

Growing Forward in Response to an Economic Disaster

By Christian Schock, Taylor Stuckert, Mark Rembert, and Dr. Peter J. Mallow

THE SUCCESS OF WILMINGTON AND CLINTON COUNTY, OHIO

In 2008, a major economic disaster hit Wilmington and Clinton County, Ohio, resulting in one of the state's largest employment dislocations in history. The Clinton County Regional Planning Commission and its nonprofit arm, Energize Clinton County, instituted a series of interconnected, award-winning economic development and planning programs. The grassroots programs and a five-part recovery strategy not only tactically assisted in the economic disaster response but also proactively set forth a strategic plan for economic resilience, which continues to pay off today.

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growing forward

IN RESPONSE TO AN ECONOMIC DISASTER

By Christian Schock, Taylor Stuckert, Mark Rembert, and Dr. Peter J. Mallow

INTRODUCTION

Clinton County, located in southwestern Ohio, like many places in the country is celebrating the end of the recession. A combination of a strengthening macroeconomy and many local competitive advantages such as a great location, successful local and state marketing efforts, and a now well-documented story of resilience and community strength have helped support the ongoing recovery. There are lessons learned behind the many efforts that grew from the local experience during the recession, some of which are perhaps models for other communities and economic development professionals.

Pre-recession Clinton County had an unemployment rate of 3 percent. It was home to the U.S. main operations base of DHL, the world's largest logistics company. DHL had purchased Airborne Express, a local major employer that had re-utilized the Wilmington Air Park, the former Clinton County Air Force Base. However, in 2008 DHL announced it was shutting down its U.S. operations, unexpectedly and practically overnight. This economic disaster fell upon Clinton County and the surrounding counties while at the same time the full extent of the financial crisis was becoming known. The county was facing the reality of over 8,000 local jobs at the Air Park disappearing in a matter of months.

In the natural disaster lexicon, federal, state, and local resources are spent preparing for potential disasters, devising evacuation plans, running assistance models, and mapping floodplains and impact zones – even if the disaster never comes. Yet, within the economic development realm, there is perhaps too quick a move to celebrate victories and a run to



Buy Local First Clinton County campaign advertisement noting the impact of shopping at local retail shops.

land the next deal, while leaving few resources to plan for the unthinkable.

The story of Clinton County is a tale of resilience and community spirit triumphing over economic hardship. It is also a cautionary tale which is occurring more frequently as globalization continues to unhinge the relationship between commerce and place. The unexpected move of major employers,

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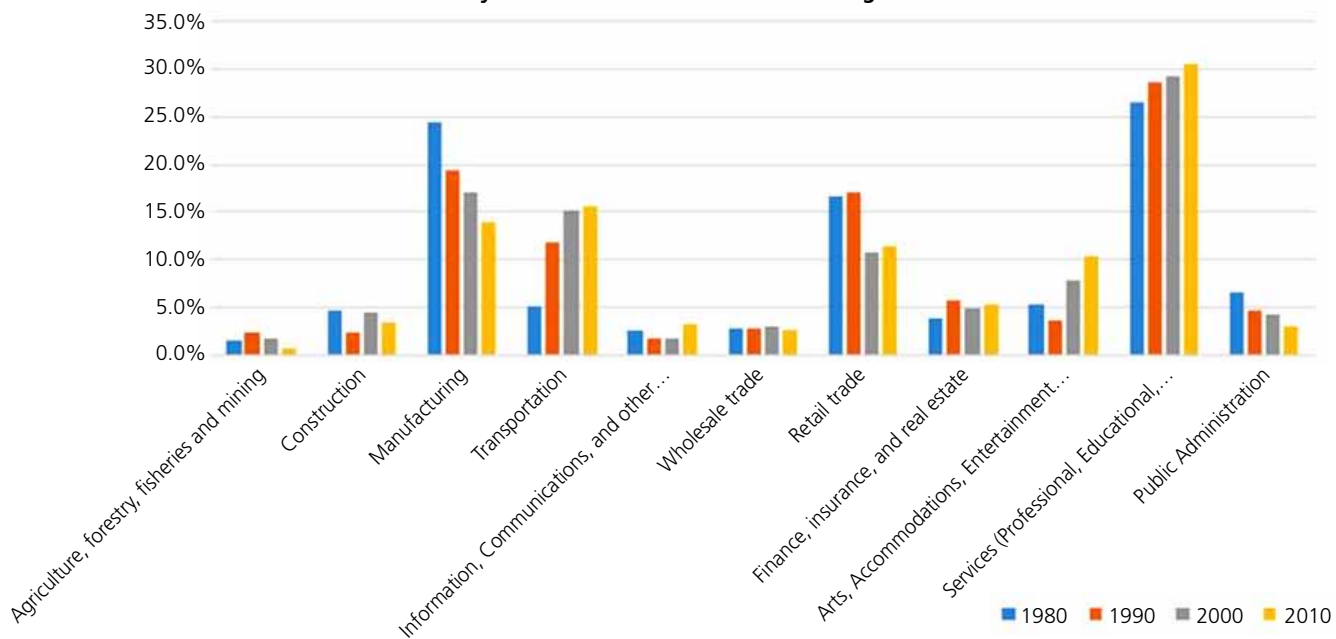
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In 2008, a major economic disaster hit Wilmington and Clinton County, Ohio, resulting in one of the state's largest employment dislocations in history. The Clinton County Regional Planning Commission and its nonprofit arm, Energize Clinton County, instituted a series of interconnected, award-winning economic development and planning programs. The grassroots programs and a five-part recovery strategy not only tactically assisted in the economic disaster response but also proactively set forth a strategic plan for economic resilience, which continues to pay off today.

