



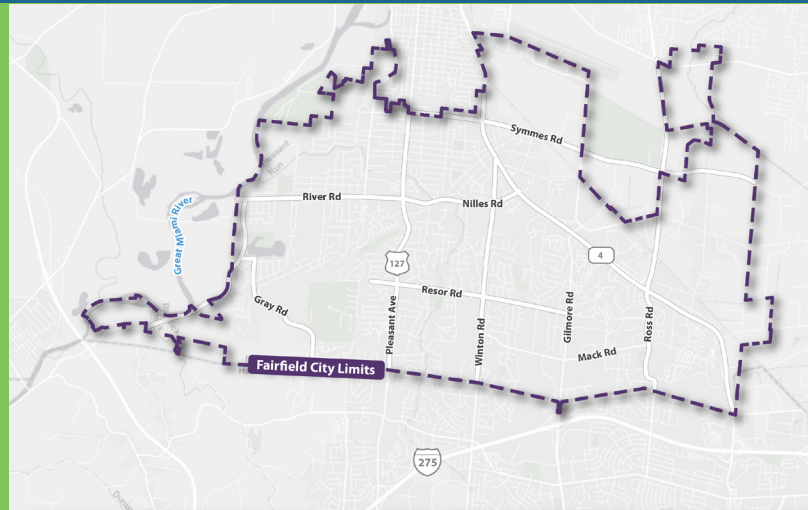
# FAIRFIELD FORWARD

CITY OF FAIRFIELD COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

## Executive Summary

The City of Fairfield has long enjoyed its position as a quality, well-balanced community located just north of I-275, about 20 miles from Cincinnati. With its regional convenience and small-town charm, Fairfield continues to attract residents, visitors, and businesses to the area. As a result of this growth, 87.3 percent of the 20.85-square-mile total area has been developed, leaving minimal remaining land for new development. **Fairfield Forward provides a critical, strategic framework for future growth and community resources** to ensure a high quality of life can be sustained for years to come.

This dynamic, policy level document establishes a collective vision, goals, policies, and strategies to make future land use, zoning, and capital investment decisions in a reasonable and fiscally responsible manner. It should be used by city staff, elected and appointed officials to guide day-to-day decision making and to offer insight to community members, businesses, and developers on the direction of the city moving forward. For more information on how to use this plan, see page 9.



