Business Community Plan
Village of Forest, OH

December 2014
Village of Forest, OH
Business Community Plan
December 2014

Prepared by:
Gregory Moon
Community Development Educator, Ohio State University Extension
Executive Director, Wyandot County Office of Economic Development

Nancy Bowen, CEd
Associate Professor and Field Specialist, Community Economics
Ohio State University Extension Community Development

Support for this program provided by:
Village of Forest, Ohio
Ohio State University Extension Community Development
# Business Community Plan

## Introduction

## Program Goals

## Methodology

## Forest, OH Demographic Overview

## Economy in Forest, OH

## Cost of Living in Forest, OH

## Community Plan Results

### General Information

### Local Business Environment

### Services/Amenities

### Useful Business Services

### Business Operations

### Action Plan

## Summary

## Appendix A: 2014 Village of Forest Planning Survey Results

### Survey Results

#### Section - General Information

#### Section - Local Business Environment

#### Section - Services/Amenities

#### Instructions Provided To Respondents

#### Section - Importance of Services/Amenities

#### Instructions Provided To Respondents

#### Section - Useful Business Services

#### Instructions Provided To Respondents

#### Section - Business Operations

#### Section - Thank you!
Business Community Plan

Introduction

In September 2014, leadership from the Village of Forest, OH contacted put forth an effort to develop an action strategy that would involve broad-based community input and include recommended actions for the growth and sustainability of the Village. Local stakeholders realized the strengths and assets in and surrounding the municipality and were interested in building on these to grow the economy while complimenting the existing Hardin County Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy. Identified assets include:

- Two intersecting highways (53 & 37)
- Within 1 mile of 4-lane US-30 interchange
- Historic downtown area
- Strong recreational programs and parks system
- Strong existing businesses including advanced manufacturing
- Availability of rail
- Large industrial development sites

The Village leadership contacted Community Development Educators from Ohio State University Extension for assistance in facilitating the planning effort, including surveying businesses and community members, and developing a list of recommended action steps. An initial meeting was held with the Village Administrator and a local business owner in summer 2014 to set the stage. On October 15, 2014, a community meeting comprised of local business owners and various community stakeholders was held in the Gormley Park Meeting House. The purpose of the meeting was to obtain community feedback and share a planning strategy that would obtain further information from existing local businesses through the use of a survey instrument.

Developing an action plan to assist in the retention of local business and help them grow is a common priority for local public officials and community leaders.

Program Goals

Goals of the Forest Business Community Plan are as follows:

- To implement a plan for action for the retention and expansion of existing businesses
- To increase the competitiveness of local businesses
- To build on Forest assets in balancing recreational, social, environmental and economic benefits

Methodology

Community Development Extension professionals Nancy Bowen and Greg Moon developed a survey instrument that captured key questions that would be asked of businesses and key stakeholders in Forest. A draft survey was then shared with business and community leaders at the meeting mentioned previously. The purpose of the survey was to collect input on business satisfaction, needs, trends and preferences for projects that should be
undertaken in the Village to help business success. Survey sections included:

- General information
- Local business environment (advantages, challenges, potential projects and events)
- Services/amenities
- Importance of service/amenities
- Useful business services
- Business operations

Extension and Village leadership used a combination of methods to collect data. The survey was made available online and could be emailed or mailed to participating businesses. In addition, some participants were provided hand-delivered, hard-copy surveys to collect survey responses.

Initially, a community meeting was held to launch the survey and collect sample data. The survey was then sent to multiple local businesses and community members to explain what the purpose of the planning effort and that the survey could be completed online. The survey was also made widely available via online methods, including on the Village of Forest webpage. Roughly 80% of the completed surveys were done electronically.

Extension professionals collected and analyzed the data using SurveyGold software. They then interpreted the data and results of the survey through aggregation to develop an action plan report, the Business Community Plan. This plan was drafted and shared with community members at a second community meeting held at again at Gormley Park on December 16, 2014.
Forest, OH Demographic Overview

- Forest had a population of **1,609**. Since the year 2010, the population growth of Forest was 9 percent (**1,461** in 2010 Census).

- The median value of a home in Forest was **$72,900**. **87.8%** of the total **674** housing units were occupied, and **68.8%** of those households were owner-occupied.

- Forest’s median age was **34.9**. The U.S. median age was **37.2**.

- The average household size in the Village was **2.72 people**. **23.3%** of residents are married with children. **11%** have children, but are single.

- The unemployment rate in Forest was **17.2%** and the U.S. average was **9.3%**.

- Of the population aged 25 and older, **84.2%** had a high school diploma or higher degree (85.7% across the U.S.), and **6.4%** had a bachelor's degree or higher (28.5% across the U.S.).