Industry as % of Total Workforce in Wilmington 1980-2010



Source: Minnesota Population Center. National Historical Geographic Information System: Version 2.0. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota 2011.

for whatever reason, has played out around the nation far too many times before Clinton County. Planning for a potential economic disaster with realistic and long-term responses is an important need.

A HISTORY REPEATING

Clinton County (population approx. 42,000) is an ex-urban micropolitan area located less than 50 miles from Dayton, Cincinnati, and Columbus in southwestern Ohio and within 500 miles of nearly 60 percent of the U.S. population. The city of Wilmington is its county seat.

The Clinton County Air Force Base (now the Wilmington Air Park) was built during World War II to teach pilots how to fly in all weather conditions. The base was heralded with much fanfare when it expanded in the mid to late 1950s, but by 1971 the base had become redundant. The Department of Defense closed the facility and Clinton County faced its first economic disaster, described at the time as Clinton County's "most significant event."

The Wilmington Community Improvement Corporation acquired the base from the federal government with funds raised locally and facilitated its redevelopment, culminating in the transfer of the remaining property to Airborne Express in 1980. During the years of Airborne's ownership, the Air Park saw steady growth and development, and by the 1990s had developed into a major freight sorting hub processing more than 500,000 packages a day.

In 2003, Airborne Express sold the Wilmington Air Park to DHL, and over the next five years, DHL invested over \$250 million into the facility. Currently in 2014, the Air Park facility consists of two Category III aircraft runways, 200,000 sq.ft. of hangar space (with another

100,000 sq.ft. to be completed this year), 2.5 million sq.ft. of warehouse and sorting space, and 200,000 sq.ft. of office space over 1,900 acres. It was the largest privately-owned airport in the U.S. and employed over 10,000 people daily at its peak in 2007.

REALIZATION

DHL and affiliated businesses at the Wilmington Air Park were the largest employers in a seven-county region. Within Clinton County, it was estimated that one in three local workers worked at the Air Park. Some initial economic impact research, at the time of DHL's announcement, indicated that one in four local businesses could fail in Clinton County because of the economic disaster. But, on closer examination, statistics showed that local business ownership had been quietly eroding for many years, even during the DHL heydays. Like many small towns, issues stemming from the arrival of chain retail and continued commercial aggregation had decreased the number of locally owned businesses and the entrepreneurs that would have run those businesses were gone.

Over time, the growth in non-local service sector jobs and transportation jobs sorting packages at the Air Park came at the expense of, and with the decline in, manufacturing jobs. As noted in the graph, the transportation sector grew significantly from 5 to 16 percent – much of it concentrated in one employer.

