



Trustees

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Chairwoman O'Brien, Vice Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member DeMora, and members of the Senate Local Government Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer proponent testimony on this important legislation, and more specifically on comprehensive zoning plans. My name is Jacob Barnes, Planning Director for Springfield Township in Lucas County, Ohio. Springfield Township is a suburban Township with a population of nearly 30,000. I have over 22 years of experience in this profession as well as doing zoning consulting for other smaller Townships and Villages. I am a regular speaker at Planning & Zoning conferences statewide and have had the privilege to assist numerous Townships with various zoning issues across the State. I have trained elected officials and Zoning Boards and have written zoning codes and comprehensive plans. I'm passionate about zoning and have seen its benefits on numerous occasions.

The importance of zoning and comprehensive plans for Townships in the State of Ohio cannot be underestimated. Zoning can encourage inclusion, create opportunity, protect open spaces, and prevent truly incompatible land uses from sharing the same space. When done thoughtfully, zoning can connect people and places and promote economic development.

More un-zoned Townships are looking to become zoned than ever before. Smaller Townships utilize zoning to help maintain the agricultural character of the nearly 75,000 farms in Ohio, helping to maintain and increase one of the largest industries in the State. Larger Townships like Springfield Township in Lucas County with populations comparable to the size of cities in the State depend on zoning and comprehensive plans for a wide variety of items like separation of uses, orderly development, maintaining property values, and blight and nuisance enforcement.

Once a Township is zoned, the next logical step is to have a comprehensive plan in place. According to the Ohio Revised Code 519.02, a Township Zoning Resolution must be in accord with an approved comprehensive plan. A comprehensive plan is a guiding document for the future growth of any Township. It should be much more than a document collecting dust on an office shelf. It should be looked at and used regularly and it should be updated regularly as well.

Without the benefits of an updated comprehensive plan, the economic development potential of Townships is much more difficult. Businesses develop where there is land, and Townships have the most virgin land of all the political subdivisions. Corporations look for areas where taxes are low which is usually the case in Townships as we do not have an income tax. Many large companies looking to locate in the State typically look at a few key areas: Whether the area is zoned for the proposed use; Surrounding zoning; Utilities; and an updated comprehensive plan which zoning regulations are harmonious with. Zoning can provide easy-to-follow guidelines that can assist developers through the approval process. Many times, developers prefer Townships as the processes are simplified, and the overall review period is much more streamlined when compared to Villages and Cities. These factors can give a zoned Township with an updated comprehensive plan many advantages.

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There are many benefits to having an updated comprehensive plan. They can encourage responsible development. Regarding residential development specifically, a comprehensive plan plays a key role. It assists development when considering where to conserve unique natural features or valuable agricultural land. A comprehensive plan can promote logical development, with certain areas designated as more appropriate for higher density development and other areas more suited for larger lot or conservation development to set aside natural open space areas. Many comprehensive plans promote pedestrian connectivity with sidewalks and trails for both walking and bike traffic and can promote street connectivity in subdivisions to ease the strain of vehicle traffic on main County or State routes.

The comprehensive plan serves as the policy guide for zoning changes and what areas may be suitable for development. It can help to prevent “spot” zoning. The comprehensive plan serves as an important piece of evidence in both challenging and upholding a zoning resolution. While a Township can rely on a County Comprehensive Plan, it is not an ideal situation. Many Counties have their own interests in mind and may not be looking out for the best interests of the Townships.

With the reduction in local government funding, most Townships simply cannot afford to have an up-to-date comprehensive plan. A very simple comprehensive plan could cost as little as \$25,000 but many plans are in the \$50,000+ range. A typical plan update process can take a good part of a year to complete as the typical process involves forming a steering committee, conducting a community survey, holding monthly meetings, involving various stakeholders, developing maps, coordinating with other agencies, and more. It’s an involved process that takes time, effort, and expertise.

In conclusion, I urge your support of the appropriation request of \$1.5 million per fiscal year to update comprehensive plans in HB 315. We can all agree that economic growth is of utmost importance to the state. A comprehensive plan is at the heart of this growth. I truly believe that if townships are afforded the same economic development tools, and comprehensive zoning dollars, the economic boom in the state of Ohio will continue far into the future.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this important issue. Please contact me at jbarnes@springfieldtownship.net with any questions.

Respectfully,

Jacob Barnes

Jacob T. Barnes
Planning Director
Springfield Township, Lucas County