- The average commute time for those living in Forest was **25.8 minutes**. The national average was **25.4 minutes**.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Forest</th>
<th>Ohio</th>
<th>United States</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total population</td>
<td>1,609</td>
<td>11,533,561</td>
<td>309,138,711</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male population</td>
<td>49.2%</td>
<td>48.8%</td>
<td>49.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female population</td>
<td>50.8%</td>
<td>51.2%</td>
<td>50.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median age (years)</td>
<td>34.9</td>
<td>38.8</td>
<td>37.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total households</td>
<td>674</td>
<td>5,124,503</td>
<td>131,642,457</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average household size</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>2.46</td>
<td>2.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent high school graduate or higher</td>
<td>84.2%</td>
<td>88.2%</td>
<td>85.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent bachelor's degree or higher</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
<td>24.7%</td>
<td>28.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

1 Information obtained from the U.S. Census Bureau, 2008-2012 American Community Survey 5-year Estimates at [http://factfinder2.census.gov](http://factfinder2.census.gov), which reflects the most current information for most categories of information in the Village of Forest, OH.
Economy in Forest, OH

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ECONOMY</th>
<th>Forest</th>
<th>Ohio</th>
<th>United States</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Civilian labor force</td>
<td>778</td>
<td>5,869,359</td>
<td>156,533,205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment Rate</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean travel time to work (minutes)</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>25.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per capita income (dollars)</td>
<td>16,801</td>
<td>25,857</td>
<td>28,051</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>POPULATION BY OCCUPATION</th>
<th>Forest</th>
<th>Ohio</th>
<th>United States</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Management, business, science, and arts occupations</td>
<td>18.0%</td>
<td>34.0%</td>
<td>35.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service occupations</td>
<td>16.0%</td>
<td>17.7%</td>
<td>17.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales and office occupations</td>
<td>17.9%</td>
<td>24.8%</td>
<td>24.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production, transportation, and material moving occupations</td>
<td>42.4%</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
<td>12.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ESTIMATED HOUSEHOLDS BY HOUSEHOLD INCOME</th>
<th>Forest</th>
<th>Ohio</th>
<th>United States</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than $10,000</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$10,000 to $14,999</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$15,000 to $24,999</td>
<td>20.9%</td>
<td>11.7%</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$25,000 to $34,999</td>
<td>15.5%</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
<td>10.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$35,000 to $49,999</td>
<td>21.3%</td>
<td>14.7%</td>
<td>13.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$50,000 to $74,999</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
<td>18.9%</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$75,000 to $99,999</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$100,000 to $149,999</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>12.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$150,000 to $199,999</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$200,000 or more</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median household income (dollars)</td>
<td>36,897</td>
<td>48,246</td>
<td>53,046</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

Information obtained from the U.S. Census Bureau, 2008-2012 American Community Survey 5-year Estimates at http://factfinder2.census.gov, which reflects the most current information for the Village of Forest, OH.
Cost of Living in Forest, OH³

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COST OF LIVING</th>
<th>Forest</th>
<th>Ohio</th>
<th>United States</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grocery</td>
<td>100.6</td>
<td>99.2</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilities</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Cost of living indices are based on a U.S. average of 100. If Forest scored above the cost of living index in any category it would indicate that local residents experience a cost of living above that of the U.S. average. Likewise, a cost of living index less than 100 in a category would indicate a cost of living below the U.S. average.

- Overall, the cost of living index for Forest is 81.60.

- Although Forest has a higher cost of living than the national average in the Groceries, Utilities, and Transportation categories, the overall cost of living in Forest is 18.4% below that of the U.S. average and 6.6% below that of the State of Ohio average (88.2).

³ Information obtained from Sperling’s Best Places [http://www.bestplaces.net/](http://www.bestplaces.net/), which reflects the most relevant data for Forest, OH.
Community Plan Results
General Information

The Forest Business Community Plan sessions were carried out in October and December 2014. Between October 15 and November 15, a survey was conducted and data was gathered from 20 local businesses and community members. An approximate response rate was difficult to determine as the survey was made available on the Village website. Survey responses were also gathered on opinions regarding community projects during the meeting held on October 15, 2014 at Gormley Park.

Of the 20 survey respondents, the majority (65%) are long-time stakeholders, conducting business in the Village of Forest for over 20 years. The vast majority (80%) own the space where the business is located. Almost all respondents (89%) also live in the local Forest area with the majority of those respondents (61%) residing within the village limits.

Roughly half (56%) of the respondents ranked Forest as a good to excellent place to do business, and 22% viewed the Village as a poor or very poor place to do business. Although only 56% gave Forest the best rankings as a place to do business, 89% indicated they would recommend Forest as a good business location to other businesses. 64% consider the quality of life to be good or excellent in the Village of Forest.

Most respondents (56%) reported the majority of their sales come from customers beyond a 10-mile radius. This indicates that most sales are “export” sales, bringing new dollars into the community.

50% of respondents also predicted their sales would increase over the next three years, while 25% predicted a decrease in sales. Coincidently roughly half believe there will be an increase in the number of customers over the next three years. Only 19% of respondents predict employment levels increasing.

