Chapter 1
Introduction

Summit County General Land Use Development Plan

This Summit County General Land Use Development Plan has been designed to guide development and redevelopment in Summit County during the next twenty years. The Summit County General Land Use Development Plan is basically a policy plan. The overall goal of the General Land Use Development Plan is to add a county-level perspective and planning direction that complements and strengthens local planning efforts. The Summit County General Land Use Development Plan will also be referred to in this document as the General Plan.

Location
Summit County is located in the Northeast Ohio. Akron is the County seat and principal city. Summit County is named for the highest point along the Erie-Ohio Canal. Summit is adjacent to Cuyahoga, Medina, Portage, and Stark Counties. The County had a population of 542,899 in 2000 (U.S. Census). Summit County has an area of 412.8 square miles. Besides Akron, other cities are Barberton, Cuyahoga Falls, Stow, Twinsburg, Munroe Falls, Tallmadge, Fairlawn, Green, Hudson, Macedonia, Norton, and New Franklin. Summit County is the only county in Ohio with a Charter form of government. Summit County has a County Executive and 11 County Council Members.

BASIS FOR THE PLAN

Project Mission: The plan is meant to address land use issues, transportation issues, demographic trends, parks and open space issues, devise economic development strategies, and encourage open space conservation.

Planning Area Qualities: The planning process recognizes the unique qualities that define the area’s character and considers the impact of those items on the county’s future. Such qualities include for example, service areas for central sewers, future road improvements, and open space areas.

Governmental Organization: Summit County consists of nine townships, ten villages, and thirteen cities. All of these jurisdictions have a certain amount of responsibility in the realm of growth management (policy, zoning, capital improvements.)

The Region: Summit County is an important part of Northeast Ohio, which contains the metropolitan areas of Akron, Cleveland, Canton and Youngstown.

Adoption and Implementation: The Summit County Planning Commission, under the Ohio Revised Code Section 713.23, has legal responsibility for adopting a general plan for the unincorporated area. Implementation will predominately include the County Executive, County
Council, and the County Planning Commission, although other county departments, local political subdivisions, and the private sector may be involved.

PLAN OVERVIEW

What is a General Plan?

A general plan is a long-range planning tool used to establish a community's overall approach and strategy for future growth and development. It provides a consolidated policy statement, which helps community officials and decision-makers evaluate land-development proposals and make educated decisions for the future.

Why Prepare a County General Plan?

The Summit County Executive and the Summit County Planning Commission initiated the effort to establish a plan intended to guide the County over the next twenty years, including periodic review. The Plan will create an agenda relative to economic development, growth issues and may promote preservation efforts related to open space.

The Summit County General Plan can more readily embrace those issues that are best considered on a regional scale, such as transportation, utility infrastructure, economic development, preservation of natural resources and open space. Solutions to these issues often require cooperation and collaboration among various levels of government, which is often more easily addressed from a broad countywide perspective.

Specifically, the General Plan may be utilized to:

- Direct public land use decisions
- Inform private development decisions
- Coordinate transportation issues and linkages
- Update zoning regulations
- Target capital improvement plans
- Support economic incentives
- Procure outside funding assistance

THE PLANNING PROCESS

Summit County established an advisory General Plan Steering Committee to work with the Summit County Department of Community and Economic Development Planning Division in developing the General Plan.

The Summit County Planning Commission Steering Committee, is a subcommittee of the Summit County Planning Commission, and is made up of Summit County Planning Commission members. In addition, on the Steering Committee there are representatives from the Township Association of Summit County and the Mayor's Association. The General Plan Steering Committee is also comprised of a “County Technical Advisory Committee” comprised of representatives of other County Agencies and Departments including:

- NEFCO
- AMATS
In addition, township zoning inspectors were routinely invited to the General Plan Steering Committee Meetings. Public input and evaluation are essential to the success of any planning process. The Summit County General Planning process involved many public participation elements, including Community Surveys, public meetings, newsletters, and the County website that provided information on the General Plan.

The following describes the planning process:

**Project Setup** – The first phase focused on several tasks, including organizing a main Steering Committee.

**Data Gathering and Analysis** – In the second phase existing conditions were inventoried and projections made based upon current trends. Demographic factors and land use trends were compiled.

**Visioning** - The public was brought into this process during this phase to assist in developing goals to drive the Plan. Ideas regarding the County’s future were generated by a Community Survey that was mailed out to all communities in Summit County in October 2003. In addition, a public Kick-off Meeting was held on January 16, 2004, and more surveys and opinions regarding important key County and community issues were collected at that Meeting.