City of Fairfield

## VISION STATEMENT

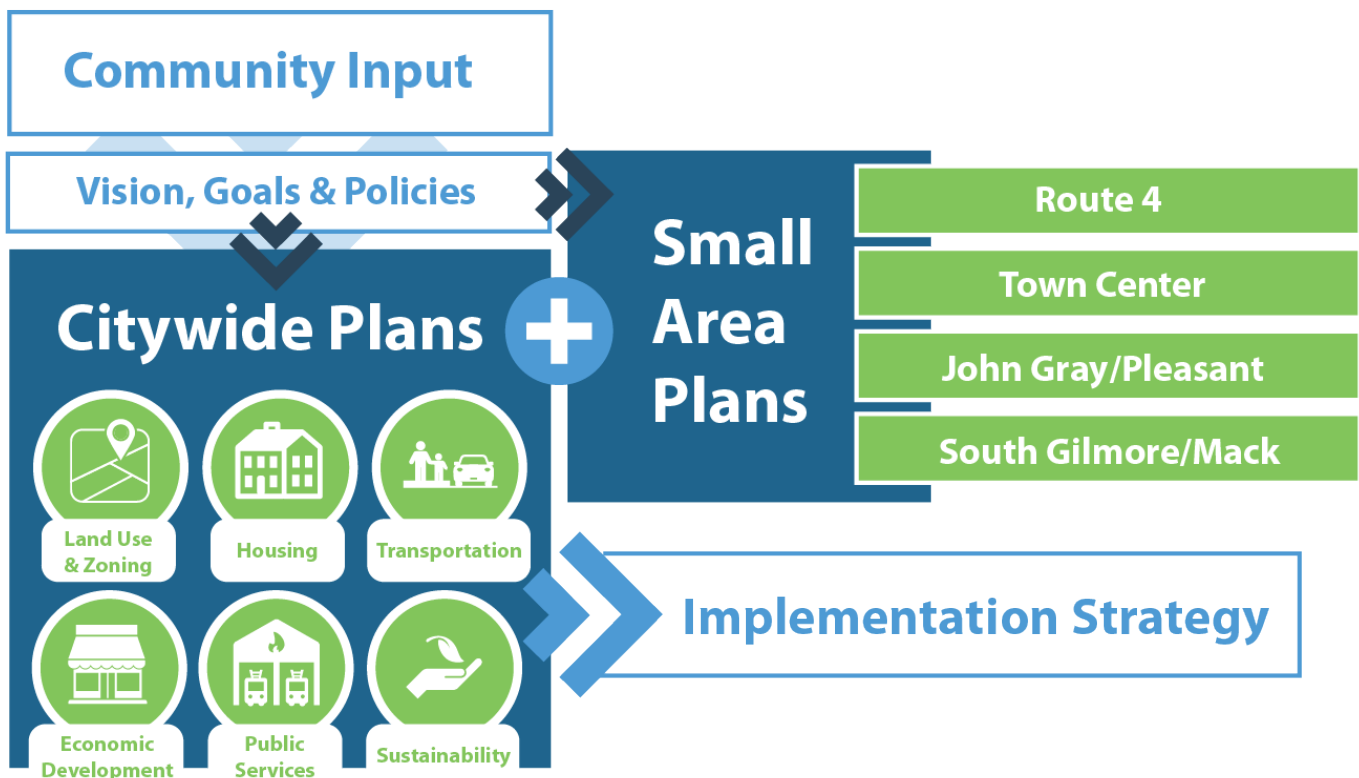
Fairfield is a vibrant and diverse city that values safe neighborhoods and a strong sense of community for all residents and businesses. Our public services are known for fostering a high quality of life, making Fairfield stand out as a desirable place in which to live, work, do business and visit.

The vision of Fairfield Forward is to carry forward these key characteristics while embracing the diversity of the city and the versatility needed to adapt so that the city can welcome new investment and redevelopment that only strengthens these qualities.

The plan addresses elements controlled directly by the City of Fairfield, such as public services and regulations, as well as policy initiatives that encourage individual community members and private property owners to help realize the overall vision. It is organized by topic area:

- Land Use and Zoning (page 15)
- Small Area Plans (page 39)
- Housing and Neighborhoods (page 81)
- Transportation (page 93)
- Economic Development (page 109)
- Public Services (page 127)
- Sustainability (page 143)

Each chapter provides an overview of existing conditions, a set of goals and policies, future plans, and implementation strategies for that topic area. This executive summary provides an overview of key information and initiatives from the plan.



## HOW WAS THIS PLAN CREATED?

This plan was developed from August 2018 to September 2019 with input from city staff, elected officials, community members, a steering committee, and four small area plan committees that met regularly to guide the development of the citywide and small area plans. Comments from community members are highlighted throughout this report in the “What We Heard” boxes like the one below. More information on the planning process can be found on page 6 and documentation of all public comments is available in the appendix.

*Popular  
comments  
received during  
the planning  
process include:*



- 1 Continue to provide excellent public services
- 2 More sidewalks, trails, and paths are needed for better overall connectivity throughout the city
- 3 Better property maintenance is needed
- 4 Design guidelines are welcomed in certain areas to provide for a more visually appealing, cohesive environment
- 5 More sit down dining options
- 6 Limit used car lots
- 7 Encourage single-family residential development over multi-family residential
- 8 Provide additional recreational opportunities
- 9 Target “blighted” areas for redevelopment, including northern Route 4 and the former Forest Fair Mall
- 10 Safer pedestrian routes to schools





## Land Use and Zoning

The Future Land Use Plan on the following page, and in the Land Use and Zoning chapter, depicts an ideal future land use pattern for Fairfield, and should be used by staff, city officials, and leaders as a policy level guide for future decisions on proposed zoning, development, and redevelopment applications, as well as to update standards and regulations. While it informs rezoning decisions, it is not a zoning map. There are 12 categories of future land uses, each illustrated on the Future Land Use Map and described in the Future Land Use Plan.