RESPONSE

The local, state, and federal response to this economic disaster was perhaps a model in itself. In response to the disaster, former Ohio Governor Ted Strickland, Lieutenant Governor Lee Fisher, and Wilmington Mayor David Raizk established a joint regional Economic Task Force

Local leaders also focused on the impact to local nonprofits and businesses. In the mix of many local efforts mobilized during the disaster, the Clinton County Regional Planning Commission (CCRPC) invested its planning resources in the establishment of a new nonprofit called Energize Clinton County (ECC) to focus on the area's future. Many leaders searched for answers and the CCRPC/ECC along with the Economic Task Force and other organizations held a series of town meetings about the future.

comprised of five committees that met every other week for nearly a year. The committees were filled with an unprecedented bipartisan membership, which included elected leaders from many of the surrounding counties, labor representatives, local business leaders, state development agencies, representatives from Wilmington College and other local institutions, and state and national elected officials.

The results of the Economic Task Force's efforts were immediate. The Economic Development Administration (EDA) funded a recovery coordinator position locally, a redevelopment plan process, and a revolving loan fund. The Department of Labor awarded a National Emergency Grant of over \$8 million to fund retraining and skills development.

Mayor Raizk immediately requested that DHL donate the facility to the community to facilitate redevelopment, and the Economic Task Force worked both media and political angles to ensure that the Clinton County story remained in the headlines. The media's interest in the story grew with CBS's 60 Minutes program labeling Wilmington the "ground zero of the great recession." As a result of this publicity, significant state and federal retraining dollars, and donations from nonprofits, celebrities, and others poured into the county for food, shelter, and other immediate aid.

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Four key issues became apparent:

- DHL was not going to reverse its decision. The community had to be ready for major layoffs, and like many communities, Clinton County had not fathomed this or created any contingency plans for such an event.
- Those being laid off had either specialized skills like aircraft maintenance and logistics technicians or little skilled training, like package sorters. Job skill matches would be difficult, especially as the country entered a major economic recession in late 2008.
- The Wilmington Air Park was privately owned, and receiving control of the facility from DHL was paramount. Even if a transfer could occur, there were still many issues to consider like carrying costs, maintenance, utilities, and overhead of such a major facility.
- There was little precedent for dealing with an economic disaster of this scale and immediate nature; in many examples, an economic disaster is predated with a gradual decline in an industry or business.

PRECEDENT OR LACK THERE OF

As part of the Economic Task Force's work, the University of Cincinnati, School of Planning assessed the literature regarding similar economic disasters. The literature surrounding military base closures was the closest precedent. The similarities between a military base closure and the DHL closure were:

- Frequently involved rural or more isolated communities;
- The facility tended to dominate both political and economic considerations of the community;
- Heavy local dependence on the facility's tax revenue;
- Local infrastructure is very specific to the facility's needs; and
- Educational attainment and training is often focused on the facility's and the facility's industry.

However, there were a few key differences between a military base closure and DHL leaving Clinton County. In the case of a military base closure, the federal government establishes a process to aid in the transition, years in advance of the actual base closure. Second, this process often provides substantial dollars to the local community to assist in the transition.

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While these differences are substantial, there were three important lessons from the military base closure literature that were embodied in the work of the Economic Task Force. These aspects were: strong regional jurisdictional cooperation, a local leadership capable of organizing and acting in collaboration with state and federal partners, and a civic infrastructure that can engage and mobilize the residents at the grassroots level.

Many discussions within the Economic Task Force and through town halls and in other forums focused on how to respond and how to channel resources. The CCRPC/ECC took to heart the lessons from the literature and the feedback from the public events and developed new institutional partnerships with the University of Cincinnati, the University of Dayton, Southern State Community College, Wilmington College, the Wilmington Clinton County Chamber of Commerce, local businesses and nonprofits, and state and federal agencies like the EDA and USDA – a set of regional cooperation and institutional engagements never undertaken before in Clinton County.

AN EMERGING STRATEGY

The initial focus of the CCRPC/ECC response was on ways to assist local business, which was projected to be heavily impacted by the disaster. However, this effort led the team to examine other observed missed economic opportunities or “leaks” in the system as well and view the local economic system through the metaphor of a leaky bucket. The team was trying to better understand the wealth inflow and outflow in Clinton County, and for the first time, examine not only growing inflow but also ways to reduce outflow.

