

**Introduction**

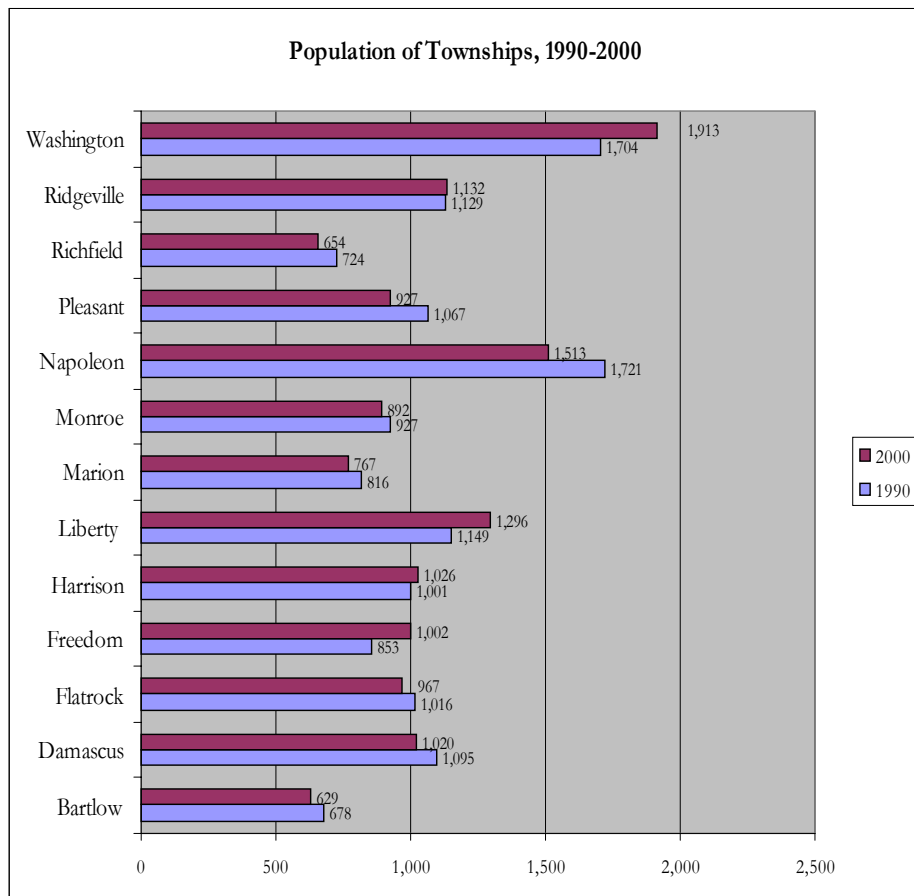
Henry County was established in 1820, but not officially in the state legislature until 1834. The county, named after statesman Patrick Henry, originally encompassed what is now Fulton County, as well as consisting of parts of Lucas and Defiance Counties. Until 1824, the first few settlements of Napoleon, Flat Rock, and Damascus were legally attached to Wood County, and from 1824 to 1834 to Williams County. However, during this time, the overall settlement of Henry County was regarded as uninhabitable due to the extreme swampy conditions that made travel and the development of transportation systems nearly impossible. Napoleon became the official county seat in 1834.



