



Community Improvement  
Corporation (CIC)  
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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Copley Community Improvement Corporation (CIC) has prepared a Strategic Plan (the “Plan”) in order to fulfill its mission to advance, encourage and promote industrial, economic, commercial, and civic development. The Plan was developed with Copley’s greatest assets in mind: its residents and the businesses that support them. Guided by the opinions of those who responded to a community survey, the Plan identifies existing community assets while recognizing challenges that have hindered progress. It considers current economic development needs and identifies the steps needed to capitalize on important Township assets. The Plan describes community and economic development opportunities designed to increase civic interest and instill community pride.

This Strategic Plan provides a snapshot of present conditions in Copley Township, describes the results of a community survey and the formation of the Copley CIC, and outlines the goals and objectives that will guide the activities of the CIC from 2019 to 2024. Township Identity, Community Improvement, and Quality of Life are concepts that frame the following goals identified for the CIC’s focus of activities over the next five years:

1. Project a clear and positive identity of Copley Township.
2. Provide conditions which lead to economic resiliency.
3. Strengthen the quality of life for those who live, work, and play within Copley Township.

### **STRATEGIC PLAN -- GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

The Copley CIC presents the following framework for its focus and activities over the next five years.

- **IDENTITY:** Project a clear and positive identity of Copley Township.
- **COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT:** Provide conditions which lead to economic resiliency.
- **QUALITY OF LIFE:** Strengthen the quality of life for those who live, work, and play within Copley Township.

## COPLEY CIRCLE BETTER BLOCK

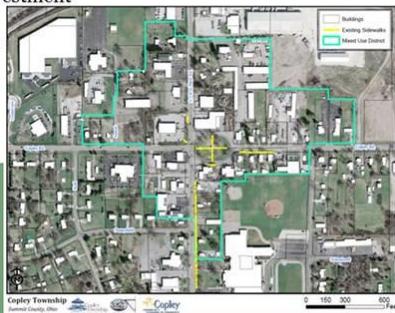
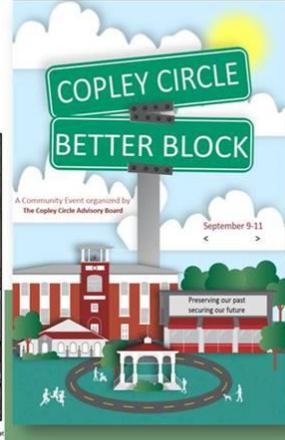
The creation of the Copley Improvement Corporation (“CIC”) has its roots in a grassroots community-led movement. In 2015, a group of township residents formed the Copley Circle Advisory Committee (“CCAB”) in response to an increasing community sense of the negative effects of the decline of Copley Circle, the township’s historic center and small business district. The group developed a community-wide survey, which asked residents and those who owned or patronized Copley’s businesses and services about their impressions of and hopes for the township. Information gathered in the survey led to the CCAB’s organization of a three-day event rooted in the concept of **Tactical Urbanism**, an approach to neighborhood building that uses short-term, low-cost, and scalable interventions and policies to catalyze long-term change ([tacticalurbanismguide.com](http://tacticalurbanismguide.com)). Named the “Copley Circle Better Block,” the event held in September 2016 temporarily added pedestrian crosswalks, bike lanes, pop-up street vendors, a beer garden, a used book store, and a coffee shop to the township’s declining Copley Circle. The event’s success generated discussions about how to continue this momentum to address needed improvements around the Copley Circle and throughout the township.

### What is a Better Block?

- Temporary event which provides a glimpse of hidden-potential of area
- Opportunity to incorporate ideas/concepts for a short-term trial
- Encourages community based support and grassroots driven solutions
- Fosters dialogue between public and private sector
- Identifies barriers and facilitates investment
- Incorporates “Complete Streets”
- Art - Markets - Retail - Public Space