This concept of the leaky bucket led us to identify at least four additional major leaks observed locally that made it harder for Wilmington and Clinton County to respond to the economic disaster. Five “leak strategies” were developed in the following areas: Local Business, Young Professionals, Local Food, Energy, and Visioning.



A slide from an early presentation highlighting the leaky bucket metaphor used by the Clinton County Regional Planning Commission/Energize Clinton County to illustrate potential missed opportunities within the local economic system.

Each strategy process started with an observed leak – the problem/observation statement which succinctly qualified the problem. The CCRPC/ECC and partners then developed programs, campaigns, plans, and processes that proactively addressed that statement. The problem statements adopted by the team appear in italics below, under each section of the five-part strategy.

LOCAL BUSINESS

Compared to nonlocal business, locally-owned businesses have a higher economic multiplier; diversify the local economy, and provide more entrepreneurial opportunities. Unfortunately, like many rural communities, Clinton County has observed a decline in the number of locally owned stores, and with that, many of the entrepreneurs who would have run those enterprises.

The CCRPC/ECC started Buy Local First Clinton County in order to:

- Assist local businesses with improving and broadening connections with consumers;
- Develop a more robust local consumer network accessible by many different businesses;
- Educate local citizens and consumers on the economic impact of their spending decisions; and
- Establish a foundation for future entrepreneurs with a consumer base already energized to “buy local” and support an emerging business.

The effort began with monthly coffee meetings to build relationships among local business owners and construct a coordinated effort, which led to development of www.buylocalcc.com, funded by the CCRPC/ECC. With a website developed, the Buy Local First effort began building a large consumer email database to update consumers weekly with email marketing pieces. These weekly emails highlight local events, provide business specials/coupons, and present “focal local” spotlights of an area business and its owner. The focal local pieces, which are produced in collaboration with the Wilmington City Schools District media department and the Wilmington News Journal, highlighted the “qualitative” values of buying local by putting a face to the local business.

The Buy Local First Clinton County campaign has continued to grow, and it is now also partnered with the Wilmington-Clinton County Chamber of Commerce. By the end of 2011, there were 3,695 consumers with nearly 300 participating businesses. At the end of 2013, the consumers’ database had exceeded 5,000 individuals, and business participation in the campaign’s events has grown each year.

Modeling the actual economic impact of a buy local campaign had been difficult, so in 2012, we partnered



Buy Local First Clinton County-
www.buylocalcc.com campaign logo.

with JP Morgan Chase's Technology for Social Good program, which led to a seminal economic study. The study utilized millions of credit card transactions analyzed by the bank's staff and concluded that businesses which participate in the Buy Local First Clinton County campaign have an approximate 10 percent sales lift over businesses in the same sector that do not participate.

Heritage Ohio recognized the campaign as one of the most successful in the state. It received a Rural Business Opportunity Grant from USDA Rural Development to expand the grassroots campaign model into the following adjacent counties also affected by the loss of DHL: Adams, Fayette, Brown, Highland, Scioto, and Pike. Along with the quantified economic success and local expansion, *Atlantic Cities* published an article in 2013 entitled "How to Design a Buy Local Campaign that Actually Works," which highlighted the campaign's success.

The powerful change in perception is perhaps just as important as the quantifiable positive economic impacts of the buy local campaign. An entire generation is now more cognizant about its buying decisions and better bonded to locally owned businesses, something which will bring economic benefits for years to come.

A survey of the Buy Local First participants in 2011 asked, "Did you consider shopping locally to be important 5 years ago?" and "Do you consider shopping locally to be important today?" Of the respondents, 45 percent said that it was important five years ago and 95 percent said that it is important today.

