



Holmes Co/ Millersburg Comp Plan Agriculture/Cultural/Natural Resources 11/3/21

Arnie Oliver opened meeting with introductions. Poggemeyer Design Group reviewed a power point on the Comprehensive Plan and specifically on the county's agriculture, cultural, and natural resources. Existing conditions in the county and visioning themes related to agriculture, cultural, and natural resources from the visioning session were reviewed. 2020 Ohio County Profile for Holmes County has 173,925 acres in farmland, 1,673 farms, 104 acres as the average size of a farm, and \$182,088,000 in total cash receipts. Opportunities and challenges were also reviewed. Participants filled out visioning cards. In addition to participation by the group, comments that were emailed to the County regarding this workshop are included in the notes below.

These planning elements are important because agriculture is an important part of the economy, cultural resources are story of the past, and natural resources are important to the environment and tourism. All three are important pieces to quality of life, why people choose to work, live, and play in Holmes County.

The following existing conditions were added to those already listed in power point:

Cultural Resources

- St. Peter's (Glenmont)
- Amish and Mennonite Heritage Center and Behalt Cyclorama
- Holmes County Home
- Millersburg Cemetery/ Indian Mound
- Paint Valley Indian Mound
- Calmoutier (old French Cemetery)
- Fort Fizzle
- Greenville Treaty Line (Paint Township)
- Shrimplin Cemetery (Civil War Cemetery)
- Jonas Stutzman Historical Marker (early Amish Settler)

Natural Resources

- Killbuck Swamp Preserve
- Troyer's Hollow
- Doughty Valley
- Amish Scenic Byway
- Remnant Kettle Bog (from glaciers)
- Wetlands from privately held land
- Potential horse only trails
- Trout farms
- Bog by Round Lake (state protected)
- Mud Lake
- Brinkhaven Barnes (ODNR Nature Preserve, Killbuck Water and Land Use)
- Lower Killbuck State Wildlife Preserve
- Baker Wetlands (north of Village of Killbuck, on trail)
- Wally Road (Mohican Scenic River)
- Baddow Pass (CR 75 or 25)

Visioning Themes (in addition to those in the power point)

- Education to landowners on potential options, now need a 501c3 to put easements in place (Farm Bureau can't do it, but Commissioners or Killbuck Watershed Land Trust could. Western Land Conservancy did it in the past, but charges at least \$10k and not planning to be a local sponsor in 2022)
 - 4 farms currently have easements

- Process is time consuming
- Clean Ohio gives money, property owners donate value and get grants (competitive process)
- Lots of auctions now, review farmland preservation with owners, need to understand all that is available
- Donate land with permanent easement, money for easements. Have to hire certified accountant, Ray & Associations will do it and need a certified appraiser
- Role of nature conservancy in assisting as non-profit sponsor
- A local landowner who has gone through the process has offered to help with process, need assistance from commissioners
- Dog Breeding
 - 2 different sides- puppy mill vs economic development, tourist generator. Legally able to do breeding
 - Bigger operations are regulated by State (100-200 dogs), probably 260-270 high volume kennels (6 females, 40 dogs). Not many laws regulating the smaller places. Not many high-volume kennels.
 - Waste is an issue affecting natural resources. Some breeders put it with human waste, septic, but not allowed now. Most people send it out with the trash. EPA recommended guidelines for boarding kennels. Have gotten some complaints about breeders putting waste in creeks.
 - There has been some crime here- people taking advantage of Amish who trust buyers to leave cash when they take the puppy and others stealing dogs from property. Amish are not reporting the crime.
 - Pet buyers using airports for puppy transportation and pet taxi services are taking puppies across county, state lines. Farmhouse Fur Babies retail store just opened
 - Not sure how much money really collecting, some don't keep records
 - Commissioners passed barking dog legislation so people can file complaints
 - PETA gets involved; people are putting out negative information on "puppy mills" with negative campaigns on social media. Amish aren't good advocates for what they are doing, kennels are well done. Could you educate naysayers? Probably not they will find something wrong with operations and they already have their minds made up
 - Most breeders do a good job with animals, socialized, part of family, educated on what breeding, high end business
- Natural Environment
 - Tree issue, property owners are taking treetops and leaving a mess. Recommend call before cut since soil and water has a list of recommended foresters. It takes years for the forest to heal. Need landowner education on forest management. Can take out scrubs.
 - Neighborhood cooperative. Soil & water has a list of initiatives. ODNR was more involved in the past.
 - Old fairgrounds would be a good location for education. A "Forest Field Day" outreach, mailings, call before you cut, etc.