There are few remaining parcels of undeveloped land zoned for commercial, planned unit development, or residential. Most remaining undeveloped acres are zoned for industrial or agricultural uses. This limitation will likely constrain future development and require more compact, sustainable building patterns to accommodate new residents within this available land, as well as the redevelopment of existing built areas. Based on the population growth trends of the city over the last 20 years, approximately 30 to 40 years of growth can be accommodated with existing undeveloped land zoned for residential.

According to the plan, the city should continue to be a residential community with a mix of suburban single-family neighborhoods and higher density housing closer to mixed-use and commercial centers. Three areas have been identified as appropriate locations for walkable, higher density, mixed-use development: Town Center, the John Gray Road/Pleasant Avenue area, and the South Gilmore Road/Mack Road area. Detailed small area plans have been developed for each of these areas beginning on page 39. General commercial uses, such as shopping plazas and auto-oriented

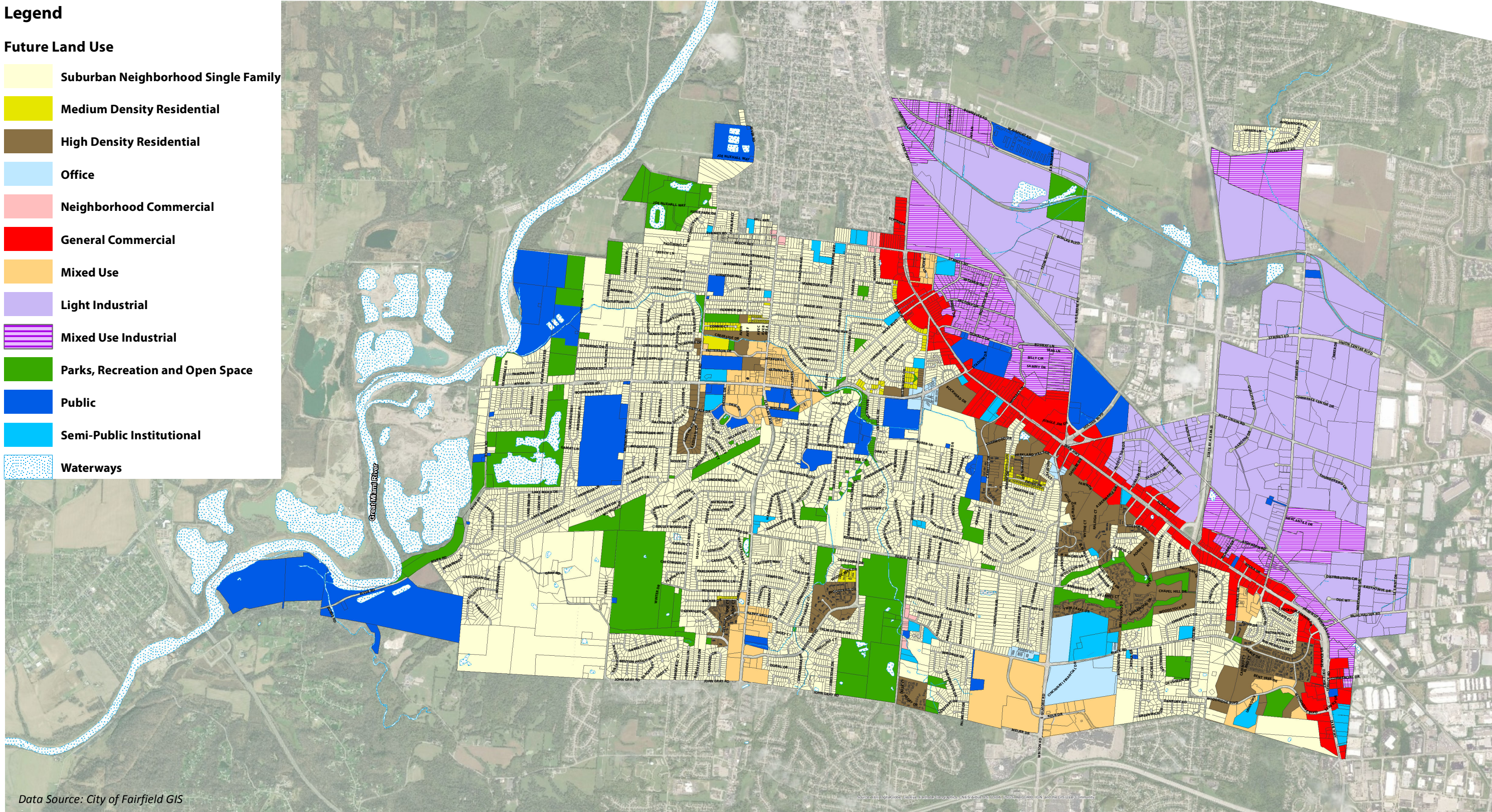
uses, should be limited to the Route 4 corridor. This corridor also serves as a buffer between the residential and industrial activity, which should be limited to the northeast side of Route 4. Public facilities and parks, recreation, and open spaces should be distributed across the city so all residents have equitable access to community resources.