What are the top three (3) challenges you face as a business owner/operator in Forest?

- Recruiting or retaining employees
- Expensive employee wages/benefits
- Unskilled workers
- Expensive health insurance
- Poor building construction
- Tenant/Landlord Relationship
- Expensive or unavailable utilities
- Insufficient local financing available
- Expensive shipping or transportation
- Expensive or unavailable products
- Declining market
- Shoplifting or theft
- Vandalism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th>Rank 1</th>
<th>Rank 2</th>
<th>Rank 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recruiting or retaining employees</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expensive employee wages/benefits</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unskilled workers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expensive health insurance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor building construction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenant/Landlord Relationship</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expensive or unavailable utilities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insufficient local financing available</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expensive shipping or transportation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expensive or unavailable products</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Declining market</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shoplifting or theft</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vandalism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Local Business Environment

The survey indicated business owners and operators in the Village of Forest are overall satisfied with the local area; although the majority of respondents live locally. Respondents overwhelming ranked the fact that “Its home for me” and location as the #1 and #2 reasons why they operate their business in the Village. Forest business owner/operator respondents also ranked access to customers as their #3 reason for operating in the Village.

The top three challenges business faced were ranked in the order below:

- Recruiting or retaining employees
- Expensive or unavailable utilities, Expensive health insurance, Declining market (tie)
- Unskilled workers

When asked what projects, programs or events would be most important to their business, the majority of respondents (35%) selected “Main Street Beautification”. The “Tree Town Festival”, Forest’s largest community event and outside attraction tool was tied with ‘Community advertising’ as the second most important.

A number of additional suggestions were provided under the ‘Other’ option. Comments in this section were closely related and included notes such as: ‘building a better economic base’, ‘new business creation’, and ‘industrial park expansion’. In summary, the top ranked projects were:

- Main Street beautification
- Tree Town Festival and Community advertising (tie)

- Town parks

Businesses were asked what assistance would be most helpful from the perspective of a business owner and most indicated “Assistance for restoring downtown buildings” was important. Other types of assistance in order of rank included:

- A Village of Forest Community Improvement Corporation
- Assistance for storefronts, Assistance for Promotion and Marketing (tie)
- Assistance for new signs/benches in downtown, a strong and dependable volunteer force (tie)
- Assistance for new signs/benches
- Better use of parks

Respondents were also asked what projects they would be willing to volunteer to assist with. The table below lists the projects and number of individuals interested in assisting.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project(s)</th>
<th>Volunteer(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Any project or capacity</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Signs and benches / Downtown</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Improvement Corporation</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotion or marketing</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New business creation / Industrial Parks</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although many of the respondents did not answer this question, several who did are available to provide assistance in any way possible. A few others indicated where or what they could do to help out, sometimes not directly related to the priority projects listed but in other significant ways.
Services/Amenities

The survey included 26 questions related to services and amenities in the Village of Forest. Respondents were asked to indicate whether each was “Excellent”, “Good”, “Average”, or “Poor” based on its presence and level of service locally. Public services were overwhelmingly given the highest ratings. Fire/paramedic services were given the most “Excellent” responses at 58%, while Police safety services were ranked as “Excellent” by 32% of the respondents. Other services that were given “Excellent” ratings by 5% or more of the respondents included:

- Transportation thoroughfares – 6%
- Water and sewers – 17%
- Communication services – 5%
- Electric utilities – 5%
- School system – 26%
- Senior services – 5%
- Snow and ice removal – 26%
- Street repairs – 5%

Although the results show that many items were ranked “Excellent” by 5% or more of the respondents, many of the same services / amenities were also provided the lowest, “Very Poor” rating. Below is a list of the services that were given “Very Poor” ratings by 5% or more of respondents:

- Transportation thoroughfares – 6%
- Snow and ice removal – 5%
- Street repairs – 5%

As can be gleaned from these lists, a total of 8 services / amenities were provided abundant “Excellent” ratings and only 3 were also given “Very Poor” ratings. This was out of a total 13 service / amenity options provided.

As a follow-up question, respondents determined whether the services / amenities they had rated were “Very Important”, “Important”, or “Not Important”. Those items receiving “Very Important” ratings for more than 40% of respondents are listed below:

- Fire and paramedic services – 89%
- Police safety services – 89%
- Water and sewers – 68% (None said Not Important)
- Street Repairs – 67% (None said Not Important)
- School System – 63%
- Electric Utilities – 63% (None said Not Important)
- Snow and Ice Removal – 61% (None said Not Important)
- Communication services – 58% (None said Not Important)
- Transportation Thoroughfares - 53%
- Health care services – 42%
- Recreation/Cultural – 42%

The vast majority of respondents indicated that Fire/paramedic services and Police safety services were very important. The respondents did not deem one service, public transportation, important.

