



Brown Township, Franklin County April 2001

THE BROWN TOWNSHIP LANDSCAPE IS ABOUT TO CHANGE!

We all have watched the farms east of Alton Darby Creek Road and along Cosgray Road disappear as housing fills the once beautiful fields of wheat, corn, soybeans and cattle. Look around Franklin County. Strip malls, big-box retail stores, and subdivisions are replacing the green fields and farmhouses once taken for granted.

Let's face it. Population changes are occurring right here in our own back yard. Traffic is out of control. Residential explosion is flooding the stores. The Hilliard City School District is considering a third high school. And yes, your real estate taxes continue to rise.

But now the inevitable has occurred! Developers, faced with a shortage of large land tracts in Hilliard and Columbus, have approached Brown Township landowners (many who do not actually live within the township) with top dollar deals. Making matters worse, Columbus announced a water and sewer services plan last year that clearly implies the annexation of Brown Township and parts of Madison County.

The change is coming. It's going to happen with or without our consent.

Threatened with annexation and its undesirable municipal zoning, incredible pressure is being placed on township and county officials to rethink things like five acre lots, cluster developments, land application wastewater treatment systems, and zoning regulations.

Like many other townships, Brown Township relies on Franklin County zoning officials to make these zoning and development decisions for us. To help guide these officials, Brown Township developed its Comprehensive Plan in 1992, which was updated in 1998.

As recommended in the 1998 update, the Township Trustees at their August 2000 meeting created the Brown Township Agricultural Preservation Plan Steering Committee. The committee is made up of eight Brown Township residents who have been asked to develop a land use document suggesting suitable development, which preserves agricultural land and open space while enhancing the health and sovereignty of the township as a whole. In developing the Committee, the Trustees were careful to consider all areas in the township so that all are represented. The members are:

- Larry Baumgartner
- Donna Carrel, Chair
- Tom Crook
- Harold Jerman

- Cheryl Lorson
- Joe Martin
- Steve Rider
- Dick Stahl

The committee consists of some who have been life long residents and some who have arrived within the last 15 years. These fine people are volunteering many hours of their time so that Brown Township will not grow to look like the neighboring cities. Instead, many would like to develop open space that allows for growth, ensure the continued protection of the Big Darby Creek, and preserve Brown Township's scenic rural character.

Collectively, committee members are pleased with the current environment of Brown Township; large lots, plenty of open space, quality of homes being built, and the general look and feel of the community. Knowing that growth cannot be stopped, committee members recognize that the residents want a voice as to how the township will be develop in the future.

Typically, the committee meets on the Tuesdays after the Township Trustees meeting and the last Tuesday of the month. Meetings are held in the upstairs meeting room of the Brown Township Firehouse and are open to all Brown Township residents.

The process is expected to take at least one year and include several opportunities for resident input. The first opportunity is about to occur with the mailing of a township resident survey in May or June. Public meetings are planned to present the results of the survey, unveil several development concepts, and obtain additional feedback from township residents.

The committee is approaching the fifth phase of a seven-phase plan:

1. Education on land uses, development techniques, and wastewater treatment technology.
2. Investigate how and why development is being driven and a review of the current land uses (existing and planned) in and around Brown Township including Hilliard, Columbus, and Madison County.
3. Identify potential land uses within Brown Township. This includes performing a survey of and soliciting comments from township residents.
4. Determine the best land uses for various areas within Brown Township to accomplish stated goal and the potential legal methods of defining, monitoring, and enforcing land use. This will require us to define solutions tolerable to township residents that will mitigate urban sprawl.
5. Obtain public feedback as solutions are reviewed with township residents. Then review comments by township residents to make revisions as deemed appropriate.
6. Obtain technical feedback as solutions are submitted to the Township Board of Trustees and other official boards for review and comment. Then review comments by these officials to make final revisions as deemed appropriate.
7. Completion will result in the submittal of a final plan to the Township Board of Trustees with recommended course of action.