**Formulate goals and objectives**: In this phase general goals and objectives were developed based on the key issues identified and input from the Steering Committee.

**Plan Development and Review**: Based on local input, the General Plan topic areas were organized into the following Sections:

- History
- Cultural/Historic Resource Preservation
- Demographics
- Housing
- Land Use
- Natural Resources
- Utilities & Storm Water Management
- Economic Development
- Transportation
- Implementation & Policy

These Plan sections were reviewed by the Steering Committee.
**Draft Plan Presentation:** The Plan has been drafted in conceptual form and presented to the general public on the County website and at Public Meetings for feedback.

**Public Participation:** There was a Public Kick-Off Meeting held for the General Plan on January 16, 2004. There was also a series of three land use meetings held in different locations with Summit County Planning staff and local governmental and planning officials the week of September 20, 2004. Various land use issues were discussed, and input was obtained for use in the Plan. A presentation on the General Plan was made to Summit County Council at their March 14, 2005 meeting. Then on March 16, 2005 a Public Meeting was held to present a summary of the first half of the General Plan that had been completed thus far. The complete Plan was presented at a Public Meeting held on March 15, 2006 and to the local Home Builders Association on March 23, 2006.

**GUIDING PRINCIPLES**
These guiding principles were developed at the outset of the planning process to guide the efforts of the General Plan Advisory Committees, and the Summit County Department of Community and Economic Development, Planning Division staff as they developed specific goals, objectives, policies, and implementation strategies.

The Summit County General Plan will:

- Provide information, dispense planning advice, and serve as the foundation for allocating regional resources.
- Provide the means to address regional issues such as natural resource preservation, economic development, and transportation.
- Coordinate, strengthen, and supplement local area plans.
- Promote efficiency and effectiveness among Summit County jurisdictions and agencies.
- Serve as a centralized source of information, with the type of facts, figures and data individual communities could use to apply for grants, update their comprehensive plans, etc.
- Act as a guide for decision makers reviewing development proposals.
- Enable all levels of government to be proactive instead of reactive.

**VISION STATEMENT**
A vision statement defines a community’s preferred future. It is broad and somewhat idealistic, but attainable. Developing such a broad vision will help Summit County residents, government officials, and business owners plan for the future by anticipating trends, addressing challenges, and focusing priorities. The vision statement identified below was developed based on data collected from the community surveys (summarized later in this chapter) and input from the Steering Committee. The vision statement directed the overall development and preparation of the General Plan.
Our Vision for Summit County in 2025 is that …

Summit County offers a high quality of life in an environment in which all our citizens may safely live, work, shop, learn, and play.

Our urban centers are healthy and energetic thanks to measures that allow a mix of land uses, encourage revitalization and redevelopment, and preserve Historic and cultural resources.

Our suburban and rural residential areas offer a variety of housing options that meet the needs of all Summit County residents, including first-time homebuyers, empty nesters and seniors.

Our tax base is strong and diversified due to measures designed to promote the retention and recruitment of responsible, productive business and industry.

Protecting our shared natural resources is a priority throughout the county, with environmentally sensitive measures that preserve green space, conserve farmland, protect water quality, reduce the impacts of development, and minimize residential sprawl.

Summit County has created a beautiful, countywide open space emerald network, comprised of connected trail systems and greenways, which provides recreation and tourism opportunities, a biking transportation network, and quality wildlife habitat.
COMMUNITY SURVEY
In October 2003 the Summit County Planning Commission sent a community survey to each township, village, and city to gather opinions and identify key issues in the various Summit County jurisdictions. Five surveys were mailed to government officials in each community, with the goal of getting at least one representative response from each jurisdiction. Out of 32 Summit County communities, 27 (84%) responded to the Community Survey.

The following is a description of the results of the Summit County Community Survey. For certain planning analyses, the County is grouped into North, Central, and South divisions.

NORTH
Boston Heights Village
Boston Twp
Hudson
Macedonia
Northfield Center Twp
Northfield Village
Peninsula Village
Reminderville Village
Richfield Twp
Richfield Village
Sagamore Hills Twp
Twinsburg
Twinsburg Twp

CENTRAL
Akron
Bath Twp
Copley Twp
Cuyahoga Falls
Fairlawn
Munroe Falls
Silver Lake Village
Stow
Tallmadge

SOUTH
Barberton
Clinton Village
Coventry Twp
New Franklin
Green
Lakemore Village
Mogadore Village
Norton
Springfield Twp
This Survey was divided into two parts: the first part of the Survey asked the respondent to answer the question from a countywide basis; the second part of the Survey asked them to answer the questions as they applied to “your community.”