Useful Business Services

In this section, respondents chose how useful selected services would be in helping them with their businesses. They were given the choices “Very Useful”, “Somewhat Useful” or “Not at all Useful”. Three-quarters of
respondents indicated that **Web site or internet resources** would be a highly useful service for their business. Another large majority (63%) responded that a **Low interest building improvement program** would be beneficial. Other services that would be appreciated by the business respondents (ranked by 40% or more as “Very Useful”) included:

- Advertising or marketing of Main Street district as shopping destination – 61%
- Façade grants – 61%
- Special event coordination (to increase foot traffic) – 56%
- Low interest business loan program – 50%
- Sign grants – 44%
- Downtown business directories, brochures, maps – 44%

Most respondents were willing to utilize the provided list of business services as not many of the options were provided the “Not at all Useful” ranking. Out of the 10 options provided only one service had a ranking over 20% as “Not at all Useful”; that being “**Downtown business directories, brochures, and maps**”.

From the data collected it appears that business respondents are most interested in advertising and marketing assistance primarily through online resources, but are in need of assistance. Low interest loans also appear to be desired by most businesses for not only building improvements but other aspects of business operations as well.

### Business Operations

The survey included final questions regarding respondents’ business operations. A summary of the results of this section is as follows:

- 41% see increases in sales during the summer season; compared to 12% in the winter
- 80% hire more employees during their busy season
- 63% say word-of-mouth is their most successful form of marketing; followed by the sponsorship of activities and events at 13%
- Only 20% of the majority of local business customers are aged 18-30; 31–49 & over 50 years of age groups received 40% each of local customer makeup
- 50% reported having no particular busiest day of the week; Saturday and Monday were tied for those that did report a busy day
- 67% of respondents have plans to modernize or expand their business
- Of those with plans, almost all (95%) face constraints:
  - Financial – 36%
  - Availability of suitable employees – 23%
  - Physical facility – 18%

### Action Plan

A primary objective of any Business Community Plan is to identify a course of action for local community, public, and business leaders as well as economic
development professionals. This action plan should work to address identified opportunities and challenges identified in the collected data. Changes in the local economy will not take place in the short-term and therefore the action plan must also lay the groundwork for sustaining local economic prosperity.

The survey data indicated several trends and potential recommendations for strategies that could assist Village of Forest officials and community stakeholders in making progress towards community economic development goals. Below are recommendation summaries and action steps which could be accomplished in the short term (3-6 months).

Extension professionals offer five recommendations based on the results of the survey and community discussions, which are listed and described in more detail below:

1. Form a concerted development effort /group within the Village (CIC)
2. Develop local funding incentives
3. Offer educational programs for effective marketing strategies
4. Leverage the Tree Town Festival
5. Main Street beautification campaign and fundraiser

**Recommendation One: Establish a Community Improvement Corporation (CIC) organized as a 501c3 to promote or support community economic development efforts in Forest.**

**Project Description:** CIC’s can serve as a means, through charitable giving, grants, fees and/or property exchanges to fund community-supported projects that might not otherwise be possible. Local governments frequently establish CIC’s (or Port Authorities) to promote or support community economic development. The State of Ohio authorizes the establishment of CIC’s, which can be formed by a local government – county, township, municipality or combination. CIC boards vary in size and composition but should have 5, 7 or 9 members including representation from the County. Powers and duties are outlined in the articles of incorporation and by local resolution forming the organization. Powers can include:

- Acquisition of real and personal property;
- Own, lease, sell and construct improvements to real property;
- Issue revenue bonds;
- Receive federal and state grants and loans and other public funds;
- Operate transportation, recreation, governmental or cultural facilities, and set rates and charges for use of facilities;
- Cooperate broadly with other governmental agencies and exercise powers delegated by such agencies;

In establishing a formal 501c3 CIC organization to lead revitalization and economic efforts in collaboration with county and state partners, there is concerted leadership, strategic direction and momentum to assure that goals are met.

**Recommendation Two: Develop local funding incentives, including small grant and microloan programs to encourage investment and reinvestment in the community and downtown area.**
**Action Step:** List and make contact with potential funders including the Ohio CDC, utilities and local foundations to request application materials and assure availability and eligibility for funding.

**Project Description:** Through the CIC, operate a microenterprise loan program and/or small grants program to encourage capital investment in buildings and businesses throughout Forest but with a focus on downtown. Seed funding for both programs can be sought through county foundations, utilities or county or state organizations. A microloan program can be funded through the Ohio CDC which operates the Ohio Microbusiness Development Program to provide funding to develop local delivery systems that encourage microbusiness development, provide low- and moderate-income households with access to capital for business development and self-employment, and create and retain long-term jobs. A small grants program can also be established to encourage investment. In exchange for grants, business or building owners or potential new businesses are typically asked to commit matching funds and/or invest sweat equity. This program can encourage downtown investment in existing buildings and work to attract new businesses to the downtown area. This program could potentially be funded with small grants through private sector donations, local foundations or state-level organizations, such as the Ohio Arts Council. A similar program has operated successfully in Nelsonville, OH (pop. 5,349) where, over a period of five years, artists and businesses cleaned up downtown storefronts and brought the town’s downtown square back into economic prosperity.