Challenges (in addition to those in the power point)

- Next generation can't agree on what to do with land
- Price per acre has doubled/tripled
- Farming is a hard life
- Masses are disconnected on where food is coming from, even in Holmes Co, need more education
- Absentee landowners are a challenge for farmers, need to let them understand what doing with the land
- Some participants felt that auctioneers run the land use planning in the county, goal is to get the best price, using their views on how land should develop, and the bank is selling land and the future
- Density map, per square mile was high
- Keeping rural character, towns were set up for horses (Berlin, Mt. Hope)

Opportunities (in addition to those in the power point)

- Need land to rent, Amish are renting land, opportunities for it, right now a lot of it is done underground
- Doing first 100 acres, building houses \$15-20k an acre, fields are further and further apart
- Use forestry industry knowledge and privately get people engaged
 - Make it a habit, "seed planting" with public, and "behind the scenes" educational opportunities
- Deed restrictions- east of town, exclude commercial. Review set back requirements
- Get more efficient to use supply chain products here for end products here (example of milk from here for cheese from here)

- Brand products, including animal agriculture

Information was provided on the following tools:

- Agricultural Easement Donation Program
- Agricultural Security Area Program
 - Must be at least 500 contiguous acres of farmland (one or more landowners)
- All promote ag land in the county, be aware of the programs, at least the easement
 - Farm Bureau and Ohio Dept of Agriculture have additional information.
- Very hard to get people to plan, they are hesitant and have the “independent spirit.”
 - Residents do not do a good job of planning for the future with wills, real estate.
- People are interested in farmland preservation, just not sure where to start but also think there is a number who aren't interested because they don't want to let other control their land. Multiple landowners are not agreeing sometimes.
- Need more education, need someone to drive it locally
- Add third program- agricultural districts are eligible through Ohio Department of Agriculture, agreement to pay different assessments
- Designate historic family farms in the county, right now there are 3 in the county
- County has provided this information to farmers. Issues become costs, vocal support, nervous about land values and it takes time (9 months). A participant said that Wayne County has thousands of acres in agricultural security area program and thinks need more staff to assist in Holmes County. Seems commissioners do support it, but not drive it. Zoning drives it. Some elected officials here are not farmers.
- Zoning in the 1970s- tried to do it but failed in the townships. Maybe an education process, need to show how to help a community with zoning. Should be done proactively, not reactively.

Planned Projects

- Former landfill into park land
- Killbuck Creek paddle and pedal connection to trail and not have sewage in the creek
- Connections between agriculture and puppy mills
- Branding of Amish products, Holmes Co
- Tourist population has changed- now have 2 different types- those who want rural tourism and those who want to be entertained
- Concern in 10 years will not be able to recognize the county (example- Winesburg with square footage of homes and manufacturing, Dollar General stores)
- West side may not want development. Glenmont and Nashville are currently sleepers.
- Move towards specialty products (example of hemp)
- Key to preservation, get people to put a value on the county and rural atmosphere

Discussion from participants

People in county are interested in Ag security areas but need assistance to get the paperwork done. NRAC funds are available for preservation of natural areas in the county. Concern northeastern portion of the county will lose natural character. Could use tools such as historic family farm designation, ASA's permanent preservation options, land banks, etc. Free to designate farms as historic family farms. Recently 15 lots stayed together for farming. Concern people will move to where land is cheaper, like Coshocton County. Amish are buying land there.

Concerns with uncontrolled building and use of farmland for houses. Without zoning regulations, experiencing unprecedented and largely uncontrolled subdivision of farmland into large-lot rural and commercially developed parcels. Development is random, unplanned, and often incompatible with existing neighboring land uses. Sprawl along SR39 seems to be ramping up. Concern that agriculture is a top economic driver in the county but losing farmland at high rate.

Agriculture is a tourism generator. Add Mt. Mope Auction, it happens twice a year. King of the Ridge is another event that draws a lot of people. Dog breeding and sales brings in people. Flea Markets also bring in people. The largest sheep auction east of the Mississippi River is held here. Horse training takes place in Mt. Hope and is also lucrative.

Could we add theater options here like they do in Lancaster, PA (Sight and Sound Theaters). Lots of tour buses in Lancaster and they also have commercial property/projects. Would like to have a permanent place with seating for horse activities

Transportation discussion: Concerns with buggy and e-bike traffic, better to connect Berlin to Charm on designated pedestrian/equestrian trail. Rush hour here is 5 am and hills are dangerous, especially in the dark. Need to get ODOT's attention on these issues. Not want to turn into Shipshewana (IN) as far as traffic, but they do have the facilities (Michiana Event Center) to house large numbers.