### Key Future Land Use Changes

- 1 Assigning agricultural areas to the appropriate land use for future growth
- 2 Implementing a mixed use category to permit a mix of residential, office and commercial uses
- 3 Establishing a mixed use industrial category to permit a mix of low intensity industrial, office, and commercial uses
- 4 Eliminating the heavy industrial land use category to prevent potentially noxious and incompatible uses
- 5 Identifying four small area plans that provide more detail on development and redevelopment activities

For more information on land use and zoning, refer to page 16.

Figure ES-1. Future Land Use Map



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## Small Area Plans

Four areas of the city were identified as needing special, detailed attention due to ongoing issues and/or the potential for change and investment. These areas include:

### Route 4 Corridor

Route 4 will continue to be the main commercial corridor in the city with a wide variety of businesses. It also serves as a major north/south roadway connector that is envisioned to have a more aesthetically appealing development style, enhanced landscaping and streetscaping, and improved and safer connections for vehicles and pedestrians. Key implementation strategies include: reevaluating the sidewalk policy to permit and encourage sidewalks south of Nilles Road; enhancing parking lot landscaping and screening requirements; promoting redevelopment opportunities; and working with businesses to consolidate curb cuts, and use access management techniques to improve traffic flow and safety. (For more information, refer to page 42.)

### Town Center

The Town Center is the heart of the city and will continue to be the central gathering area for the community, providing living, retail, service and social opportunities. There is a desire to expand the well-designed, compact, walkable characteristics of the Village Green to the entire Town Center area. Key implementation strategies include promoting available development and redevelopment sites; developing a

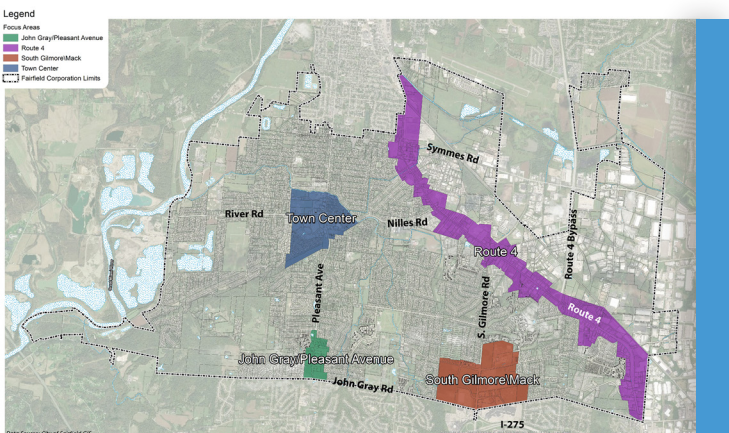
pedestrian and bicycle connectivity plan to establish access to and within the Town Center; and encouraging businesses that attract communal gathering opportunities. (For more information, refer to page 52.)

