

Harlem Township issues new strategic plan

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Westerville Estates is a mobile home community in Harlem Township.

Gary Budzak | The Gazette

GALENA — Harlem Township's Strategic Planning Committee has issued a "Quick Strategy Guide" to plan for the future.

With the imminent construction of Intel in Jersey Township (Licking County) and other potential growth nearby in the form of sewer lines and annexation, Harlem residents have stated they want to retain as much of their rural character as possible. The township's most recent comprehensive plan expresses similar sentiments.

The 134-page Strategy Guide was prepared by Crossroads Community Planning, LLC and adopted by the committee, including revisions based on comments last month from the Harlem Township Zoning Commission. It was presented at a zoning public hearing on Feb. 16.

The guide starts with a "SWOT analysis" — strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to the township. Next, the planners wrote about what they learned from another rural community who had welcomed the high-tech giant.

Chandler, Arizona, had rapid development within seven years of its Intel plant being built.

The plan also included Liberty Township and Canal Winchester as case studies in a chapter called "What happens if we do nothing?"

That section concludes that Harlem should "select certain areas and permit acceptable development."

It also noted that using local referendums “as a tool to prevent denser development is likely to fail in the long run.”

Therefore, recommendations were made to the township in three areas: infrastructure, land use, zoning, development tools; communications; administrative capacity.

In the first area, the guide gave the following recommendations:

- Add zoning districts that align with the township's vision while allowing land uses and densities required to support the incoming sewers.
- Pair new zoning districts with economic development tools to help reduce the likelihood of annexation and increase funding for township services, infrastructure improvements and long-term maintenance.
- Collaborate with governmental partners, developers and landowners.
- Create programs to promote long-term preservation of key parcels.
- Create east-west road connection to support increased traffic from additional housing development and workforce commutes to Intel from both Harlem Township and adjacent areas.
- Require regional stormwater detention or mitigation.

For communications, Crossroads recommended:

- Utilize multiple communication channels to disseminate information to ensure residents are well-informed of township activities.
- Eliminate duplicate Facebook pages.
- Create other social media accounts.
- Create distribution lists to easily disseminate information to residents via US Mail and electronically.
- Create a monthly newsletter to inform residents of township activities.

Finally, in administration, the guide recommended:

- Hire a director of Planning and Development.
- Create subcommittees to address administrative services in the short-term.
- Complete five-year forecast of township revenues and costs.

The planners conclude that development cannot be completely stopped within the township.

“Should Harlem try to prevent development, this will likely result in expensive lawsuits and developers annexing properties into the nearby growing cities of Columbus and New Albany and the Village of Galena,” the guide states. “This would have the double-negative effect of allowing development while Harlem Township loses control over development and receives none of the tax revenue.

“Instead, Harlem Township should become open to development on its own terms,” the guide continued. “If development cannot be prevented, it certainly can be guided, regulated and made to fit into the character of the community, and the land and tax base it generates can remain in Harlem Township. This will involve a number of strategies that will combine development, preservation and strategic partnerships.”