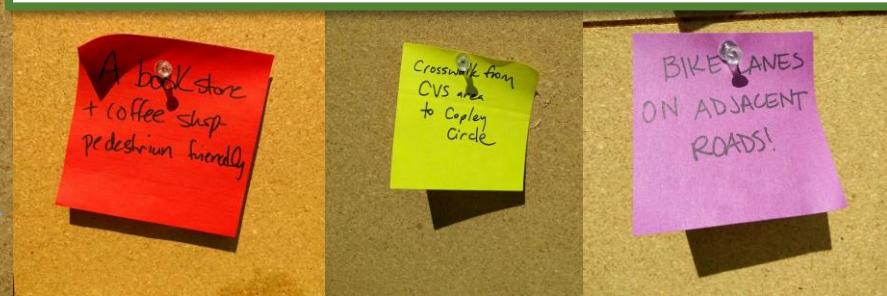
*“MANY COMMUNITIES END UP PUTTING OFF THINGS BECAUSE THEY WANT TO FULLY UNDERSTAND EVERYTHING. THEY DON’T UNDERSTAND THAT INOVATING IS ABOUT STARTING. TAKING CARE OF A COMMUNITY IS A PROCESS THAT YOU START AND THEN GIVE THE POPULATION SPACE TO RESPOND.”*