**Recommendation Three:** Offer educational programs or workshops to small and micro-businesses to implement effective marketing strategies.

**Action Step:** Define and list niche-marketing needs for local businesses, i.e. social media marketing, cooperative or piggyback advertising, events and/or special venues. Identify and schedule delivery of workshop or other training to meet local needs.

**Project Description:** Small businesses located in villages and rural areas often have unique market needs, opportunities and barriers. Defining what works and creating a plan to meet the needs of local businesses can help boost sales and increase visitors. For instance, small businesses often miss the boat leveraging the marketing advantage of web-based applications. Interactive websites are a key component of every small business marketing strategy. Businesses can benefit greatly tapping into mobile media marketing that integrate maps and applications and mobile media marketing. OSU Extension recommends delivering a daylong workshop to assist businesses in developing and implementing effective marketing strategies. An example of a popular workshop Extension has delivered at many locations is called the “Maps and Apps” Workshop.

**Recommendation Four:** Leverage the Tree Town Festival through increased promotions and advertising.

**Action Step:** Identify existing and potential new advertising opportunities through the Ohio Tourism Association, JobsOhio, Hardin County and other organizations to assure the event is being widely marketed. Pursue the idea of an article to be written about the event and posted in a state or national travel publication.
**Project Description:** The Village of Forest hosts a very successful event, the Tree Town Festival, attended annually by visitors from throughout the county and region. Survey respondents listed this event as tied with ‘advertising’ as #2 in importance. This existing event has been recognized as an opportunity to grow awareness of the Village of Forest; its location and unique amenities, which includes a strong youth soccer program. This project would involve identifying free or leveraged marketing opportunities that would piggyback on regional or state advertising promoting statewide events. Widespread advertising for this event would help to draw new visitors and traffic to the community, also benefitting area businesses. An example of this type of success is Wren, OH (pop. 193). Wren holds an annual whiffle ball tournament that has grown to be a national event drawing hundreds of visitors every year. Twenty years ago, there were virtually no businesses in the small, 6-storefront downtown, and today, it is 100% occupied.

**Recommendation Five: Conduct a Main Street Beautification Campaign.**

**Action Step:** Identify, list and make contact with potential donors for this project. Beneficiaries should be given the opportunity to be recognized for specific donations as part of the campaign.

**Project Description:** Main Street beautification was listed by community member respondents as being #1 in importance for the future of Forest. Community members agree that to beautify Main Street is of critical importance if the Village of Forest is to draw shoppers and create a sustainable community economic development trajectory into the future. Since respondents indicated that this project was the most important of all options listed in the survey, it follows that the Village leadership should consider opportunities for immediate response. The project could involve, at a minimum, planters, flowers, benches and other efforts to spruce up the downtown area. The long-range effort will include targeting specific buildings for demolition or renovation, where possible. To accomplish this long-range project, funds will need to be raised to buy and install infrastructure and leverage potential grants for building demolition or renovation. Although the amount of investment could be fairly small, an effort will need to be mounted to identify and contact contributors who could help make this project a reality.

**Summary**

The Village of Forest has significant assets on which to build, in addition to considerable support from local partners including private sector businesses and the Hardin County Chamber and Business Alliance. Outstanding parks, a solid manufacturing base, available development sites, a historic downtown area, and proximity to four-lane highway 30 are assets and advantages that provide a solid footing for future investment and development in Forest. In planning for future growth, Village officials and private sector partners are taking an important step in providing strategic direction and assuring long-term sustainable growth in the Village of Forest.
Appendix A: 2014 Village of Forest Planning Survey Results

Survey Results
The following is a graphical depiction of the responses to each survey question. Additional comments provided by respondents, if any, are included after each graph.

Section - General Information

1. How long has this business been operating at its current location?
Min: 1.00 Max: 5.00 Mean: 4.06 Mode: 5.00 Median: 5.00 Std Dev: 1.43
2. Do you currently own or lease the space your business occupies?

Min: 1.00  Max: 3.00  Mean: 1.36  Mode: 1.00  Median: 1.00  Std Dev: 0.72

Comments/Notes for "Other":

not yet

Political Sub-division
3. What is your overall opinion of Forest as a place to do business?

Min: 1.00   Max: 5.00   Mean: 2.50   Mode: 2.00   Median: 2.00   Std Dev: 1.01

- Excellent: 11%
- Good: 50%
- Average: 22%
- Poor: 11%
- Very Poor: 6%

4. Would you recommend Forest as a good business location to other businesses?

Min: 1.00   Max: 2.00   Mean: 1.11   Mode: 1.00   Median: 1.00   Std Dev: 0.31

- Yes: 89%
- No: 11%
5. Please rate the overall quality of life in the Village of Forest.