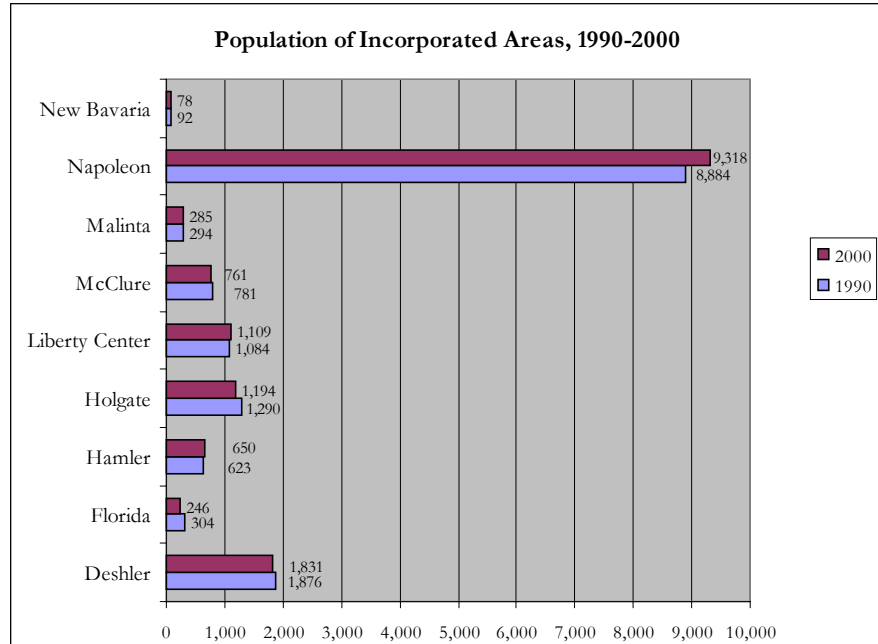
Growth and development throughout Henry County is largely attributed to the development of the Miami and Erie Canal. Construction of the canal began in 1837 and was officially open for traffic and use in 1843. Nevertheless, the agglomeration of settlers into Henry County came largely due to the artificial drainage by ditches and tile of the Black Swamp region.

Today, Henry County is comprised of 13 townships, eight villages, one city, and ten or more unincorporated areas with names such as Ridgeville Corners, Gerald, Colton, Texas, Okolona, Grelton, Elery, Westhope, Standley, and Pleasant Bend, and has a current population of 29,210.

Growth trends in the county since 1990 indicate that residents preferred living in rural townships, most predominately the townships of Freedom, Liberty, Washington, Harrison, and Ridgeville rather



than in more developed villages and Napoleon. Freedom Township witnessed an increase in population by 17.5%; Liberty Township, 12.8%; Washington Township, 12.3%; and Harrison Township by 2.5%. Ridgeville Township grew marginally by a net of 3 new residents. All of this new rural agglomeration has occurred in Henry County's northernmost townships located near US 24 & US 6 and other major rural major collectors, and thus was a major factor in designing



“concept areas” highlighted in the Land Use chapter. For a full index of maps contained within this Plan, please see **Appendix A: Comprehensive Plan Map Index**

There are a variety of reasons for these residential migration patterns such as cheaper land costs, location, less taxes, more open space, and less congestion. Another reason may be the general lack of available land and building opportunities in several of the county’s municipalities.

Of the established municipalities in the county, only three- Napoleon, Liberty Center, and Hamler- witnessed an influx of new residents since 1990. Napoleon increased in population 4.9%; Hamler by 4.3%; and Liberty Center by 2.3%.

On January 9, 2003, the Henry County Regional Water and Sewer District was officially created and will soon be in use as a tool by which to promote safe and well-rounded growth.

**Purpose of the Plan**

The comprehensive plan is an element of Henry County’s development regulations. It envisions land use ten years or so into the future, and provides a policy framework to manage growth and development during that period. The comprehensive plan does not show sufficient detail to permit strict adherence to its land use recommendations and the associated requirements (it is not intended to be a site plan). The plan is meant as a guide to assist county officials, local governments, developers, and citizens with decisions about the future. It establishes countywide goals and recommends objectives and policies to achieve those goals. It sets policy direction, which will help direct development, against which development proposals may also be measured.

The plan is intended as a guide for land use decisions such as requests to change zoning classifications and utilize community and man-made resources. Any rezoning request or development proposal should be evaluated for conformity with the goals and policies of the plan. Should changes in zoning be proposed, the rezoning should be in accord with the goals, objectives

and policies of the comprehensive plan. This may mean that amendments to the plan will need to be considered.