### John Gray/Pleasant

The John Gray/Pleasant area is a main gateway into Fairfield, providing access to many of the city's residential neighborhoods, Harbin Park, and the Town Center. It will be a well-designed, small-scale, mixed-use area supported by low intensity retail and services that support the surrounding neighborhoods and low-to-medium-density residential uses. Key implementation strategies include developing design guidelines; creating a gateway feature at the corporation line; and encouraging the application of a Planned Unit Development (PUD) on key parcels. (For more information, refer to page 62.)

### South Gilmore/Mack

The South Gilmore/Mack area is a primary gateway entrance into Fairfield with close proximity to the interstate and contains high traffic volume generator businesses, and is a regional draw. It will have strong design standards for development but also have flexibility to accommodate a range and intensity of uses that are compatible with, and support the current office and medical use patterns and needs. Two of the largest undeveloped properties in the city—the Heine Property (110 acres) and the Benzing Property (27 acres)—are located in this area and have the potential to accommodate significant growth. Key implementation strategies include collaborating with Forest Park on the redevelopment of the former Forest Fair Mall; enhancing the existing gateway; and reducing roadway congestion. (For more information, refer to page 70.)



Small Area Plan Locations



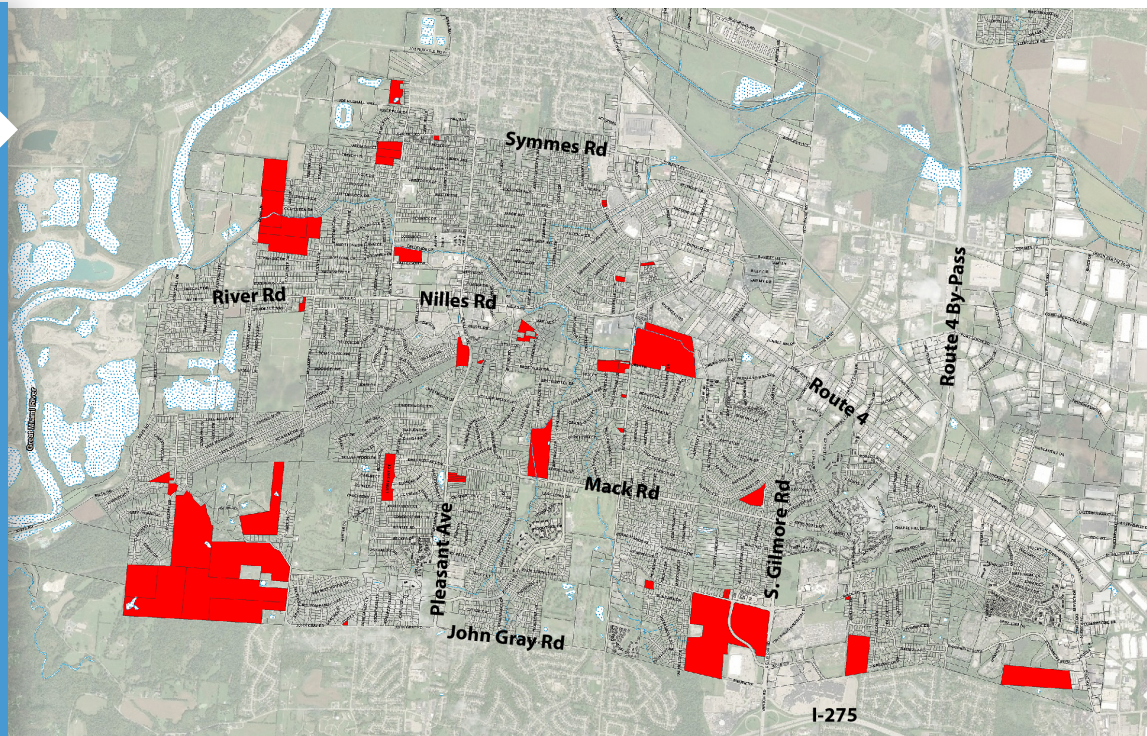
## Housing

The right mix of housing types will ensure that a wide variety of people can live, work, and play in the Fairfield community. Most residences in the city today are single-family homes and most units are owner-occupied (62 percent). Home values and rents are fairly affordable but are on the rise, with the median home value increasing 13 percent and median rent increasing 16 percent between 2016 and 2018. Many housing units, including both single-family homes and apartment buildings, are older and many are showing signs of aging and wear. Maintaining and enhancing the condition of existing residences through proactive code compliance, inspection programs, and rehabilitation incentive programs are key implementation strategies.

