

Community Facilities & Services



IV. Community Facilities & Services

A snapshot of comments from Sidney Survey Respondents:

"The leaders in this community need to support each other's organizations and activities. We have a lot of caring and talented people in our city and we could achieve a lot more by working for the greater good"

"I would improve the school. If we don't have a good solid school foundation we won't have a good community."

"We need more to do in this town so we're not constantly driving 30+miles one way to do that! I do love Tawawa Park and Canal Feeder Trail. I would like to see it connect to Port and Lockington in the near future"

"Our community needs something to work toward as a common goal. Our schools would benefit greatly from a community-bonding trend, outside of a winning sports team!"

Introduction

This chapter of the Comprehensive Plan highlights the types and extent of services available to City residents and businesses and provides strategies for improvement.

The City of Sidney supports a variety of community facilities and provides a range of services to protect and enhance the residents' health, safety and general welfare. Community facilities and services play an important role in defining and supporting the City's quality of life. These facilities are important to educating our children, recreation, public safety and health.

The Community Facilities and Services Plan focuses on improving the City's existing facility network and services. Even if these services are deemed sufficient for the needs of the current population, future development and a change in community demographics may increase the demand to upgrade, expand, or create the services and facilities necessary to attract and retain residents.

Sidney officials should continue to ensure a level of communication exists that helps to reduce redundancy and promote the most effective use of resources.

Planning Conditions

Based on the community survey results, it appears that residents are satisfied with most City services, with the exception of youth, teen and senior recreation programs, additional pedestrian connectivity elements, and the availability of additional retail shopping, dining and entertainment opportunities (See Chapter: *Public Participation*). Predicting future population growth (or decline) and understanding demographic trending is crucial for planning the expansion of community services and facilities. Attracting and retaining residents in the future will be based on delivering these preferred services at the most effective price point, as well as having an effective school district.

The planning issues raised by the community focused on the generally outstanding community facilities found in Sidney, with outstanding parks facilities in the forefront.

Parks and Recreation

Parks and recreation areas are a strong resource for the City's residents. The City parks system contains 25 park and recreation areas totaling 422 acres.

The City has an outstanding parks system, which provides good geographic coverage for most residents. A Parks and Recreation Master Plan was updated in 2008, but since that time additional public desires have emerged that should be addressed.

Sidney's parkland standard has traditionally been one neighborhood park within one-quarter to one-half mile of each residence, and mandatory land dedication requirements were developed to include qualitative standards. These standards have helped to expand the City parks to include an inventory that may be burdensome to sufficiently maintain in the future, especially if the additional efforts are taken to address the current desires of residents to expand pedestrian connectivity linkages and open up the riverfront.



Police

Sidney's police force is comprised of 38 full time officers. The Sidney Narcotics Task Force is an organized unit of two detectives formed from the Sidney Police Department that are committed to fighting against crimes of drug trafficking and drug abuse. The investigators are trained in narcotic investigative tactics and work in conjunction with area police departments like the City of Piqua, the Ohio State Patrol and other departments to share information and resources to help reduce the effects of drug abuse and trafficking in the City of Sidney. The department keeps an active online survey open to solicit better methods to make the community safer.

Fire and EMS

The need for a City fire station in Sidney's north end has been a planning issue that was identified in the previous Comprehensive Plan update. After significant due diligence, city officials acquired land in 2016 to build its third fire station but need to address additional planning and funding issues before moving forward with construction and staffing.

Teen Center

Numerous residents and high school students expressed a desire for additional teen programming to meet the educational and recreational needs of this special population. These programs would provide teens with alternatives to otherwise nonproductive activities. It is recommended that City officials could continue to move this issue forward, working with the Sidney School District, Gateway Youth, the Salvation Army and the YMCA.

Senior Center of Sidney Shelby County

The Monarch Community Center (304 South West Avenue) is home to the Senior Center of Sidney-Shelby County. Its mission is to provide older adults

with caring and quality services towards the continued enhancement of health, education, recreation and socialization. The Senior Center has witnessed a 78 percent increase since 2002 and now has over 900 members.