This process will require a better public understanding of land use and open space preservation. One of the biggest threats to our rural character turns out to be the individual and numerous large lot developments dictated by current zoning regulations. These developments result in minor losses of open space and subtle degradation of the township's rural character. Suddenly, we will discover that the character of the township, which we intended to preserve, is gone. Forever.

Owners of the multi-acre large lot have long enjoyed the "Borrowed Landscape" of open farm fields and empty roads. Can we allow development within our township and still preserve this open landscape and natural character? The answer is yes - if we are able to avoid municipal annexation with its undesirable zoning so that development can be done under our control, on our terms, and to our high standards.

HOW WILL BROWN TOWNSHIP BE PROTECTED?

The Brown Township Agricultural Preservation Plan Steering Committee has discussed the creation of zoning text that could be submitted to Franklin County for use as an "Overlay" to the existing zoning in the township. This text could detail land use restrictions, building densities, and infrastructure development for any new planned development over X number of homes and/or with lot sizes under X acres within the township. The text could also allow the township direct influence regarding protection of the Big Darby Creek.

The committee has also discussed the creation of a zoning district that would permit higher net density residential developments and some commercial development balanced by the purchase of development rights on undeveloped or undevelopable land. This would allow higher density development in areas deemed appropriate while providing a method of compensation for landowners in areas deemed as low or no density.

Finally, the committee has recognized that these issues could require an expansion of township government to review, accept and hold land conservation easements (method of controlling development rights). This might consist of an appointed board to monitor and enforce easements generated by the Transfer Land Development idea. Funding of such a board could be based on a percentage of the transaction amount or some other formula.

WHAT HAS THE STEERING COMMITTEE DONE SO FAR?

Realizing that the individuals on the committee brought their own personal opinions and different levels of understanding of the issues being address to the table, the Trustees suggested that the first step should be education on the topics involved with land use planning. Inviting speakers, attending seminars, having meetings with open discussion, and taking tours, accomplished this. Here is a recap of the committee's first six months:

Don Brosius, Brown Township Attorney, outlined the task involved and enlightened the committee on the political winds of Columbus, Hilliard, Franklin County and several of the local townships.

Phil Lorian of the Delaware County Planning Commission spoke to the committee about Cluster Developments and gave an overview of Delaware County's Comprehensive Plan.

Dr. Karen Mancl of OSU Extension educated the committee about Alternative Wastewater Treatment.

Tom Shockley, Franklin County Sanitation Engineer, reviewed the county's requirements of Alternative Wastewater Treatment equipment.

Ben Hale representing Ruma presented an overview of the proposed development Manchester Park.

Dr. Mike Hurdzan, Golf Course Designer, educated the committee about golf course architecture, design concepts, and horticulture.

Brady Koehler, Franklin County Soil and Water, educated the committee about the different types of soils present throughout Brown Township.

Dan O'Brien, real estate developer and developer of Heritage Lakes, presented his vision of appropriate and equitable land development in an unincorporated area.

The committee toured the Columbus Jackson Pike Waste Water Treatment Plant.

The committee toured the Tarton Fields Country Club Alternative Waste Water Treatment Plant in Delaware County.

The committee reviewed films and books by Randall Arendt concerning Conservation Planning.

Many members of the committee attended a two-day seminar concerning Watershed Policy and Planning, as well as Better Site and Storm water Design, conducted by Center for Watershed Protection Alternatives to Storm water Control.

A committee member attended the debate between Arlene Shoemaker and Rich Sensenbrenner.

A committee member attended a Kirby Date Seminar on Conservation Development.

Several committee members attended a meeting to hear an overview of the Columbus Metropolitan Facilities Plan Update.

The township has retained the services of Tim DeWitt who is with Bennett and Williams to assist in mapping and documentation.

Jennifer Switzer, a planner with the Franklin County Development Department, and Timothy Lawrence , a township resident who is with the Ohio State University Extension, serve as technical advisors.