- Excellent: 11%
- Good: 53%
- Average: 26%
- Poor: 11%

Min: 1.00   Max: 4.00   Mean: 2.37   Mode: 2.00   Median: 2.00   Std Dev: 0.81

6. Where do the majority of your sales come from?

- Customers in Forest: 13%
- Customers within a 10-mile radius: 56%
- Customers beyond a 10-mile radius: 31%

Min: 1.00   Max: 3.00   Mean: 2.44   Mode: 3.00   Median: 3.00   Std Dev: 0.70
7. Do you live in the Forest area?

- Yes: 89%
- No: 11%

Min: 1.00  Max: 2.00  Mean: 1.11  Mode: 1.00  Median: 1.00  Std Dev: 0.31

8. If YES, do you live within the village limits?

- Yes: 61%
- No: 39%

Min: 1.00  Max: 2.00  Mean: 1.39  Mode: 1.00  Median: 1.00  Std Dev: 0.49
9. Over the next three (3) years, do you think your Number of Customers will increase, stay the same, or decline?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Increase</th>
<th>Stay the Same</th>
<th>Decline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Min: 1.00   Max: 3.00   Mean: 1.67   Mode: 1.00   Median: 2.00   Std Dev: 0.70

10. Over the next three (3) years, do you think your Sales - Total Revenue will increase, stay the same, or decline?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Increase</th>
<th>Stay the Same</th>
<th>Decline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Min: 1.00   Max: 3.00   Mean: 1.81   Mode: 1.00   Median: 2.00   Std Dev: 0.81
11. Over the next three (3) years, do you think your Profit will increase, stay the same, or decline?

- Increase: 38%
- Stay the Same: 31%
- Decline: 31%

Min: 1.00   Max: 3.00   Mean: 1.94   Mode: 1.00   Median: 2.00   Std Dev: 0.83

12. Over the next three (3) years, do you think your Number of Employees will increase, stay the same, or decline?

- Increase: 19%
- Stay the Same: 75%
- Decline: 6%

Min: 1.00   Max: 3.00   Mean: 1.88   Mode: 2.00   Median: 2.00   Std Dev: 0.48
Section - Local Business Environment

13. What are the top three (3) reasons you choose to operate your business in Forest?

- Location
- Access to your customers
- Access to business services
- Community Amenities
- Quality of housing
- Quality of life
- Safety services
- Safe environment
- It's home for me

14. What are the top three (3) challenges you face as a business owner/operator in Forest?

- Recruiting or retaining employees
- Expensive employee wages/benefits
- Unskilled workers
- Expensive health insurance
- Poor building construction
- Tenant/Landlord Relationship
- Expensive or unavailable utilities
- Insufficient local financing available
- Expensive shipping or transport
- Expensive or unavailable products
- Declining market
- Shoplifting or theft
- Vandalism
15. Keeping your business in mind, what are the top projects/programs/events you feel are most important?

Min: 1.00   Max: 6.00   Mean: 2.91   Mode: 1.00   Median: 2.00   Std Dev: 1.83

Comments/Notes:

Building better economic base
Industrial Park Expansion
new business creation
Rundown buildings (eyesore)
soccer
16. From your perspective as a business owner, which do you think would most help the Village of Forest?

Min: 1.00   Max: 8.00   Mean: 3.70   Mode: 1.00   Median: 3.00   Std Dev: 2.65

17. Which of the above effort(s) would you be willing to support by way of volunteering, donating, or promoting?

Any and all

As a business we already try to make our business appealing by keeping our property clean, planting flowers, etc but we are willing to do more if the other businesses around us also do their share. We will be willing to assist in new signs, benches in town, taking part in a Community Improvement Corp, etc.

As a member of the work force in this community along with being a resident in the Village of Forest my entire life I would assist in any matter that would help generate new growth or renewal of items that need to be addressed.

Assistance for promotion and marketing

I will promote the Village of Forest in downtown revitalization and new business creation in our 2 industrial parks.

I would be interested in volunteering, donating or promoting my website design services for Forest business or community improvement.
Section - Services/Amenities

Instructions Provided To Respondents
Please rate the following amenities and services in Forest:

18. Transportation thoroughfares
Min: 1.00   Max: 5.00   Mean: 2.44   Mode: 2.00   Median: 2.00   Std Dev: 0.90

19. Water and sewers
Min: 1.00   Max: 4.00   Mean: 2.28   Mode: 2.00   Median: 2.00   Std Dev: 0.80
20. Communication services

Min: 1.00  Max: 4.00  Mean: 2.68  Mode: 3.00  Median: 3.00  Std Dev: 0.73

21. Print media

Min: 2.00  Max: 4.00  Mean: 3.00  Mode: 3.00  Median: 3.00  Std Dev: 0.59
22. Electric utilities
Min: 1.00  Max: 4.00  Mean: 2.42  Mode: 2.00  Median: 2.00  Std Dev: 0.67