*JAIME LERNER*

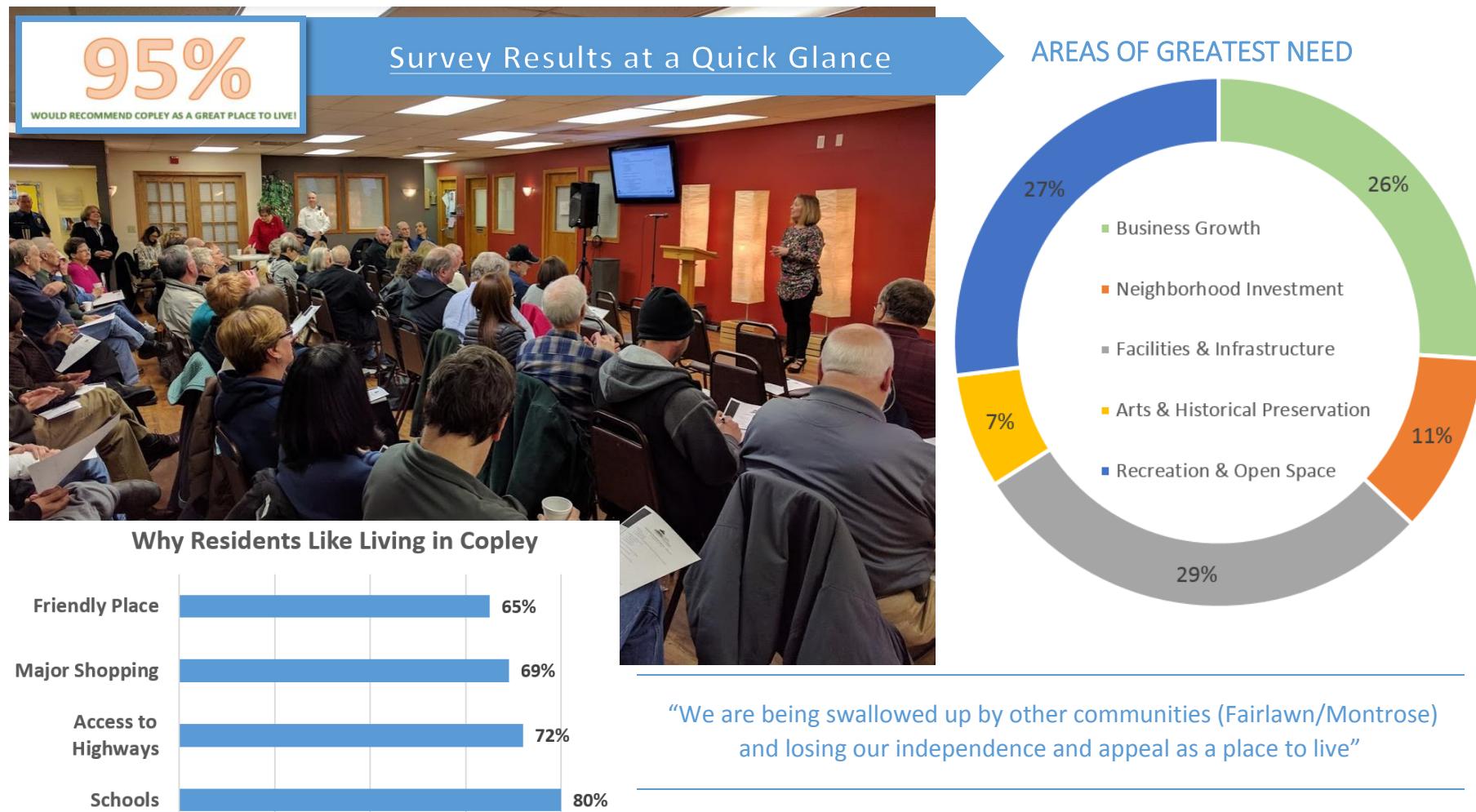


Following the positive response from the community to the Copley Better Block, the Copley Township Board of Trustees decided to explore the possibility of creating a Community Improvement Corporation ("CIC"). CICs are quasi-governmental entities that assist and operate separately from a local government. CICs often perform economic development functions, and are authorized by the State of Ohio to advance, encourage and promote industrial, economic, commercial and civic development of a specific area (Ohio Revised Code 1724.01(B)(1)).



## COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVE SURVEY

The Township conducted a Community Perspective Survey with the end-goal of a better understanding of needs and wants of those within the community. The survey was intended to capture the respondents' geographical area of residence, demographic information, and to prioritize areas of interest. Upon the conclusion of the survey, a public forum was held to reveal the survey. Residents responding to survey indicated their priorities from most important to least important. Survey results indicated that facilities and public infrastructure were most important to respondents while the preservation of arts and historical structures was valued the least.



Survey feedback pointed to an overwhelming majority who strongly supported targeted or restricted growth. Copley Township has widely contrasting land uses, including a major retail corridor and the Panzner Wetland Wildlife Reserve, a Class 3 wetland (the highest classification). These advantages exemplify the township's diversity and the challenges of managing competing land uses.

When asked to identify their top priorities for the next five years, survey participants named the following needs. Each priority received nearly equal preference by residents.

1. **Community improvements.** Responses indicating the desire for storm and sanitary sewers and water line extensions point to current gaps in the provision of critical services. Public improvements that allow residents to more safely navigate the township by means other than a car were also noted. Revitalizing Copley Circle and improving traffic flow were also seen as priorities.
2. **Open space preservation and recreational opportunities.** This priority closely follows survey participants' preference for managed growth. Copley residents clearly value the rural character of the township and would welcome more opportunities to enjoy their surroundings. A recreational facility, such as a community center, has been (and continues to be) discussed.
3. **Small business support and job growth.** Respondents indicated a preference for promoting small businesses, retaining and creating jobs, and a stronger identity for the township. Frequent mention of the declining Copley Circle in community conversations demonstrates that some residents view this past center of the township's commercial activities as valuable and a possible complement to the big-box retail development a few miles away.

These identified priorities indicate that Copley's residents enjoy township life and want improvements that make the township an even more desirable place. A balance between growth and preserving the character of the township should factor into land use decisions.