Chart 1. Illustrates the results of the survey question, what priority should each of the following issues have in maintaining and improving the future quality of life in Summit County? See Chart 1. below.

The highest priority issues included:

- Controlling traffic congestion
- Preserving open space
- Promoting well-planned subdivisions
- Providing water/sewer services
- Providing parks/recreation opportunities and
- Controlling urban sprawl

Controlling traffic congestion was ranked as having the highest priority in terms of maintaining and improving the future quality of life in Summit County. Seventy two percent (72%) of those responding felt that traffic congestion was a problem.

- More townships than cities/villages considered traffic to be an issue.
- Communities in the central and south planning areas were more likely to see traffic congestion as a problem.
The respondents were asked to indicate the priority or importance of each of the following alternatives/solutions (see Chart 2. below). “Improving existing roads” had the highest priority in terms of traffic congestion solutions.

Chart 2.

**Alternatives/Solutions to TrafficCongestion**

- **Improve existing roads**
- **Build new sidewalks/trails**
- **Build new roads**
- **Public transportation**

Survey questions asked respondents to rank the importance of some economic development policy options, both from the perspective of Summit County (triangle) and in their individual communities (square.) See Chart 3. below that illustrates the survey results pertaining to the Economic Development Policy Options questions.
As Chart 3 above illustrates, retaining and expanding existing businesses was the preferred economic development policy at both the county and local level, while revitalizing existing retail areas came in a close second.

Chart 4. Local Community Priorities
Chart 4 indicates that preservation of open space was overwhelmingly important no matter how the responses were analyzed. Townships and cities, and communities north and south all considered this a significant issue.

Chart 5.

### Community Housing Policies

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<th>Not Important</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>Very Important</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cluster/open space dvlpt</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variety of housing types</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low density/large (2+ ac) lots</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not encouraging more</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher density/small lots</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
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The chart above illustrates the results of a question, which listed various housing policies and asked the respondent to indicate the importance of each in their community on a scale of very important (3) to not important (0).

- Although the average importance ranked only 1.6 out of 3.0, cluster/open space development was the most agreed upon policy option across all respondents.
- Townships favored larger lots and low density, while cities/villages favored the cluster/open space approach.

**Community Positives and Negatives**

There was a question on the Community Survey that asked respondents to identify the top 4 “likes” and “dislikes” about their individual communities. Although not all of the features listed apply to each and every community, they were stated often enough to provide a good idea of what is and is not appreciated.

The most commonly identified positive features of Summit County communities included:

- Natural areas and open spaces
- Parks and recreational opportunities & programs
- A sense of community
- Rural atmosphere, where it currently exists
- Community character
- Good schools
- A small-town atmosphere

On the other hand, the most commonly stated negatives about Summit County communities included:

- Traffic congestion and access issues
- Limited water & sewer
- Poor property maintenance and lack of enforcement
- Limited or insufficient tax base
- Reluctance of residents to accept change and development

**Future Vision**

In addition to providing space for a descriptive vision statement to be written, respondents were asked to choose whether they thought their community should be rural, suburban or urban in character 20 years from now. When mapped, the responses show a solid urban core for the county (with the city of Akron at the center) surrounded by suburban communities. “Rural” communities are clustered primarily around the Cuyahoga Valley National Park, and in the southernmost portion of the county.

Communities without a color designation did not respond to the question.
Question 26B: "in 20 years, what would you like your community to be? (Note: communities not shaded did not answer)
Included in the Community Survey was a Visioning Question, which asked the respondent if you could control future events, what would your community be like in 20 years?

Common themes included the desire for:

- A community center or focal point
- Balanced development
- Preserved natural areas

**Community Survey: Key Issues Summary**
The survey questions asked for a lot of opinions and information. The following is a list of key issues and concerns that were repeatedly raised:

- Preserve open space and existing natural areas
- Address environmental concerns in general, through stormwater management, riparian setbacks, and greenway connections
- Increase effectiveness of economic development to balance the tax base burden. Retention and expansion of existing businesses, and revitalization of existing downtowns, town centers and other shopping areas were emphasized
- Control growth and reduce sprawl
- Reduce traffic congestion
- Improve partnerships and cooperation between communities

**Smart Growth**

**What is Smart Growth?**
Smart Growth recognizes connections between development and quality of life and leverages new growth to improve the community. The features that distinguish smart growth in a community vary from place to place, but in general, smart growth invests time, attention, and resources in restoring community and vitality to center cities and older suburbs. New smart growth is more town-centered, is transit and pedestrian oriented, and has a greater mix of housing, commercial, and retail uses. It also preserves open space and other environmental amenities.

