

Summary Memo

Round 2 of Public Engagement

September 3, 2021

This document summarizes the second round of public engagement for *All in! Ashtabula County*, which was conducted between August 9 and August 30, 2021.

The memo includes the following:

1. Purpose
2. Outreach and Publicity
3. Approach
4. Results

A summary of each input approach is described in Part 3: Approach of this document. Input was gathered in the following ways:

- Community Choices Workshop (In-person): August 9, 4-6 PM
- County Fair (In person): August 10-15, 11 AM-8 PM
- Virtual Workshop: August 18, 12:30-1:30 PM
- Online Activities: August 9-30

1. Purpose

Ashtabula County launched a process to update its comprehensive plan in November 2020, called *All in! Ashtabula County*. The County's last comprehensive plan was adopted in 2003.

Insight from the community has been integral throughout the entire plan process. The first round of public engagement, held in January-February 2021, included multiple opportunities for anyone in the community to inform the plan's preliminary goals, objectives and recommendations as well as its draft future character and land use component through open-ended questions and mapping exercises about the future of the County. This second round of public engagement, held in August 2021, included multiple in-person and virtual engagement opportunities for participants to comment on and respond to a set of draft plan actions and the draft future character and land use map. This input will inform revisions ahead of the plan's final completion and adoption.

2. Outreach and Publicity

Outreach was conducted to spread the word about the multiple opportunities to participate in this round of public engagement. The Team capitalized on existing networks through community groups, organizations, churches, educational institutions and local governments for outreach. A press release was distributed to local media outlets, a website news post announced the engagement opportunities, and Steering Committee members signed up for individual outreach tasks with their networks and/or organizations. Outreach efforts included the following:

- Multiple email announcements and invites for engagement opportunities were distributed to members in the community via email with a request to distribute widely.
- Steering Committee members conducted outreach with their networks and organizations.
- 1,500 rack cards promoting the engagement opportunities were printed for distribution throughout the County.
- Social media collateral was produced and utilized by various organizations.
- Media outlets reached included The Star Beacon and Jefferson Gazette.

3. Approach

All in! Ashtabula County's second round of public engagement included multiple opportunities for both in-person and online engagement. Each approach is summarized below:

Community Choices Workshop

The kick-off event for this round of public engagement was held on Monday, August 9 from 4-6 pm at the Jefferson Community Recreation Center. Participants could view a full set of draft plan actions and a draft future character and land use map and were encouraged to provide feedback on provided materials. This event was at-your-own-pace in an open-house style, where community members could stop by at the time most convenient for them.

County Fair

Planning Team members conducted outreach about the Plan and offered opportunities for input at Ashtabula's County Fair, August 10-15 from 11 am to 8 pm in the Exhibit Hall.

Virtual Workshop

A virtual workshop was held on Wednesday, August 18 from 12:30-1:30 pm. Planning Team members provided background information on the planning process, facilitated interactive, online polling about the plan's draft priority actions and overarching goals, and encouraged participants to provide additional feedback on the project website (see below).

Virtual Activities

A series of virtual engagement activities were provided on the project website, AllinAshtabula.com, from August 9-30. Participants could provide feedback on any of the draft plan actions, which were generated with input from the first round of public engagement, Steering Committee meetings, and interviews and conversations with County planning staff and stakeholders. Participants could also provide their "Top 5" priority actions, as well as comments on a draft future character and land use map of the County that will be finalized and incorporated into the final plan document.

4. Results

This section summarizes input collected during the second round of public engagement. Over one-hundred comments on the draft actions were provided at both the project website and at the in-person workshop. The online input was organized by support, concern, or clarification comments and includes the individual action number associated with the comment. A summary is included below and a database of all public comments received appears as an appendix to this memo.

Draft Plan Actions

Comments of Support

- The vast majority of comments received were supportive (65 percent of people marked “support,” and many other comments were supportive although the “support” box was not checked).
- Approximately 15 percent of the supportive comments were in support of Objectives and Actions under Goal A (Foster the protection of agricultural land and the conservation of scenic areas), with Objective A.1 (Focus new development in incorporated areas that are supported by infrastructure) and Objective A.3 (Protect and enhance scenic and natural areas) garnering repeated support.
- Participants thought many of the actions under Objective B.2 (Preserve and invest in historic and archaeological resources) and Objective C.1 (Encourage conservation of stream corridors, woodlands, wetlands and lakeshores) were important considerations in this planning process.
- Participants were especially supportive of adding an Amtrak stop in the County (Action D.2.4) and exploring ferry rides to regional destinations (Action D.2.5).
- Nearly 27 percent of all supportive comments fell under Objectives and Actions in Goal E. Improving countywide broadband speeds (Objective E.1 Improve broadband speed and reliability throughout the County) and promoting regional agriculture (Action E.2.5 Continue to promote and market specialty agriculture.) were repeatedly selected in support.
- In Goal F, Objective F.1 (Strengthen sense of community pride) and Objective F.3 (Improve public health) contained the Actions of primary support for participants.

Comments of Concern

- Less than 14 percent of all comments received were those of concern.
- Many of the concern comments pertained to a relative uncertainty with the use of public monies for funding recommended Actions, or simply stating that the recommended Action is “not a priority” for the County.
- The most repeated comment of concern involved Action F.2.2 (Facilitate implicit bias trainings.). One comment of concern sought clarification, while another didn’t think the training was necessary.

Comments of Clarification

- There was only one comment received officially as a “clarification” – Action E.3.4 (Pursue brownfield redevelopment opportunities.)
- Other comments that asked, “What is this?” were actually self-classified as a “concern”

comment, which has slightly skewed the results of this classification.

- Several comments that were expressed as seeking clarification have already been addressed in the supporting text to the Action by the Planning Team. (It's possible that people submitting comments did not view the PDF documents with full text explanations of each Action.)

Draft Action Prioritization (Top 5)

- Goals A through D were well-represented with "Top 5" priority Actions among participants.
- Objectives A.3 (Protect and enhance scenic and natural areas), C.4 (Reduce energy use and promote alternative energy), and C.5 (Protect water quality) were the most repeated among all participants "Top 5" selections.
- There was only one participant who listed a Goal F Action (F.3.5 Adopt policies to address obesity and help alleviate food deserts) as a priority.

Draft Future Character and Land Use Map

- Comments received on the draft future character and land use portion of the engagement materials include industrial pollution, preserving historic buildings, or updating community parks.
- Supportive map "points" concerned additional areas for economic development.

Virtual Workshop Input

During the virtual workshop (August 18), participants were asked online polling questions, in addition to being asked to provide more detailed feedback on the project website. Below is a summary of some of the key input collected at the workshop:

- There was a question about whether green building codes would be represented in the plan. The Planning Team stressed the relatively "high level" of this plan but said it would consider how this might be integrated into another Action.
- A participant asked if brownfield sites would be addressed with remediation or redevelopment. The Planning Team indicated that, yes, this is important to the plan and is addressed under Goal E: Local Economy.
- A participant expressed interest in who is going to implement these Action items. Planning Team members responded that an implementation chapter will be part of the final plan document. This forthcoming chapter will identify a lead organization to "take charge" on the proposed Action. Many of these lead organizations will be County government offices/departments but several will be in partnership with other public and private entities throughout the County.
- A participant expressed concern that the township trustees were not invited to the Steering Committee. The Planning Team explained that the Steering Committee included a broad range of representatives and that the entire planning process was widely promoted to encourage participation by all, including Township Trustees. The Planning Team asked this participant to please share information about how to have input now via the online engagement as it will be available through the end of the month.