Raise the Roof for the Arts

Raise the Roof for the Arts is a local non-profit organization that owns and operates the Historic Sidney Theatre. Not only do they provide a home for local arts organizations but they also plan and organize quality cultural, arts and educational experiences that benefit the Sidney/Shelby County community and beyond. They are currently overseeing the \$3.5 million dollar renovation of the theatre. It is anticipated that the theatre will be fully renovated in 2018 and be the only venue of its kind within a 20 mile radius providing diverse quality cultural arts experiences such as live performances, concerts, classic film series, corporate events/ workshops and many other community events.

Gateway Arts Council

The Gateway Arts Council is a growing organization and provides an array of services to the public. The

Council serves all residents of Shelby County. The Council receives minimal funding from the City and County, and is primarily privately funded through an annual campaign. The Council completed a master planning effort in 1999 to determine facility and other future needs.

Historic Preservation

The Historical Society is an active community organization. Currently, it owns one structure and a museum. The downtown in particular is considered to have a very good collection of historic structures worthy of preservation. The People's Federal Savings and Loan designed by Louis Sullivan, Shelby County Courthouse and the Monumental Building are outstanding architectural examples that should be preserved and enhanced.

Sidney City Schools

A majority of the City of Sidney is located within the boundaries of the Sidney City School District, however the eastern portion of the City extends into the Fairlawn Local School District and a portion of the City extends to the west into the Hardin-Houston Local School District.

Many residents indicated during the planning process that the Sidney City Schools were doing a good job educating children, but had several shortcomings such as inadequate facilities like the elementary schools and the failure to pass levies. It was noted, the quality of educational facilities affects the quality of the teaching environment. Some facilities in particular were thought not to be handicap accessible.

Strategies

The planning stakeholders selected the following strategies for implementation:

1) Implement and Update the City's Parks & Recreation Master Plan

The City updated its park and recreation plan in 2008 which focused on a number of physical improvements to existing park sites. Since then, city residents, through this plan update process, have requested additional facilities. It is recommended that City officials could work to implement the strategies of the 2008 Sidney Parks and Recreation Master Plan, most specifically:

- Utilizing the Miami River and the Miami-Erie Feeder Canal corridors as the primary walkway/bikeway linkage through the City. Encourage park development along this corridor.
- Expanding the walkway/bikeway system throughout the City linking residential neighborhoods and parks.
- Improving recreational programming and develop a long-range plan to improve indoor recreation and year round activities by collaborating with the YMCA, local schools, Salvation Army, and others for expansion of multi-purpose recreation options.
- Maintaining and expanding cooperation and partnering with other local agencies.
- Updating park standards to use as a guideline for future park development.
- Updating the parkland dedication requirements of the City.
- Aggressively identify potential funding sources and developing public / private partnerships.

By updating the parks master plan, officials will be able to better address issues such as:

- Linking the community and Tawawa Park to the Great Miami River Trail, a goal that was expressed by many residents during the planning process. The Plan update should include an updated discussion on pedestrian connectivity and trail design guidelines. These guidelines could include sidewalks, separated bike and pedestrian paths and trails, location and development of trailheads and an on-street bike path system.
- Improve visibility and access to certain neighborhood parks. Establishing linkages via signage, bike lanes, and other pedestrian connectivity methods to the parks would help to enhance the value of many of Sidney's neighborhoods. Also, as new neighborhoods develop well defined, logical pedestrian connections should be made. All of these new connections should be separated from traffic to ensure public safety.
- Revisiting the City's parkland dedication requirements in the zoning ordinance. These requirements allow the planning commission to determine when additional park resources are required from a developer, either by dedicating a portion of land (for future parks) and/or pay a fee in lieu of land dedication. Because the existing

footprint of parks is deemed sufficient, fee in lieu of land dedication may be more appropriate.

- Expanding recreation activities and programs to youth, teens and seniors, especially during the summer, winter, and after-school. The additional programming activities, especially for teens, are crucial to the quality of life of the City.