YOUNG PROFESSIONALS

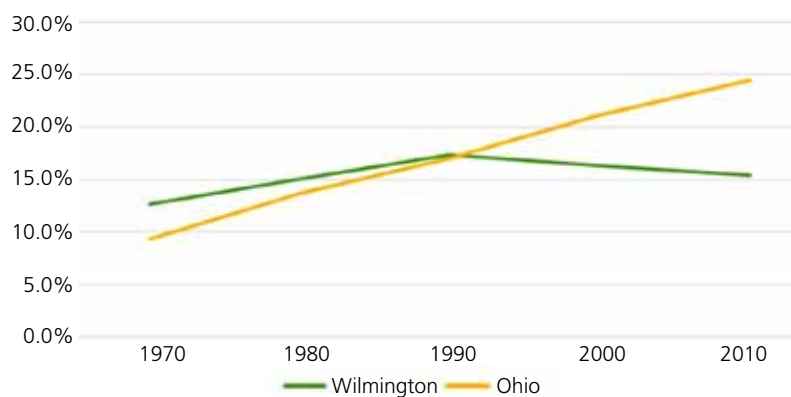
Like many rural communities, the loss of young professionals is a loss of the community's investment in an important human resource. Young professionals are often unable to fathom opportunities for themselves in the rural community where they grew up.

"Brain drain" is a term that may be used in rural communities across the United States, and Clinton County was no exception. The issue reflects the loss of young and educated populations from a community. It reflects a major leakage in a local economy, as the investment in education represents a significant public expenditure.



2013 Clinton Community Fellows (from left to right), Dawit Habtemariam, Brooke Beam, Bria Eslick, Madison Law and Zach McCune.

% of Pop. >25 with Bachelor+ Degree 1970-2010



Source: Minnesota Population Center. National Historical Geographic Information System: Version 2.0. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota 2011.

One of the unintended consequences during the "boom years" of the Air Park's package sorting operation is that young citizens had job opportunities with low educational requirements and thus less incentive to invest in higher education. The growth of low skill Air Park jobs coupled with the traditional rural brain drain of educated citizens leaving the community for higher education and job opportunities in cities and metropolitan areas led to the leak in demographics, which became quite noticeable.

During much of the latter half of the 20th century, Wilmington's educational attainment rate at the bachelor degree and higher level was above both state and national averages. In fact, it was considered to have one of the highest educational attainment rates for females in the state as late as 1980. Over time though, as seen in the graph, educational attainment rates have plummeted. Today, Wilmington has a bachelor degree and higher educational attainment rate of just about 15 percent, which is nearly 10 percent below the state average and nearly 13 percent below national averages.

The young professional exodus was statistically evident, though rarely discussed locally, so the CCRPC/ECC staff developed the Clinton Community Fellows program (www.clintoncommunityfellows.org), which introduces young professionals to local businesses and nonprofit organizations. The goal is to build community roots and provide local businesses and organizations needed professional capacity.

More than an internship program, the Fellows format is designed to empower young professionals to be change agents by pairing their specific skills with a local business willing to discuss a "change-focused" need, one that will change the way the business currently operates. For example, some of the Fellows have set up new accounting practices, performed market research for new products, created new marketing strategies, provided design services, or helped establish a new web or social media presence.

Through 2013, 17 Fellows have provided nearly 7,000 hours of "change-focused" consulting for 50 local businesses and nonprofits in Clinton County. The pro-



The Clinton Community Fellows logo, designed by former Fellow and architecture graduate Chas Weiderhold – noting the skyline of Wilmington, Ohio, with the Clinton County courthouse centered, crop rows indicative of a rural area, a rising sun denoting the future, and roots to characterize the program's effort to root young professionals locally.

gram enables businesses to try new business opportunities and be more competitive while introducing young professionals to opportunities and organizations. Most of the Fellows have been offered full-time positions, and many businesses which have benefited from the program now pay it forward by sponsoring a future Fellow.

The Fellows program complements the existing workforce development initiatives locally, and it is assisted by the small business development organizations already active in our region, including the local Small Business Development Center (SBDC), the Southern State Community College Enterprise Center, and Wilmington College's Business Department. This program has also increased local businesses' participation rates with these small business assistance efforts and resources as the Fellows often introduce these services to local businesses.

In addition to the Fellows program, the CCRPC/ECC sought to objectively understand the reasons why young professionals stayed or left the community. The Ohio University School of Communications through Dr. Anna Wiederhold (now at the University of Nevada-Reno), Dr. Laura Black, and Dr. Ted Welser conducted a survey and a series of focus groups, which resulted in a realistic assessment for local leaders and institutions to better understand what matters to local young professionals.