Limited land is available for new traditional subdivision-style residential development. As a result, new residential development will shift toward 1) infill on undeveloped lots within existing neighborhoods, 2) tearing down and rebuilding existing housing, and 3) cluster type housing in mixed-use developments. Infill housing within existing neighborhoods should be compatible with the setback, scale, and materials of the neighborhood. Future housing is encouraged to be sustainably designed. Incorporating housing into mixed-use developments in the Town Center, John Gray/Pleasant, and South Gilmore/Mack areas will create new opportunities for Fairfield residents to live in walkable neighborhoods near jobs and activities and reduce their dependence on cars.

For more information on housing, refer to page 81.

*This map shows undeveloped tracts of land that have the potential for new residential developments.*





## Transportation

A transportation system should be well balanced and include motor vehicle access, public transportation, sidewalks, and bike paths and trails. During the planning process, community members emphasized improving pedestrian access and vehicular access management as primary goals for the city's transportation network.

### Walking

The City of Fairfield continues to develop a connected sidewalk system, which will reduce the need to drive to most locations within the city. As a next step, the city should develop a pedestrian connectivity plan to identify gaps in the sidewalk network, and create a program to install sidewalks and trails throughout Fairfield. All new developments are typically required to construct sidewalks and will be required to consider multi-use paths. In addition, the City of Fairfield will collaborate with the Fairfield City School District to prioritize sidewalk connections and paths to increase available safe routes for students, particularly on Route 4.

### Biking

The Great Miami River Trail offers recreational cycling opportunities on the west side of the city; however, there are no marked bike lanes or off-roads paths on roads within the city. More than 13 miles of trails and connections have been identified in the city's Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Master Plan (2014).

### Driving

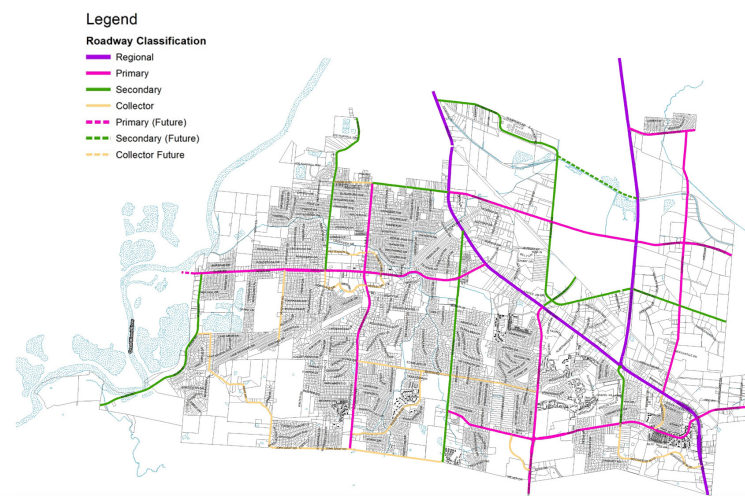
Fairfield has direct access to I-275 and is minutes from I-75, providing quick and convenient regional access to and from the city by car. Within the city, a comprehensive roadway network moves vehicles effectively. The Thoroughfare Plan establishes the locations and minimum standards for the future street network within the city, helping to establish rights-of-way and guide the construction of new roads and intersections such as the new roundabout at River

and Gray Roads. Access management principles such as curb cut consolidation, frontage roads and service drives should be incorporated by the city along primary and secondary thoroughfares.

