

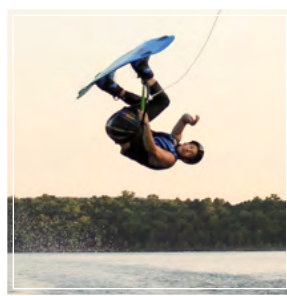


**LORAIN COUNTY
STRATEGIC
ACTION PLAN**

LORAIN COUNTY STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN

OHIO, USA

MARCH 2024





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This report presents the outcomes of the Lorain County Strategic Action Plan project. This seven-month planning project's objective has been to create a comprehensive and sustainable Strategic Action Plan for Lorain County, looking out to 2035. Notably, this process has included extensive and inclusive engagement from across Lorain County.

All information pertaining to the Lorain County Strategic Action Plan project can be viewed on the unique project portal at:

lab2.future-iq.com/lorain-county-strategic-action-plan-project/

ABOUT LORAIN COUNTY

Lorain County is in the north-eastern portion of Ohio. As of the 2020 Census, the population was 312,964 with the County seat being Elyria. Agriculture dominates the southern area of the County with a large presence of manufacturing and health care industry in the north. The County is well known for its academic institutions and strong business environment, including corporate headquarters and major facilities of global corporations as well as leading-edge start-ups. Over the past number of years and amidst the recent global pandemic, Lorain County has seen economic growth, enormous investment, job creation and retention and a dedication to higher educational attainment and businesses being headquartered in Lorain County.

REPORT PREPARED BY:

future→iq[®]
Create Future Intelligence[®]



March 29, 2024

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»»»»» SNAPSHOT – REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

This report represents the final step in the seven-month Strategic Action Planning process. It covers the preferred future and lays out six strategic pillars and associated action areas.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS AND OUTCOMES



IMPORTANCE OF A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

Throughout the planning process, collaboration has emerged as a central theme. There is a significant appetite and desire to see higher levels of collaboration, and for groups and organizations to come together and work on solutions and opportunities. The implementation of the plan will allow new and additional opportunities to build on this collaborative spirit and include new voices and organizations.



FUTURE STRATEGIC POSITIONING OF LORAIN COUNTY

The planning work has highlighted a unique strategic positioning for Lorain County. Stakeholders have identified the abundant fresh water and land as a key asset, and the importance is likely to increase as much of the world faces declining access to fresh water and productive land. This creates an opportunity for the County to be a mecca for water reliant industries, and an attractive location for new residents. The County has the chance to promote itself as an attractive and relevant location for people, businesses and industry.



CREATING A FUTURE-READY COMMUNITY

The planning work has highlighted the need and desire to create Lorain County as a ‘future-ready’ community. This means ensuring residents and leaders understand the key emerging trends that are shaping the future and are working to position the County to take advantage of new opportunities. This also includes having a workforce and education system that is orientated to future skill needs and is helping prepare the workforce to be adaptable and ready.



WILLINGNESS TO TACKLE THE TOUGH ISSUES

The planning has shown that the key stakeholders across the County are willing and ready to tackle the tough issues. It was recognized that there are large challenges in terms of housing availability and affordability, impoverished areas and limitations in some community services. However, there is a clear determination to find creative solutions and build new partnerships to tackle previously intractable issues.



Lorain County staff, Strategic Engagement Committee members, and community stakeholders have made significant contributions to the strategic action planning process. In total, over 2,000 people have contributed to the development of the plan through their engagement and participation.

1.0 | INTRODUCTION

In August 2023, the Lorain County Board of Commissioners embarked on the Lorain County Strategic Action Planning process to deliver a 10-year Strategic Action Plan. The purpose was to help position Lorain as a diverse, resilient, and vibrant community.

Key to this process was the Lorain County Board of Commissioners expressed an intention for extensive community and stakeholder engagement and input. This engagement was very successful with over 2,000 individuals participating in the Lorain County Strategic Action Plan over the seven months process. This engagement ascertained where Lorain County is now and where it could evolve by 2035. The planning process explored the future from an economic, governmental, societal and community level.

A key focus of the Strategic Action Plan process has been a collaborative approach to build an inclusive and resilient Lorain County. The strategic planning process began in August 2023 and ended in March 2024, with the production of this final Lorain County Strategic Action Plan. This report represents the analysis of the research and engagement outcomes and outlines how the extensive accumulated data has informed the identification of a preferred future and key strategic action areas for the future development of Lorain County in 2035. All information pertaining to the Lorain County Strategic Action Plan project can be viewed on the unique project portal at <https://lab2.future-iq.com/lorain-county-strategic-action-plan-project/>.

Lorain County Strategic Action Plan





Lorain County has seen its position improve in relation to the state of Ohio in several important demographic categories over the past 10 years.

1.1 | SETTING THE CONTEXT - LORAIN COUNTY'S CURRENT STRATEGIC POSITION

As part of the background research, the Lorain County Strategic Action Plan Benchmark Report was produced in December 2023. This served as a study to assess and evaluate various aspects of Lorain County's performance. The report covered a wide range of topics, including economic performance, infrastructure, education, healthcare, social services, and more. By examining these key indicators, the benchmark report offered valuable insights into Lorain County's status. The report also produced comparison with peer counties: Media County, Erie County, Huron County and Lake County in the areas of key demographics, economic index, and housing affordability. The Lorain County Strategic Action Plan Benchmark Report can be viewed at <https://lab2.future-iq.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Benchmark-Report-Lorain-County-Strategic-Action-Plan.pdf>.