The survey results and feedback from a young professional working group meeting convened by Wilmington Mayor Randy Riley led us to form a partnership with the Wilmington City Schools District, Southern State Community College, and Wilmington College to create first-ever tangible incentives for young professionals to stay in Wilmington and Clinton County.

These first-ever incentives are collectively called Wilmington Succeeds (www.wilmingtonsucceeds.com). The suite of programs includes special scholarships for local students to attend the local colleges and a reimbursable homesteading grant program for recent graduates to purchase homes in the city of Wilmington, funded by private donations. Even more important than any one program may be that the leak of young professionals from the community, glossed over by years of growth at the Air Park, is now a topic that is being discussed locally and local leaders are being proactive to address it.

LOCAL FOOD

Especially in a rural community like Clinton County, the lack of local produce and other value-added agricultural products is a missed economic opportunity, as the economic spending on those items is leaked out of the local, state, and even national economy.

CCRPC/ECC redeveloped and expanded the existing Clinton County Farmer's Market (www.clintoncountymarket.com) and enhanced access to the market by providing electronic benefits transfer infrastructure for food assistance and credit card transactions. The CCRPC/ECC continues to serve as the market's coordinating and fiscal agent.

Since 2009, the Farmer's Market has doubled in size and offers a wider array of products, including more finished goods such as baked goods, crafts, clothing, soaps, etc. The market hours were expanded to twice weekly during the larger summer market, along with the addition of winter and spring markets. The marketing for the market has been coordinated and interconnected with the Buy Local First effort. For example, local restaurants like the General Denver Hotel offer special menu items on the market day, using products from the market.

In addition to enhancing the local food economy, there is also a need to leverage Clinton County's advantages in agriculture by focusing on distribution, food processing, and improving regional access to adjacent metropolitan markets. The CCRPC/ECC, collaborating with the state of Ohio Center for Innovative Food Technology, took the proactive step of designing the layout and assisting in the site ready certification of a 300-acre area specifically for food processing. A broader discussion on local food and improving aggregation for local producers, engaging Wilmington College and regional partners, is now ongoing.

ENERGY

Energy is a bottom line cost of every business and residence, lowering energy cost will allow them to operate with a higher profit margin and allow residents and businesses to reinvest more into the local economy.

The CCRPC/ECC drafted the legislation which designated the city of Wilmington as one of the nation's first Green Enterprise Zones (GEZ), which created specific incentives for green building, a council to coordinate green efforts, and a geographical boundary to focus the efforts. The U.S. Green Building Council recognized the



The city of Wilmington develops the first solar photo-voltaic facility in Clinton County history at a municipally owned facility with a grant won by the CCRPC/ECC.



An infill vision sketch for downtown Lynchburg, Ohio – part of the village's first comprehensive plan, created by planner David Alpern through the immersion planning process in collaboration with the University of Cincinnati.



Wilmington GEZ legislation as a “Top 20 Public Policy Achievement” nationally in 2009.

Clinton County has attracted both utility-grade solar and wind companies to put land under contract in the county. In addition, the city of Wilmington developed the first solar PV facility in Clinton County history with a federal Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant won by the CCRPC/ECC.

The team developed a partnership with the University of Dayton's (UD) Building Energy Center and the work of Dr. Kevin Hallinan, which uses energy usage data in a proprietary model to determine the theoretically least baseline energy efficient local businesses. With this information, and our Buy Local First network, the UD team was then able to target businesses (and later residences) which were the most likely to have a high ROI on the cost of a full energy audit. The CCRPC/ECC won private and foundation grants for a series of energy audits of local businesses in 2010-2011 and local businesses have implemented many of the audit recommendations, becoming more energy efficient.

Using our network and community outreach efforts, UD developed a web-based platform called Dropoly (www.dropoly.com), which provides a fresh, user-friendly interface to energy efficiency awareness for local residents and small businesses. We also brought together local environmental groups with the formation of the Clinton County Green Alliance (www.greenalliancecc.com), which increased collaboration and led to combined events and promotions between the organizations.