23. School system
Min: 1.00  Max: 4.00  Mean: 2.00  Mode: 2.00  Median: 2.00  Std Dev: 0.79
24. Recreation/cultural
Min: 1.00  Max: 4.00  Mean: 2.68  Mode: 3.00  Median: 3.00  Std Dev: 0.92

25. Activities/entertainments
Min: 2.00  Max: 4.00  Mean: 3.22  Mode: 4.00  Median: 3.00  Std Dev: 0.79
26. Senior services
Min: 1.00   Max: 4.00   Mean: 3.37   Mode: 4.00   Median: 4.00   Std Dev: 0.87

27. Snow and ice removal
Min: 1.00   Max: 5.00   Mean: 2.26   Mode: 3.00   Median: 2.00   Std Dev: 1.02
28. Street repairs
Min: 1.00  Max: 5.00  Mean: 2.79  Mode: 3.00  Median: 3.00  Std Dev: 0.89

29. Fire/paramedic services
Min: 1.00  Max: 3.00  Mean: 1.47  Mode: 1.00  Median: 1.00  Std Dev: 0.60
30. Police safety services

Min: 1.00   Max: 3.00   Mean: 1.84   Mode: 2.00   Median: 2.00   Std Dev: 0.67

31. Transportation thoroughfares

Min: 1.00   Max: 3.00   Mean: 1.53   Mode: 1.00   Median: 1.00   Std Dev: 0.60
32. Water and sewers
Min: 1.00  Max: 2.00  Mean: 1.32  Mode: 1.00  Median: 1.00  Std Dev: 0.46

33. Communication services
Min: 1.00  Max: 2.00  Mean: 1.42  Mode: 1.00  Median: 1.00  Std Dev: 0.49
**34. Print media**

Min: 1.00  Max: 3.00  Mean: 1.89  Mode: 2.00  Median: 2.00  Std Dev: 0.55

![Pie chart showing the distribution of responses to print media importance: 21% Very Important, 68% Important, 11% Not Important.](chart_1.png)

**35. Electric utilities**

Min: 1.00  Max: 2.00  Mean: 1.37  Mode: 1.00  Median: 1.00  Std Dev: 0.48

![Pie chart showing the distribution of responses to electric utilities importance: 63% Very Important, 37% Important.](chart_2.png)
36. Public transportation
Min: 1.00  Max: 4.00  Mean: 2.61  Mode: 3.00  Median: 3.00  Std Dev: 0.76

37. Health care services (hospitals, clinics)
Min: 1.00  Max: 4.00  Mean: 1.68  Mode: 2.00  Median: 2.00  Std Dev: 0.73
38. School system
Min: 1.00   Max: 4.00   Mean: 1.47   Mode: 1.00   Median: 1.00   Std Dev: 0.75

39. Recreation/cultural
Min: 1.00   Max: 3.00   Mean: 1.63   Mode: 2.00   Median: 2.00   Std Dev: 0.58
40. Activities/entertainment

Min: 1.00  Max: 2.00  Mean: 1.67  Mode: 2.00  Median: 2.00  Std Dev: 0.47

41. Senior services

Min: 1.00  Max: 3.00  Mean: 1.68  Mode: 2.00  Median: 2.00  Std Dev: 0.57
42. Snow and ice removal

Min: 1.00  Max: 2.00  Mean: 1.39  Mode: 1.00  Median: 1.00  Std Dev: 0.49

43. Street repairs

Min: 1.00  Max: 2.00  Mean: 1.33  Mode: 1.00  Median: 1.00  Std Dev: 0.47
44. Fire/paramedic services
Min: 1.00  Max: 3.00  Mean: 1.16  Mode: 1.00  Median: 1.00  Std Dev: 0.49

45. Police safety services
Min: 1.00  Max: 4.00  Mean: 1.21  Mode: 1.00  Median: 1.00  Std Dev: 0.69
**Section - Useful Business Services**

**Instructions Provided To Respondents**
Please indicate the extent to which the following business services or programs would be useful to you:

### 46. Free business assistance

- **Very Useful**: 22%
- **Somewhat Useful**: 72%
- **Not at all Useful**: 6%

Min: 1.00   Max: 3.00   Mean: 1.83   Mode: 2.00   Median: 2.00   Std Dev: 0.50

### 47. Networking Events (i.e. breakfast/luncheon mtgs., business after hours, etc.)

- **Very Useful**: 28%
- **Somewhat Useful**: 56%
- **Not at all Useful**: 17%

Min: 1.00   Max: 3.00   Mean: 1.89   Mode: 2.00   Median: 2.00   Std Dev: 0.66
48. Advertising or marketing of Main Street district and Village businesses