### Transit

The Butler County Regional Transit Authority (BCRTA) operates three bus routes along major roads within the city. The City of Fairfield will continue ongoing coordination with BCRTA to increase transit service in the area.

For more detailed information on transportation, refer to page 93.



***The Thoroughfare Plan establishes future road locations and typologies***

*(See page 101 for an enlarged map.)*



## Economic Development

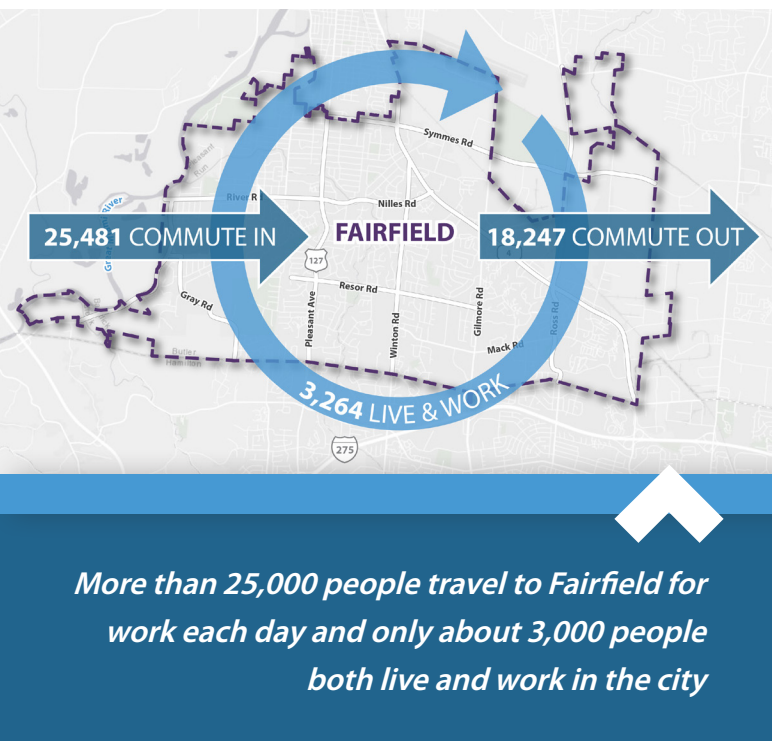
Business in the City of Fairfield is strong, growing, and diversified. Over the past 10 years, 200 new businesses were established, resulting in 8,500 additional employees working in Fairfield. The industries employing the greatest number of people in the city are finance and insurance (16.6 percent), manufacturing (13.2 percent), health care and social assistance (12.9 percent), retail trade (11.7 percent), and wholesale trade (10.1 percent).

The city uses a variety of economic development tools to encourage business growth, to create and retain jobs, and to assist in capital development, such as property tax abatements, small business loan programs, a redevelopment fund, workforce development partners, and other state and federal programs.

The primary business and employment areas in the city are the Route 4 corridor business district, the industrial area northeast of Route 4, the Mack and South Gilmore area, and the Town Center. Compared to the 12 surrounding communities, Fairfield has a slightly higher average commercial vacancy rate (10.8 percent vs. an average of 8.1 percent) and slightly lower asking rates per square foot for commercial rents (\$10.89/sf vs. \$13.86/sf). There has been strong investment in commercial properties over the past 10 years, including more than \$49 million in commercial building investment in 2018. There are 1,500 acres of remaining undeveloped land zoned for industrial uses and another 200 acres of undeveloped land zoned for commercial uses. The efficient use of this limited remaining land and the redevelopment of existing built properties will be critical to ensuring that land is available for future business activities.

