Ohio Balanced Growth Program

Priority Development/Conservation/Agriculture Areas

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Types of Priority Development Areas

Priority Development Areas include existing urban areas, industrial parks, special development districts, ports, brownfields, areas with existing or planned infrastructure, and undeveloped areas designated for future growth and development.

Although the designation of Priority Development Areas does not restrict development elsewhere in the community, it does identify areas that the local community would like to be the most eligible for additional state incentives to encourage development.

Factors to Consider for Priority Development Areas

Do the areas already have buildings and adequate existing urban services?

Are there existing urban areas that can be redeveloped?

Are there other areas where growth will be encouraged and that can be served by future urban services in an efficient manner?

Are there nearby activities that are complementary to quality of life, such as parks, trails, and alternative transportation systems?

The map at right is an example of a Priority Area map showing all three types of areas. Note that the areas cross jurisdictional boundaries and follow the features of the land. This will help the local communities be consistent along their borders as they update their comprehensive plans. This map is advisory only and does not impose or remove legal restrictions on any land within or outside of the areas.

What is a Priority Area?

A Priority Area is a locally designated area where (re-) development, conservation, or agriculture is to be especially promoted in order to maximize suitability of use, utilize existing buildings, roads, and sewers efficiently, revitalize cities and towns, and help restore Ohio's water resources.

Who Designates Priority Areas?

Priority Areas are designated by the local governments who make up the Watershed Planning Partnership, in consultation with state government and other interested groups, and are included in a Balanced Growth Plan.

Priority areas should be identified based on measurable factors of the landscape. For examples, see the factors listed under each Priority Area.

The Balanced Growth Plan provides for both economic development and the protection of clean water, and is meant to augment and harmonize with local comprehensive plans.

Why Designate Priority Areas?

Reasons for designating Priority Areas include:

1) Allow the state and local governments to coordinate future development in a complementary manner with well-informed public input.

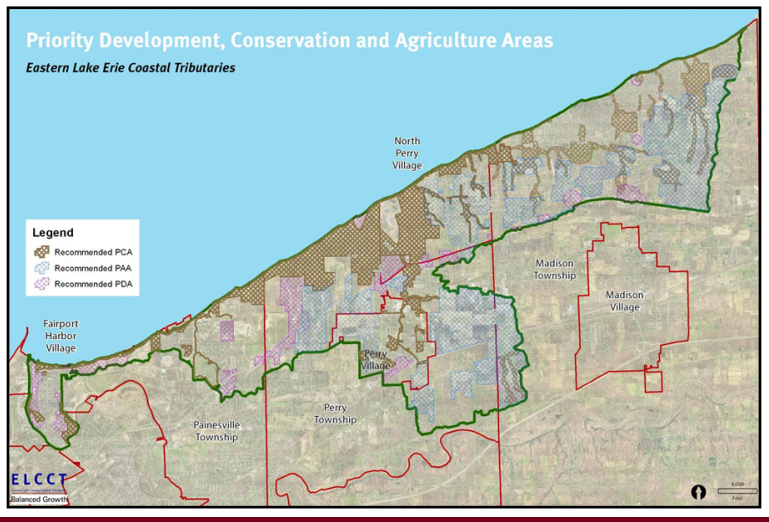
2) Encourage a pattern of efficient and contiguous development where buildings, roads, and sewers are already available.

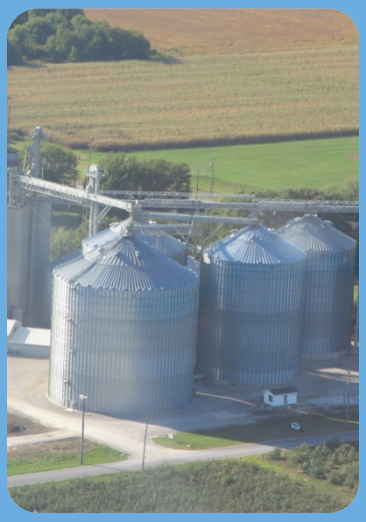
3) Encourage preservation and adaptive reuse of existing buildings, roads, and sewers.

4) Protect agricultural and forest land, scenic areas, and other land resources from unnecessary damage or destruction and preserve their function for cleaning water and providing quality of life.

5) Identify areas where urban services such as water and sewer are being or will be provided and reduce the costs of providing these services.

6) Guide state policies and investments in development, redevelopment, and conservation in a manner preferred by the local community.





Types of Priority Agricultural Areas

Watershed Planning Partnerships may, if they wish, include criteria for agricultural lands protection within the Priority Conservation Area category. This approach was used by the Chagrin River Watershed Planning Partnership because the farmland in that watershed consisted primarily of pasture lands or hobby farms.

A Watershed Planning Partnership may instead consider criteria specific to agricultural protection under a Priority Agricultural Area category. Priority Agricultural Areas are locally designated areas where the open space and economic value provided by agriculture is a significant contributor to clean water and the region's quality of life.

Selection of these areas maximizes the viability of farming and enables efficient location of other local businesses that provide products and support to farms. The map on the reverse page is an example of Priority Agricultural Areas for significant local industry, in this case nursery and fruit production.

Factors to Consider for Priority Agricultural Areas:

Does the area contain prime farmland soils?

Are there other natural features applicable to agricultural productivity?

Does the area have existing special designations such as Agricultural Districts or Agricultural Easements?

Is there significant interest among local farmers in maintaining agricultural industry as indicated by number, size, and location of active operating farms?

Have the local farmers indicated support for Priority Agricultual Areas through the public participation process of the Watershed Planning Partnership?

Types of Priority Conservation Areas

A Priority Conservation Area is a locally designated area targeted for protection and restoration.

They may be critically important ecological, recreational, heritage, agricultural, and/or public access areas that are significant for their contribution to water quality and the region's general quality of life.

Factors to Consider for Priority Conservation Areas

Is the ecological value of the area of substantial watershed or basinwide significance?

Are the ecological functions provided by the area of substantial watershed or basinwide significance?

Is the area is susceptible to significant natural hazards that would affect existing or planned development?

Does the area contain designated critical habitat or any threatened or endangered plant or animal species?

Does the area contain a unique, ecologically sensitive, or valuable ecosystem whose loss or decline would negatively affect watershed, state, or national biodiversity?

Does the area offer significant recreational, historical, or quality of life benefits?

Does the area offer opportunities for ecological restoration in urban areas?

What Happens in Non-Priority Areas?

Areas outside of Priority Areas may be developed, farmed, or conserved as usual, like all land in the community. The Priority Area designation merely tells the state the local preferences for ***priorities*** in development, redevelopment, or conservation.