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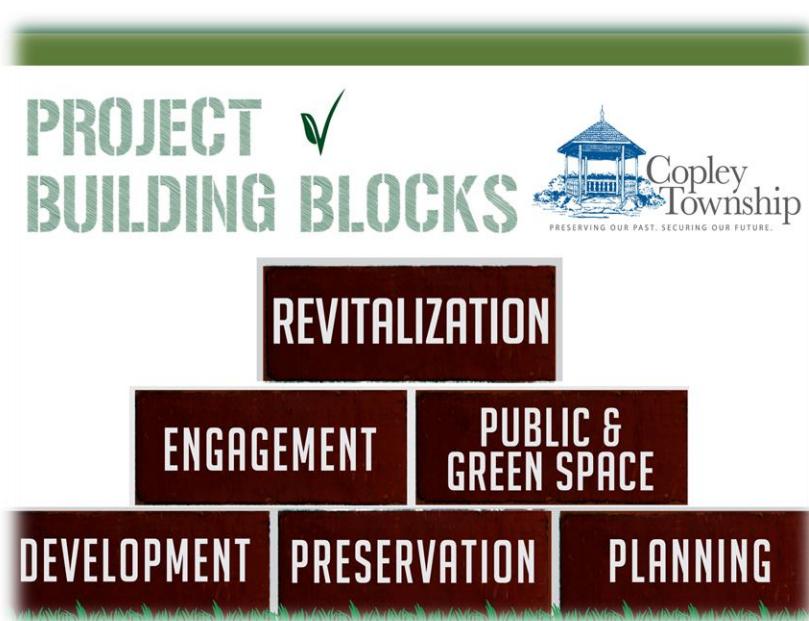
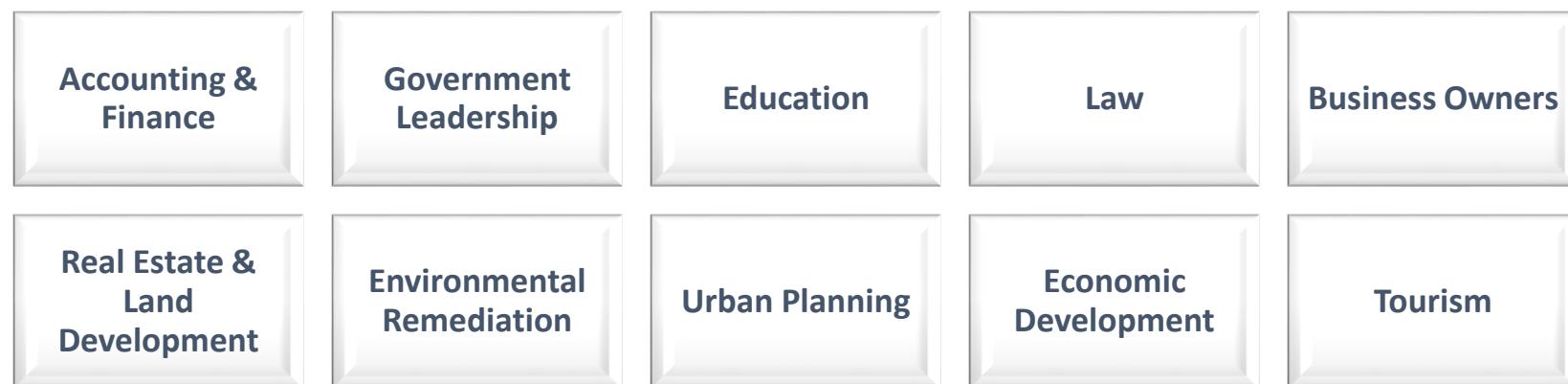
"The traffic pattern at the Circle is **DANGEROUS!** There are no turning lanes for traffic. Always a guessing game for motorists"

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## **CREATING THE CIC**

In March 2017, the Copley Township Board of Trustees approved the creation of the Copley CIC, and the group's first organizational meeting was held on November 9, 2017. The CIC is a non-profit corporation certified by the State of Ohio and created under Chapters 1702 and 1724 of the Ohio Revised Code to foster sound development that supports goals identified by Copley Township. The Copley CIC has been designated by the Board of Trustees to act as the township's official economic development agent for the purpose of advancing, encouraging, and promoting the industrial, economic, commercial, and civic development of Copley Township. As such, the CIC works in concert with the township to implement its community and development strategies known as Project Building Blocks.

The CIC board membership reflects the breadth and diversity of community and economic development experience that characterizes Copley Township's residents. The CIC includes life-long and more recent township residents. Backgrounds of committee members include:



## TOUR OF THE TOWNSHIP

Members of the CIC participated in a Tour of the Township, which was intended to reveal the vast diversity and complexity of issues facing the community. The Tour included stops in suburban style housing developments (New Copley), national retail corridors (Montrose), struggling local establishments (Copley Circle), a scenic ride through rural Copley (Wolf Creek), and finally a visit to an environmentally sensitive area (Little Farms). Each stop provided a glimpse of successes, challenges, and opportunities for improvements.

### Community Improvement Corporation Community Tour NORTHWEST AREA "NEW COPLEY"

#### OVERVIEW

Over the last 20 years, a surge of residential development has occurred in the Northwest quadrant of Copley Township. The residential growth is accompanied by a regional shopping district known as Montrose. The shopping area provides primarily retail, restaurant and personal services.

The new investment has been a major contributor to the \$150 million dollars of Township investment over the past decade.