Key economic development implementation strategies include promoting available sites for new development and redevelopment; investigating incentives and public assistance programs to be used in areas with high commercial vacancy rates; revising zoning regulations to allow higher densities near centers of activity; establishing design guidelines for major commercial areas; investigating the formation of Joint Economic Development Districts with neighboring communities; and continuing a dialogue and partnership with the city's major employers and educational institutions.

For more detailed information on economic development, refer to page 109.





## Public Services

The resources the city provides and maintains greatly contribute to the quality of life for residents and businesses, and lend to the economic success of the city. The City of Fairfield offers a full range of municipal services, such as public works, public utilities, fire, police, municipal court, and parks and recreation. Public education is provided by the Fairfield City School District, which serves both the city and Fairfield Township. As new development and redevelopment come online in Fairfield, city services must be reviewed to ensure Fairfield continues to offer a high quality level of service.

### Public Facilities and Services

The city is focused on maintaining high-quality water and wastewater systems through maintenance and proactive replacement of the aging infrastructure. To maximize the use of existing community services and facilities, the city will promote redevelopment opportunities in areas where public services and facilities currently exist. New development will be required to provide infrastructure upgrades as needed to maintain current levels of service. In addition, maintaining the transportation network will continue to be a priority. Fairfield is a diverse community and will strive towards inclusiveness by providing exceptional activities, services, and infrastructure to meet the needs of residents and businesses.

### Parks, Recreation, and Open Space

The city's 800-acre portfolio of active and passive recreation facilities provide many places for Fairfield residents to play. The latest addition to the portfolio is a 6.5-acre dog park and trailhead along the river, which will connect to the Great Miami River Trail. *The Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Master Plan* (2014) guides decisions and funding for parks, recreation, and open space and is supplemental to *Fairfield Forward*. The redevelopment of Marsh Park as a water-based recreation site with access to the Great Miami River has been identified as a potential new project to be included in the plan. New private developments will also be encouraged to incorporate gathering spaces and pocket parks to add to the collection of recreation facilities in the city.

### Intergovernmental Coordination

The City of Fairfield will continue to work closely with its partners in neighboring communities, Butler County, Fairfield City School District, and the Ohio-Kentucky-Indiana Regional Council of Governments, as well as collaborate with regional agencies and non-profit organizations to further achieve shared goals.

For more detailed information on public services, refer to page 127.



Dog park and trailhead concept plan on River Road



## Sustainability

Sustainable actions support, maintain, conserve, and enhance the environmental, economic, and social systems on which communities depend to ensure these critical resources continue to be available for future generations. The City of Fairfield will be a leader in responsible stewardship, healthy environments, and reduced energy consumption on both public and private property. Fairfield has implemented sustainable initiatives such as curbside recycling, urban forestry, an environmental commission, a farmer's market, and groundwater resource protection. In order to reduce the carbon footprint at city-owned facilities, efficient lighting and mechanical systems are being installed, street lights are being replaced with energy efficient LEDs, and the city is investigating applying for a grant to install electric vehicle charging stations.

Key sustainable implementation strategies include exploring alternative energy technology to power city-owned properties; revising the zoning code to require landscaping on private property when it develops or redevelops; encouraging the preservation of mature trees and planting of new trees; exploring incentives for sustainable site and building design; increasing pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure; pursuing Greenroads certification status for eligible transportation projects; and creating a sustainability plan to detail and guide these efforts.

For more detailed information on sustainability, refer to page 144.



Top to Bottom: 1) Local vendor at the Village Green Farmer's Market; 2) The Ohio-Kentucky-Indiana Regional Council of Government's Solar Ready website informs property owners of their home's solar energy potential; and 3) Earth Day in Fairfield with Mayor Steve Miller, Council Member Tim Abbott, and Duke Energy employees.