Smart Growth is development that serves the economy, community, and the environment. Although there is no “one-size-fits-all” solution, successful communities do tend to have one thing in common: a vision of where they want to go and of what things they value in their community. Their plans for development reflect these values. This is Smart Growth.

Smart Growth is an umbrella term for a set of principles and tools that communities can use to direct growth they way they want. Smart Growth is part of a broad movement embraced by the National Realtors Association, the National Home Builders Association, the National...
Association of Counties, the United States Conference of Mayors, and by a number of private organizations across the country.

County health departments around the country have acknowledged the relationship between sprawling land use patterns and increased obesity rates. There have been a number of health studies to show that people living in places marked by sprawling development are likely to walk less and weigh more than people who live in less sprawling communities. Studies have shown that people living in sprawling areas drive more, while people living in compact communities are more likely to walk.¹

The United States is facing a health crisis of epidemic proportions. Physical inactivity combined with overeating has made us a nation of fat, out-of-shape people. The incidence of overweight or obese adults increased steadily from 47 percent in 1976, to 56 percent in 1994, and 61 percent in 1999. The prevalence of overweight children and adolescents almost doubled during the same period. Physical inactivity and obesity rank second to smoking in their contribution to total mortality in the United States.²

There are many options for creating more healthy communities; many of these options are also similar to Smart Growth principles. Community leaders looking to reshape their communities to make it easier to walk and bicycle have many options. They can create more walkable communities by creating mixed use districts, increasing development densities in certain areas, requiring sidewalks and trails in new developments, retrofitting already developed areas with sidewalks, trails and bike paths, instituting traffic calming measures, linking open space, and requiring street connectivity.

There are numerous changes that can be made to zoning and subdivision regulations to create neighborhoods where residents have more opportunities to be active. One is to revise ordinances to permit New Urbanist or traditional neighborhood developments, and to permit mixed use zoning districts.

**Ten Principles of Smart Growth**

The Smart Growth Network, an organization formed in 1996 by a number of organizations including the State of Maryland, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and the National Association of Realtors, identifies the following ten principles as a framework for smart growth discussion and action:

1. **Create Range of Housing Opportunities and Choices**
   Providing quality housing for people of all income levels is an integral component in any smart growth strategy.

2. **Create Walkable Neighborhoods**

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¹ Smart Growth America, Measuring the Health Effects of Sprawl, [http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org/health](http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org/health)
³ This information in this section is from the Smart Growth Network, see [www.smartgrowth.org](http://www.smartgrowth.org).
Walkable communities are desirable places to live, work, learn, worship, and play, and therefore a key component of smart growth.

3. **Encourage Community and Stakeholder Collaboration**
Growth can create great places to live, work, and play – if it responds to a community’s own sense of how and where it wants to grow.

4. **Foster Distinctive, Attractive Communities with a Strong Sense of Place**
Smart growth encourages communities to craft a vision and set standards for development and construction, which respond to community values of architectural beauty and distinctiveness, as well as expanded choices in housing and transportation.

5. **Make Development Decisions Predictable, Fair, and Cost Effective**
For a community to be successful in implementing smart growth, it must be embraced by the private sector.

6. **Mix Land Uses**
Smart growth supports the integration of mixed land uses into communities as a critical component of achieving better places to live.

7. **Preserve Open Space, Farmland, Natural Beauty, and Critical Environmental Areas**
Open space preservation supports smart growth goals by bolstering local economies, preserving critical environmental areas, improving our communities’ quality of life, and guiding new growth into existing communities.

8. **Provide a Variety of Transportation Choices**
Providing people with more choices in housing, shopping, communities, and transportation is a key aim of smart growth.

9. **Strengthen and Direct Development Towards Existing Communities**
Smart growth directs development towards existing communities already served by infrastructure, seeking to utilize the resources that existing neighborhoods offer, and conserve open space and irreplaceable natural resources on the urban fringe.

10. **Take Advantage of Compact Building Design**
Smart growth provides a means for communities to incorporate a more compact building design as an alternative to conventional, land consumptive development.

Every individual community, county and state has smart growth responsibility - we cannot wait for the “other guy” to address issues that affect our quality of life. The principles of smart growth support the vision identified in this Summit County General Plan, and address key planning and development issues important to Summit County. Therefore, the Summit County Planning Commission Steering Committee has adopted the ten principles of smart growth as a planning framework for developing more specific goals, objectives, and implementation strategies in the Plan. Each chapter in the Plan will address and incorporate the principles of smart growth relevant to the planning issues.