Min: 1.00  Max: 3.00  Mean: 1.44  Mode: 1.00  Median: 1.00  Std Dev: 0.60

49. Low interest business loan program (X% if guidelines met)

Min: 1.00  Max: 3.00  Mean: 1.67  Mode: 1.00  Median: 1.50  Std Dev: 0.75
50. Low interest building improvement loan program
Min: 1.00  Max: 3.00  Mean: 1.53  Mode: 1.00  Median: 1.00  Std Dev: 0.75

51. Facade grants (up to $X)
Min: 1.00  Max: 3.00  Mean: 1.50  Mode: 1.00  Median: 1.00  Std Dev: 0.69
52. Sign grant (up to $X)

Min: 1.00  Max: 3.00  Mean: 1.67  Mode: 1.00  Median: 2.00  Std Dev: 0.67

53. Downtown business directories, brochures, maps

Min: 1.00  Max: 3.00  Mean: 1.78  Mode: 1.00  Median: 2.00  Std Dev: 0.79
54. Web site or internet resources

Min: 1.00  Max: 2.00  Mean: 1.25  Mode: 1.00  Median: 1.00  Std Dev: 0.43

55. Special event coordination (to increase foot traffic)

Min: 1.00  Max: 3.00  Mean: 1.56  Mode: 1.00  Median: 1.00  Std Dev: 0.68
Section - Business Operations

56. **Do you typically have a significant increase in sales during any particular season of the year?**

- **Winter**: 12%
- **Spring**: 29%
- **Summer**: 41%
- **Fall**: 18%

Min: 1.00   Max: 4.00   Mean: 2.65   Mode: 3.00   Median: 3.00   Std Dev: 0.90

57. **If yes, do you hire more employees during this busy season?**

- **Yes**: 20%
- **No**: 80%

Min: 1.00   Max: 2.00   Mean: 1.80   Mode: 2.00   Median: 2.00   Std Dev: 0.40
58. What is your most successful form of marketing?

- Newspaper advertisements: 13%
- Internet marketing and advertising: 6%
- Sponsorship of activities and events: 6%
- Word-of-mouth: 63%
- Other: 13%

Min: 3.00   Max: 11.00   Mean: 9.38   Mode: 10.00   Median: 10.00   Std Dev: 1.87

Comments/Notes for "Other:"

- Facebook
- Sales calls
59. More of my customers are of this age group than any other:
Min: 2.00   Max: 4.00   Mean: 3.20   Mode: 3.00   Median: 3.00   Std Dev: 0.75

60. What is the busiest day of the week for this business?
Min: 1.00   Max: 8.00   Mean: 6.06   Mode: 8.00   Median: 7.50   Std Dev: 2.51
61. Do you have any plans to modernize or expand your business?

Min: 1.00   Max: 2.00   Mean: 1.33   Mode: 1.00   Median: 1.00   Std Dev: 0.47

62. If yes, do you face any constraints?

Min: 1.00   Max: 9.00   Mean: 4.32   Mode: 2.00   Median: 3.00   Std Dev: 2.80

Comments/Notes:

sinage, ongoing building repairs

Time
Section - Thank you!

63. Please share any additional information in the space below as to your business or future vision for the Village of Forest:

1) Address main street-unkempt buildings 2) Address unkempt properties 3) Restrictive access to freight carriers creating a dangerous situation 4) Unfair landfill charges where no refuse created (on real estate taxes) 5) No follow-up on attempted arson of building by police dept. (about 8 months ago)

From my experience, there are a lot of Forest residents who don't support local business or activities. Need to somehow change the mindset of a lot of residents. Difficult task. Also definitely need to clean up the storefronts downtown. Makes the town look dirty and cheap. Another difficult task.

I feel in order for Forest to grow and keep the high school graduates who leave for bigger towns the village needs to go after any and every business and store possible... Even if they big on the edge of town and are later annexed in that would help the tax base and keep some of the young adults who are fleeing for other towns...

Test survey

This is only a potential business. My answers are based on what I have seen or currently see elsewhere.

We are very appreciative of the support the community gives our business. However we wish that the town would do more to enforce other business owners and residential property owners to clean up their properties. We have talked about expanding but are hesitant because we would be making a large investment and not sure of the return we would receive.

WE NEED TO GET MORE INDUSTRY IN THIS TOWN BRING MORE PEOPLE INTO THE WORK FORCE AND MORE SPENDING WILL FOLLOW

We need to utilize the 2 industrial parks. We are located within 500 miles of 60% of the US population. We are located within a prime commercial corridor for the Midwest by over the road interstate connections and rail service. We have so much to offer in untapped resources for prospective commercial entities. We need a plan to develop and market our industrial parks and village.
Ohio State University Extension - Community Development
25 Agricultural Administration Building
2120 Fyffe Road
Columbus, OH 43210

Phone (614) 292-6232
Fax (614) 292-7341
URL comdev.osu.edu