Any zoning change or land use proposal that is not consistent with the goals and policies of the comprehensive plan should trigger a mechanism to set in motion a procedure to consider amending the comprehensive plan, or provide reasons to deny a request. This will assure that any change to the land use provisions of the plan are given due consideration prior to or at the same time as the review of the specific rezoning or development proposal. The Henry County Planning Commission should review and act upon the comprehensive plan amendment prior to or simultaneously as the specific rezoning or development proposal is being acted upon.

### **General Amendment Process**

Two (2) general types of plan amendments are necessary to maintain the comprehensive plan as an effective guide to development.

***Minor modifications*** to the comprehensive plan would be changes primarily to the Land Use section that do not bring new land use classifications to the area and are just an extension of an existing one. These modifications will generally be triggered by a rezoning request and are to be reviewed during the rezoning process. Approval shall be based on the Planning Commission<sup>1</sup> and the local jurisdiction's determination that the modification(s) are not in conflict with the intent, goals, objectives and policies of the plan, and are consistent with the local jurisdiction's vision. These modifications will be evaluated and acted upon during the rezoning process.

*General Process* - The Planning Commission's staff receives a rezoning request, staff submits a report and makes a recommendation to the Planning Commission. Planning commission official takes action to modify or not modify the Land Use section based on the final approval of the township. Planning Commission takes action to approve or deny rezoning request.

***Major modifications*** to the comprehensive plan would be the addition of a new land use to an area, a change to a local comprehensive plan, the provision of public utilities (water and waste water collection) beyond the identified urban service boundary, or a major increase to an existing land use that could impact adjoining areas. A major modification requires the re-evaluation of the plan's intent, goals, objectives, and policies.

*General Process* - The Planning Commission's staff receives a rezoning request, development proposal, utility extension or new information. Staff studies the request, submits a report and makes a recommendation to the Planning Commission. Planning commission takes action to modify or not modify the comprehensive plan based on the final action. If the major modification involves a change to a local comprehensive plan – then the local community shall go through the amendment process before it goes to the Planning Commission. If it is a rezoning then the Planning Commission approves or denies the rezoning request.

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<sup>1</sup> The Planning Commission has no binding authority to approve or deny zoning recommendations, only to make recommendations to the local jurisdictions.

When considering rezoning and development proposals the Planning Commission should consider all relevant sections of the comprehensive plan. To facilitate the Planning Commission's approval process, and provide consistency when reviewing rezoning and development proposals, a check list is being provided to ensure conformance to the Plan.

### **Monitoring and Evaluation**

The comprehensive plan provides principles for achieving a planned future, and it establishes this desired future state.

The concept of monitoring progress towards the desired future and evaluating tools for implementation are integral to this process. A well-designed monitoring and evaluation program can help the Planning Commission, member jurisdictions, and citizens understand both progress and setbacks in achieving the plan's goals. More importantly, the program can direct staff and decision makers toward revisions of the plan and more effective ways of obtaining desired goals, objectives, and policies. Most importantly, the monitoring program can provide citizens with the means to hold the local government accountable for the actions it takes to achieve the county's future. Developing a meaningful monitoring and evaluation program is an important plan implementation tool in itself and should have high priority among the many action items necessary to implement the plan.

The monitoring and evaluation program should focus on the key indicators, the plan's goals, objectives, and policies, and they could expand over time if needed. Each indicator should be analyzed by the following characteristics:

1. Readily available and accurate data;
2. Be measurable over time, annually;
3. Provide meaningful information relating to the Update;
4. Be sensitive to change; and
5. Be easily interpreted.

Over time, additional comprehensive plan supplements, map amendments, and urban service boundary adjustments may need to be adopted. In particular, the adoption of supplements and amendments to urban service or municipal boundaries and the land use map should include community input, and be considered by the Planning Commission at any time.

The results of monitoring and evaluation should be presented annually to the Planning Commission for their information. The annual monitoring and evaluation report should include proposed changes to the plan's goals, objectives, and policies. Review of the report and consideration of proposed plan amendments should include citizen input also. These changes to plan policy and revisions to the plan should be considered as part of an annual plan review process in order to promote the viability of the comprehensive plan and the county planning process.