In 2008, energy and energy usage was not a topic on the minds of many local leaders or citizens. However, these programs and the broader energy discussions have not only led to more efficient businesses and homes but also to both the city and county enacting energy aggregation programs, which have saved over \$5 million for local residents and businesses to date.

VISIONING

Small towns and villages in rural areas like Clinton County may lack visioning capacity and a framework for redevelopment. Even if resources were available, for a plan to be suc-

cessful there needs to be extensive local participation and buy-in, which traditional consultants may be unable to provide.

With the institutional support and guidance of a University of Cincinnati, School of Planning research team led by Dr. Michael Romanos, Dr. Peter J. Mallow, Antony Seppi, and Sudeshna Ghosh, the team completed a Wilmington Air Park Redevelopment Guidelines document collaborating with the local Economic Task Force. This effort also led to a Wilmington Air Park Redevelopment RFI/RFP process which solicited revisioning ideas and proposals for the facility from leading national teams, including several of the largest real estate, engineering and planning, and consulting firms. The RFI/RFP process then led to the Wilmington Air Park Master Plan and Market Study, which was funded by the EDA and continues to guide redevelopment efforts.

The CCRPC/ECC also engaged the University of Cincinnati, School of Planning to assist local communities in visioning and master planning. Traditionally, the school worked mostly with urban areas. However, this new approach, branded “immersion planning,” placed planning and architecture students/recent graduates with sponsoring small towns to develop hands-on comprehensive plans for smaller villages.

Six first-ever comprehensive plans for local villages were completed in Clinton County through this model (www.imagine.energizecc.com). The plans have allowed local villages to prioritize and visualize future infrastructure needs and redevelopment opportunities and highlight resources and challenges. Following the success locally, the University of Cincinnati expanded this model to rural communities in Kentucky and Pennsylvania as well.

The “immersion planning” process and the case of planner David Alpern, who developed the Village of Lynchburg, Ohio's plan, were specifically highlighted in 2012 testimony before the U.S. Senate Agriculture Committee as a model for small towns to address planning and visioning challenges. The institutional partnership continues with the university, as the CCRPC/ECC is currently working with Dr. Xinhao Wang on land suitability mapping and livability indexing for areas of Clinton County.

PLANNING FOR TOMORROW

The programs developed under this five-part planning strategy have been noted as models of proactive innovation, attracting national recognition and grant funding from many diverse organizations including: Pop!Tech, VH1 Do Something, Pepsi, Toyota, National Audubon Society, *The New York Times*, *The Economist*, *Fast Company*, *Solutions Journal*, National Public Radio, Fox News, Glenn Beck, Great Lakes Brewing Co., Wise Economy Workshop, Institute for the Future, MSNBC, IEDC, the Ohio Economic Development Association (a Top 3 Best Innovation Award in 2012), and the American Planning Association (a National Planning Achievement Award in 2013).

Within the literature, there is an increasing critique of economic development incentives for corporate location. The DHL case is yet another case study deserved of this critique – where in less than 10 years, the company received over half a billion dollars in state and local incentives used to lure it as the company moved operations from Kentucky to Ohio and then ultimately back to Kentucky when it departed in 2008. Even with all these incentives, there was effectively no investment or research done on what communities should do before, during, and after a corporate departure. In the natural disaster planning field, there is a process of “hardening” – the physical preparation of community facilities to accommodate a disaster. This hardening process is clearly what needs to be contemplated in economic development.

We argue that a first planning step in the hardening process can be done locally – by proactively addressing many leaks already recognizable within the economic system, which does not require major policy changes or massive new resources.

One of this strategy's most successful elements has been the designed and natural linkages between each of the five areas and programs. Many of the programs naturally leverage the others. For example, encouraging consumers to buy at locally owned restaurants and then getting the additional boost from that restaurant sourcing local food. The young professionals in our Fellows program work with local businesses and develop projects related to local energy, local food or community planning as well – getting the Fellows and the businesses they work with more involved in the community. Another example is many businesses active in the Buy Local First campaign learned about and utilized the energy efficiency resources and the other programs.