There is a common perception/divide between "NEW COPLEY" and "OLD COPLEY" which are very different in comparing

#### OPPORTUNITIES

- Community Gateway Signs – Branding
- Infill Development (Underutilized Parcels)
- Creation/promotion of walkable communities
- High Commercial Occupancy Rates (95+%)
- New Housing Options – growing population

#### MILLER FARM HOUSE

#### PEDESTRIAN BRIDGE

### Community Improvement Corporation Community Tour WOLF CREEK AREA

#### OVERVIEW

The Wolf Creek Area of Copley Township is enhanced by the natural beauty of the Barberton Reservoir and large rural lots with a beautiful countryside setting. This picturesque area is framed by wooded areas, waterways and a strong potential for a micro-tourism and a niche shopping market. Visitors to the area can enjoy the Wolf Creek Winery with scenic views of the Barberton Reservoir. Adjacent to the winery is the converted Brenner Farm which now houses the Whimsical Pig Bed and Breakfast. The recently converted Wolf Creek Trading Company not only offers an art gallery but a rustic wedding venue situated in a 1884 bank barn.

#### OPPORTUNITIES

- Micro Tourism
- Branding

#### CHALLENGES

- Restricted use of Barberton Reservoir

#### WOLF CREEK WINERY

#### WOLF CREEK TRADING COMPANY

CIC

### Community Improvement Corporation Community Tour LITTLE FARMS AREA

#### OVERVIEW

Historically, the Little Farms Area has been home to "small farms" which is nutrient rich with wonderful growing conditions. The land is perfect for wetland restoration, environmental conservation efforts and the introduction of passive recreational access. The area often consists of small homes built within floodplains and/or wetland areas. The area has hundreds of vacant parcels. Many of these vacant parcels are becoming tax delinquent as absentee owners find little value in the undevelopable land.

Through cooperation with the Summit County Land Bank, Copley has begun the

#### OPPORTUNITIES

- Planned Conservation Efforts
- Floodplain-storm water management
- Community Greenspace
- Trail and Park Development

#### RESIDENTIAL: ABANDONED/LAND BANK

#### BESSIE WILLIAMS SUPERFUND

### Community Improvement Corporation Community Tour COPLEY CIRCLE

#### OVERVIEW

Copley Circle seems to be a centralized topic with much community interest and opinion. The roadways are controlled by the State (ODOT) and County Engineers (COSCE). Little effort and attention has been given to make the Circle pedestrian friendly. Uncontrolled curb-cuts have created unsafe traffic patterns and little room to improve the streetscape. Centralized water and sewer are available along S. Cleve-Mass but the connection (tap-in fees) are often considered cost prohibitive. There is little architectural uniformity and there are no properties listed on the historical registry. The Circle holds annual festivals and musical concerts throughout the year.

#### STRENGTHS

- Mixed Use Overlay District
- Centralized/Community Greenspace
- Utility Access

#### COPLEY CIRCLE: COMMERCIAL

#### COPLEY CIRCLE: COMMUNITY

#### COPLEY CIRCLE: RESIDENTIAL

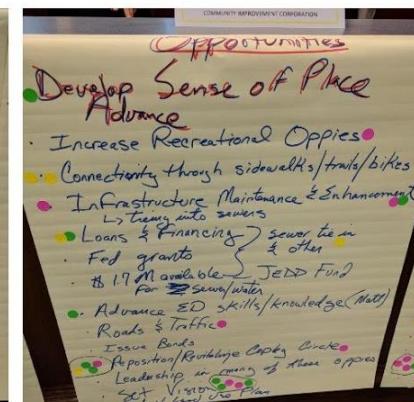
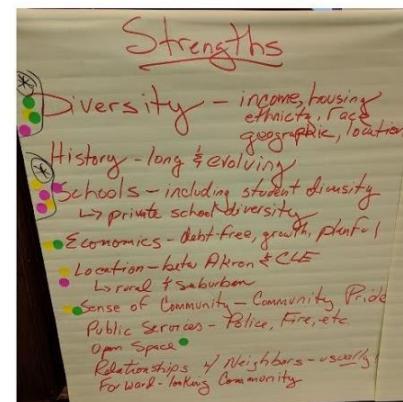
COPLEY COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT CORPORATION (CIC) | Strategic Plan