2) Encourage community-based policing and neighborhood watch programs

Like many other communities in the Midwest, the City of Sidney has witnessed its share of the heroin problem, assisted by the fact that nearby Dayton, Ohio remains one of worst places in America for heroin deaths. Law enforcement officers are seeing similar problems along I-70 and I-75 through the Miami Valley. The heroin epidemic has affected the County tremendously, and Children Services reports that 60% of children removed from homes are removed because of heroin addiction by the parents.

To address the noticeable heroin situation in selected areas of Sidney, it is recommended that City officials could expand community-based policing (such as “beat cop” teams for high risk areas) and continue to expand

anti-drug efforts. Aggressive efforts should be taken to develop neighborhood watch programs with local neighborhood associations and groups. Special efforts should be made downtown, including enhanced policing, plus streetscape improvements that provide a sense of security.

City officials could also explore regional and local partnerships for the delivery of other community services as well, to include neighborhood watch programs. Neighborhood watch programs should also be expanded where requested by individual neighborhoods.

3) Address public / safety service needs of newer growth areas

It is recommended that City officials could continue to pursue the feasibility of the third fire station to accommodate growth and improve response times to areas north of Russell Road. Response time studies indicate that without this station, the Fire/EMS department has difficulty responding to calls in many areas north of Russell Road within acceptable time standards.

Over the past several years, the City has established the need for a north end fire station, and has formalized site recommendations and the acquisition of land located off Wapakoneta Avenue and Hoewisher Road.

Before developing this new facility, city officials should pursue additional discussions as to how to get the maximum public use from the new site in a manner than helps to reduce operational costs.

4) Continue to foster partnerships between the City, surrounding jurisdictions and public and private organizations

Sidney should continue to embrace a level of communication in which they are knowledgeable with the current needs, trends, and issues of the YMCA, school district, library, and similar service providers in contiguous and nearby communities. Another potential partnership discussed by residents would bringing institutions of higher learning with a regional presence closer to Sidney residents by developing arrangements with area institutions like Edison State Community College. This endeavor could occur through the mutual sharing of space or resources, or by the City providing space for these institutions to teach classes.

Recreational programming and the development of recreation programs can be controversial. However, if developed properly, programs can be developed that spike the interests of every resident. To do so, it is important to engage in an active recreation (and arts-related) planning process that assesses needs that are based in demographics as well as interests, as the two are often different and conflicting. Beginning this process with the local YMCA staff, high school students, and seniors is recommended. It is also, recommended to include would be arts-related groups.

To this end, it may be valuable to reinvigorate the discussion on a regional approach to parks and recreation with the creation of a county-wide park district or a joint recreation district using school district boundaries. The creation of a recreation district could use funds from the passing of levies for financial support for various projects and programs like new



youth and senior programs.

5) Pursue additional recreational facilities funding avenues.

Citizens have expressed a desire for additional recreational opportunities including improved pedestrian connectivity, bike lanes, a “face-lift” to some existing parks, and additional programming for youth, teens, and seniors. Also, the residents in the Stewart Subdivision have even expressed an interest for the city to build a small neighborhood park in their subdivision, as the closure of Peerless Park in 2006 left them without a close recreational outlet.



6) Continue to maintain quality and cost-effective safety services.

As Sidney's population ages or continues to expand north, the public and safety services departments could be hard pressed to maintain optimal response times. This is evident in several response rate studies conducted on behalf of the fire department. To maintain proper and safe response times, the City's

safety service providers should continue to discuss how to best maintain and stabilize response times while retaining the same high-quality level of service.

Safety services and the public service/utilities departments should continue to be part of growth-related discussions. Continued growth of housing and businesses in certain areas in the City are likely to make construction of replacement and/or additional facilities necessary for effective safety and utility services.

7) Continue to communicate to residents the how their tax dollars are being spent in the community and a discussion on how projects are funded.

Further efforts should be made to communicate the impact of the City's tax and credit rates on its ability to deliver community services at a level expected by Sidney's residents. The City's relatively low income tax rates translate directly into lower revenue stream and an inability to meet the demand for services.