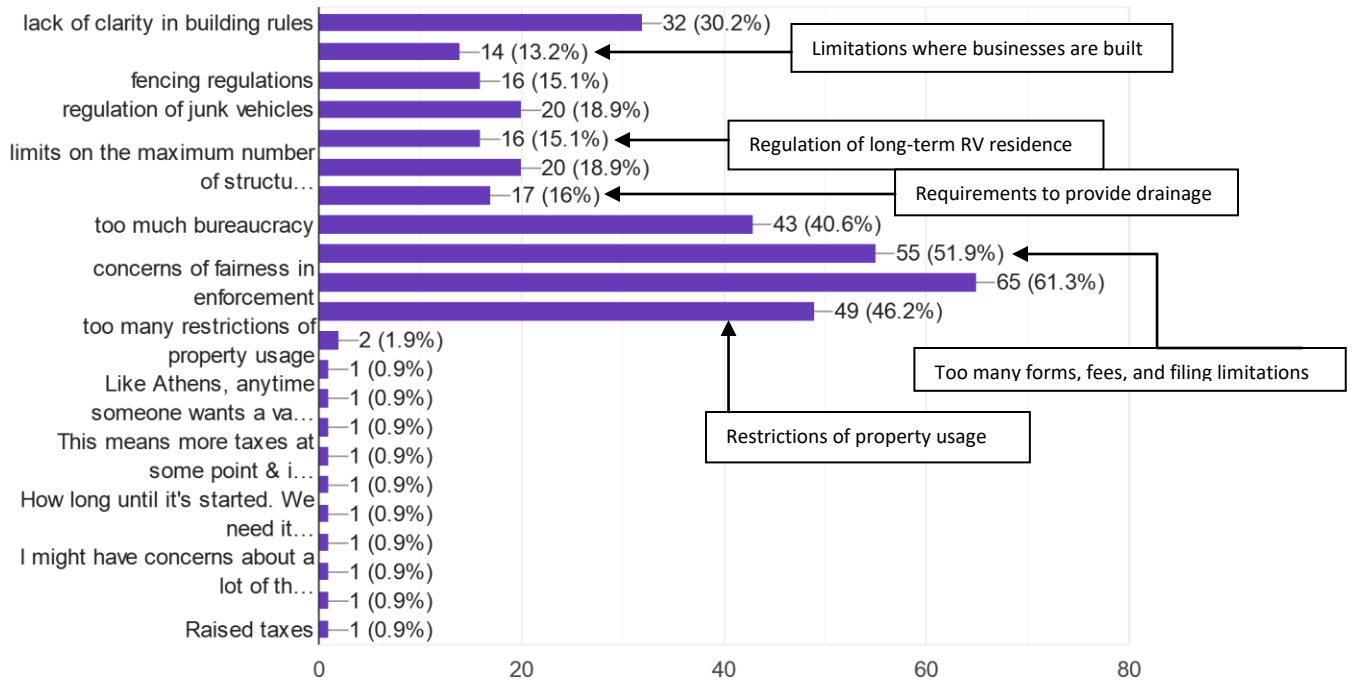
What do you find favorable about zoning (Check all that apply.)

117 responses



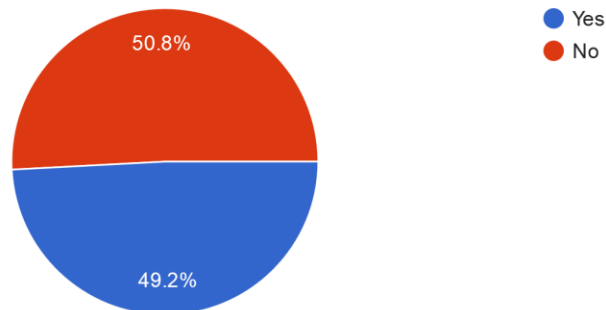
### What aspects of zoning concern you the most?

106 responses



### Are you aware that the state requires a board of zoning appeals to allow exceptions or variances if needed on a case by case basis?

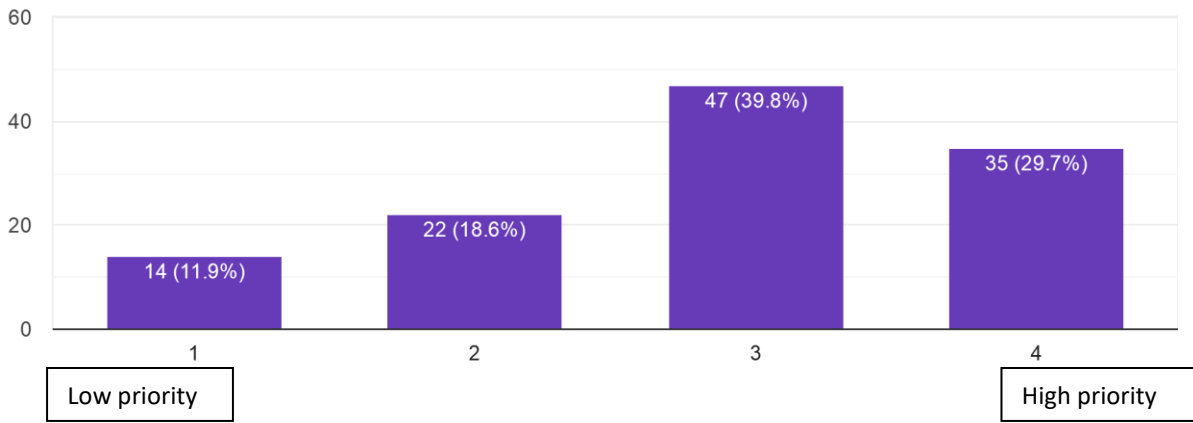
120 responses





Property setbacks are requirements that state how far structures need to sit back from existing property lines. They can allow for greater access in times of emergency like during fire and can prevent fire from spreading from one building to another. How much of a priority is a property setback requirement to be added to a zoning code in The Plains?

118 responses



Are you aware the Athens Township Zoning Commission has a Facebook page?

123 responses