By developing programs that have strong linkages, the community has leveraged the region's cooperation, further developed local capacity, and strengthened – “hardened” – the civic infrastructure. The strategy has won local, state, and national planning awards because it has proven to be both tactical – in providing immediate and tangible economic impact – but also strategic – in focusing on setting a long term foundation for local resiliency. In addition to this success, the programs brought Wilmington and Clinton County over \$3 million worth of positive media attention at an important time during the redevelopment process.



Construction continues on an additional 100,000 sq.ft. aircraft maintenance hangar at the Wilmington Air Park, leased to Airborne Maintenance and Engineering Services (AMES). The facility will create 259 new jobs when it is operational later this year.

Today, Wilmington and Clinton County have come a long way from the label of ground zero. In 2013, the Clinton County Port Authority, which now owns the Wilmington Air Park (www.wilmingtonairpark.com) following its donation by DHL, won a Gold Award in Marketing from IEDC. Almost 700 new jobs were created in Wilmington in 2013.

The Air Park will finish construction of another 100,000 sq.ft. of additional aircraft maintenance and repair organization hangar capacity for Airborne Maintenance and Engineering Services this year, adding an additional 259 new jobs. Also, there have been recent corporate locations and expansions for at least four Fortune 500 firms at the Air Park and within adjacent warehouses and offices, including Cargill, Polaris, Praxair, Cole Taylor Mortgage, DealerTrack, and others.

But the work is just starting. This five-part strategy would not have prevented this specific local economic disaster, much like natural disaster preparedness planning does not prevent hurricanes. It is a long term process of strengthening local advantages specific to a respective place and part of an overall economic development strategy. This strategy builds and renews a pride of place and thus complements traditional efforts related to marketing, training, and incentives undertaken by the county, city, port authority, and state agencies.

As traditional economic development efforts are often regimented, this approach stands out because it specifically targets preparedness by addressing existing weaknesses – many of which even “successful” communities may be grappling with today. When you are located in the floodplain, you plan for floods to occur; the economic development field must plan for economic disasters and address the existing leakages, which would only be exacerbated during a disaster or another economic downturn.

LEARNED FROM EXPERIENCE

The Wilmington and Clinton County recovery process and turnaround success point to a few key steps

for communities to consider in a plan for economic disaster hardening and preparedness:

1. **Examine Leaks** – What are the observed economic leakages occurring in a respective local economic system, why are they occurring, and is the leakage statistically worsening? Does the community have the will to acknowledge that these weaknesses exist, especially during the “good” economic times? We viewed this economic research much like mapping a 100 year flood line – a process of demarcating the dangerous development trends.
2. **Define Vulnerability** – Within the highlighted leaks, which will have the most negative impact and what leak is the community most susceptible to? These could include an increasing lack of economic diversity, an over reliance on economic sectors forecasted to shrink, an aging workforce, declining educational or skills attainment, and a decreasing location quotient or share of an industry that is otherwise growing regionally or nationally.
3. **Determine Priorities** – Which of these leaks, determined to be vulnerable, could be pragmatically tackled and/or proactively addressed locally or regionally?
4. **Highlight Potential Partners** – What local organizations and institutions have a vested interest in addressing those most vulnerable leaks? What institutions can provide research and/or support?

The Clinton County example highlights educational institutions, private firms, government agencies, and foundations which have provided key support and assistance for the defined programs.

5. **Implementation** – How to craft a change-focused program which can target that highlighted leak, gain local buy in, create a local multiplier, and be vested at the correct level – neighborhood, community, region, state.

The team’s hope is that the Wilmington and Clinton County story and the work of the CCRPC/ECC inspires other communities to look critically at leaks in their economic systems, build grassroots collaborations with institutions, increase local planning capacity, and develop proactive programs focused on resiliency well before an economic disaster strikes. Preparing for potential economic disasters at the local level, better understanding existing leaks, and determining a community’s vulnerabilities will enhance all economic development efforts.

The authors thank the following individuals for their thoughts and contributions: Dr. Michael Romanos, former Wilmington Mayor David Raizk, former Wilmington Executive Assistant Laura Curliss, Wilmington Mayor Randy Riley, Clinton County Port Authority Executive Director Kevin Carver, Clinton County Workforce Services Director Keith Hyde, former Clinton County Regional Planning Commission Chairs David Blandford and Don Spurling, Sam Stratman, Della Rucker, and those referenced in the article. ④



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