Periodically, the Planning Commission should conduct a major review of the Plan's themes, principles, and strategies. The timing of this major review effort is dependent upon the rapidity of changes in the County.

### Implementation

The comprehensive plan is not self-enforcing. Once the comprehensive plan is officially adopted, steps must be taken to carry it out. There is a wide range of implementation mechanisms to achieve the plan's goals, objectives, and policies. Most of these mechanisms are already in place for incorporated areas and the unincorporated areas of the County. The implementation mechanisms include zoning ordinance/resolutions, floodplain and flood hazard regulations, subdivision regulations, urban service boundaries (if any exist), other land development regulations, natural hazard mitigation plan, building codes, capital improvement programs, land acquisition, use and conservation easements, land use plans and maps, eminent domain, and nuisance laws. The potential complementary role of private investment actions (e.g. easements, deed restrictions, and plat covenants and restrictions) in furthering plan objectives is essential if the plan is to be realized.

The role of the Planning Commission's staff is to provide sound administration, coordination, and communication on a continuing basis, which cannot be over emphasized. Once the comprehensive plan is adopted, some of the existing development regulations may need to be modified in order to help carry out some of the stated goals, objectives, and policies. Other items and studies that should be considered in the future include, but are not limited to:

1. The City of Napoleon, villages and townships within Henry County are encouraged to expand upon this initial Plan and develop a detailed comprehensive plan for their jurisdictions. These plans need not to be as "comprehensive" in scope and could focus on special areas such as land use, economic development, housing, and infrastructure.
2. Zoning resolutions should be amended and modified to implement goals, objectives, and policies for:
  - a. Agricultural preservation;
  - b. Rural residential development;
  - c. The promotion of economic development;
  - d. Floodplain management; and
  - e. Planned unit and other "conservation" development techniques.
3. Existing utility extension policies need to consider the available water supply, as there is not an unlimited supply of ground water. With the amount of physical growth taking place in the County, it is recommended that water resources and water quality planning for Henry County should be performed within a watershed framework, evaluating the inter-relationship of surface and groundwater within the watershed.
4. Update the Thoroughfare Plan and develop an Access Management Plan.
5. Further detailed study of the U.S. 24 corridor and hazardous traffic/accident areas.
6. Impacts of public rural water being extended in the unincorporated areas of the county<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> The recent creation of a Regional Water and Sewer District should assist the promotion of this concern.

7. Future designation of open space and active recreational sites in the County.

### **Comprehensive Plan Advisory Board and Public Input**

The planning process by which this Comprehensive Plan was developed involved several layers of public input and oversight. The comprehensive plan was developed under the guidance of an advisory board comprised of public and private representatives and county planning commission members.

The following Henry County Comprehensive Plan Advisory Board Members were the following:

- ✓ Mr. Steve Baden, Henry County Commissioner (and past Mayor of the Village of Hamler)
- ✓ Mrs. Ida Bostelman, Henry County Auditor
- ✓ Mr. Brent Damman, Napoleon Zoning and Building Official
- ✓ Mr. Phil Flavin, Henry County Community Improvement Corporation
- ✓ Mr. Bill Glanz, Liberty Township Zoning Commission
- ✓ Mr. Ed Hoeffel, Napoleon Township Trustee
- ✓ Mr. Phil Parsons, Tricounty Rural Electric Cooperative
- ✓ Mr. Tim Schumm, P.E., Henry County Planning Commission
- ✓ Mr. Lenny Sonnenberg, Henry County Engineer's Office
- ✓ Mr. Tom Wiggins, AICP, Henry County Planning Commission

The public input process included the use of random sample surveys. One survey was mailed to a random sample of county residents in January 2002, while the primary audience of the second survey focused on township and county officials. The results of the two surveys provided unique results that often mirrored each other, yet had some notable differences. These survey results, in addition to advice provided by the diverse comprehensive plan advisory board, set a base by which this plan was developed. The highlights of these survey tools are addressed in this specific Plan component. Please see the community survey chapter and the appendices for more information concerning the completed results of this survey.