## SOAR Analysis Results

- 1) **Strengths**
  - i. Diversity – Income, housing, ethnicity, geography
  - ii. Schools
  - iii. Economics – government debt free with plentiful growth
- 2) **Opportunities**
  - i. Revitalize Copley Circle
  - ii. Set Vision for Community
  - iii. Connecting Community through Trails/Sidewalks/Paths
- 3) **Aspirations**
  - i. Change to Copley Circle
  - ii. Connecting Copley Park to other Community Assets via Trails, Paths, Sidewalks
  - iii. Make a “Nice” Gateway
  - iv. Improve Infrastructure
  - v. Market Copley – Branding Identity
- 4) **Results**
  - i. Increased Property Value(s)
  - ii. Increased Community Engagement
  - iii. New Business
  - iv. Removing Blight

## STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

CIC members participated in a strategic planning session using the SOAR (Strength, Opportunity, Aspirations, Results) methodology to assist in identifying a forward path over the next five years. Conducted by Dr. Paul Levy, a University of Akron professor of Industrial/ Organizational Psychology, the SOAR is a new strategic planning tool that helps organizations focus on what they are doing well, what can be improved, and what is most compelling to stakeholders. In the workshop, CIC members identified the following Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, and Results that could inform the organization's priorities and assist in the development of future activities.



# Goals and Objectives

A sub-committee appointed by the CIC evaluated the Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, and Results analysis that emerged from the CIC's strategic planning process. Grouping together some common items, the committee then organized the CIC's priorities into three themes: the need for a clearer township identity, possible actions and programs to address deteriorating properties and strengthen the local economy, and physical improvements that make Copley a place where people want to visit and live. The CIC board adopted the following framework for its strategic plan:

**IDENTITY:** Project a clear and positive identity of Copley Township

**COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT:** Provide conditions which lead to economic resiliency

**QUALITY OF LIFE:** Strengthen the quality of life for those who live, work, and play within Copley Township



# IDENTITY

## Project a clear and positive identity of Copley Township

Copley Township's population and geography are diverse. People are often confused as to whether they are in Copley or a surrounding community such as Fairlawn, Norton, Akron or Bath. This confusion is heightened by the fact that the Township is home to four different school districts – Copley/Fairlawn, Revere, Highland and Akron. A clear identity will foster community pride and engagement and create a sense of place by:

*"Copley needs small businesses and restaurants which keep people and money in the community"*

## OBJECTIVES

1. Construct gateways at strategic township entry points
2. Identify landmark areas of the township
3. Provide wayfinding markers that encourage exploration throughout the Township
4. Encourage business to identify with Copley in their advertising media
5. Establish a social media presence to effectively communicate with a diverse population



# COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT

Provide conditions which lead to economic resiliency

The diversity of Copley Township presents the opportunities of myriad housing choices, large as well as quaint retail establishments, and a demographic and cultural population mix that is unique among Ohio's townships. However, challenges present themselves in the forms of an aging housing stock and gaps in public infrastructure. Future community improvements will need to strategically balance the interests of all stakeholders.

*"The Township needs to support the small businesses"*

## OBJECTIVES

1. Improve the Township's commercial corridors
2. Support existing businesses and provide opportunities for growth
3. Foster opportunities for future development
4. Develop and implement a strategic approach to the acquisition of land
5. Create economic development tools which facilitate investment based on sound business principles



# QUALITY OF LIFE

**Strengthen the quality of life for those who live, work and play within Copley**

A sound approach to development balances economic, cultural, and environmental interests to achieve vibrant communities that meet the needs of a variety of residents, businesses, and institutions. As housing, retail, and development trends evolve, a community must be agile and anticipate future priorities. Providing choices that enhance the quality of life attracts and retains residents and businesses under any economic condition. Forward-thinking communities make adjustments to advance the greater good.

*"Provide authentic connections which set the stage for continued growth and vibrancy"*

## OBJECTIVES

1. Improve physical connections within the community by promoting different modes of transportation
2. Promote access to public and green space
3. Pursue infrastructure improvements that are beneficial to the community
4. Highlight features of the unique natural and urban environments that contribute to Copley's identity and sense of place





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