POPULATION GROWTH:

One of the most significant demographic changes in Lorain County has been population growth. The county's population grew by 4.7% between 2010 and 2021, from 301,479 to 315,595. This growth rate is slightly higher than the state of Ohio's growth rate of 3.2% over the same period¹.



IN-MIGRATION:

The migration patterns in Lorain County have changed significantly since 2010. Prior to 2010, the county was losing population due to net out-migration. However, since 2010, the county has seen a net influx of migrants. The net influx of migrants is due to several factors, including the county's proximity to major metropolitan areas such as Cleveland and Akron, affordable housing costs, and relatively low cost of living².



DIVERSITY:

Lorain County is becoming more diverse, with a growing Hispanic population and a larger share of residents who identify as multiracial. The Hispanic population in Lorain County increased by 2.3% between 2010 and 2021, while those identifying as white dropped by nearly 3%³.



EDUCATION:

Lorain County's educational attainment levels have increased since 2010. The share of residents with a bachelor's degree or higher increased from 23.1% in 2010 to 26.2% in 2021⁴.



HOUSEHOLD INCOME:

The median household income in Lorain County was \$66,330 in the 2022 American Community Survey, above the State median of \$65,720. By family type, the median income for families was \$89,754, married-couple families was \$106,413, and non-family household were \$38,808. Poverty was slightly less than the State sitting at 12.9%⁵.

1. Census 2020
2. County Migration Flows, Census 2020
3. Census 2020
4. Census 2020
5. American Community Survey 2022

1.2 | OBJECTIVES OF THE LORAIN COUNTY STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN PROCESS

As part of initiating the strategic planning process, a Strategic Engagement Committee consisting of 15 regional representatives was created in August 2023 to guide the Lorain County Strategic Action Plan project. Committee members felt it was important to establish an overarching orientation for the Lorain County Strategic Action Plan process. The Committee members attended monthly meetings and assisted with the guidance of the project. Dave Greenspan, Special Projects Coordinator/Manager within the Lorain County Commissioners, headed up the project working with Future IQ on a weekly basis regarding the organization, content, and direction of the project.

The Strategic Engagement Committee ensured that the planning approach reached out to all parts of Lorain County and sought their input and involvement. This was particularly evident in the 9 county-wide workshops that were held across the County.

The objectives of the Lorain County Strategic Action Plan process included:



CREATE A COMMON VISION

A common vision will energize and unite the region around the Strategic Action Plan and its implementation while acknowledging that implementation of the Plan may look different in various areas of the region.



FOCUS ON EXTENSIVE RESEARCH AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

This research and engagement identified the needs and wants of the region, as well as ways to raise awareness and provide clarification to the community on the scope of services provided by Lorain County Government.



EMBRACE, CELEBRATE, AND LEVERAGE THE VARIED AND DIVERSE STRENGTHS

It was important to include the Spanish speaking population of Lorain County via translated materials, reports, and invitations to engagement events. The Community Foundation of Lorain County and El Centro produced this outcome.



BE INCLUSIVE OF DIFFERENT VOICES AND PERSPECTIVES

The Community Foundation of Lorain County was contracted to provide outreach to the different voices, perspectives, and communities within Lorain County.



IDENTIFY AREAS FOR COLLABORATION ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

This included exploring ways that existing assets and institutions can be leveraged for greater success across the region.



For a complete list of Strategy Engagement Committee Members, please see the acknowledgments section at the end of this report. The Strategy Engagement Committee represented an excellent cross section of the County. In addition, there was a wide range of perspectives with specialty interest areas that spanned economic development, municipal government and community focused not-for-profits.



The focus of the Lorain County Strategic Action Plan has been on extensive research and in-depth, wide, and deep community and stakeholder engagement that focuses on the future of Lorain County, looking out to 2035.

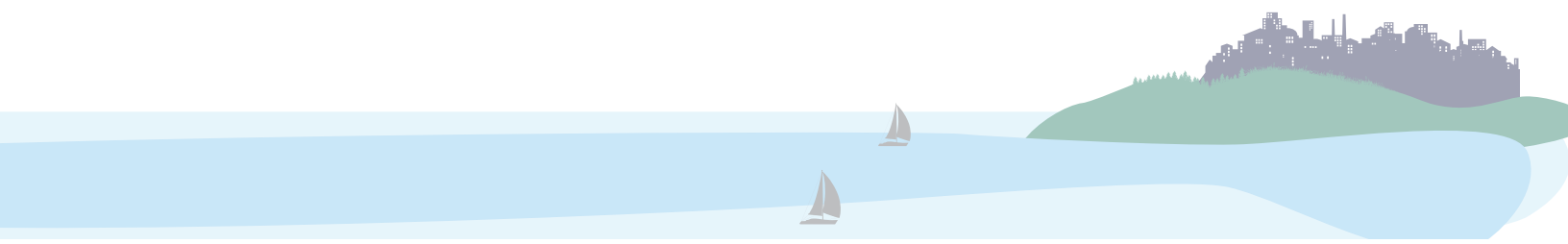
2.0 | HOW TO USE THIS REPORT

This report lays out the findings from each key step in the Strategic Action Planning process. The process moved from a background analysis and exploration, through to identifying key priorities for the future of Lorain County. This work represents robust 'future thinking' regarding where stakeholders and community members considered possible directions and the impacts and consequences of those directions for Lorain County in 2035. The process, and this Strategic Action Plan report, then drilled down deeper into what people saw as the optimal or preferred future. This understanding helped lay the groundwork for illustrating how the preferred future can be reached. The preferred future identified through this process presents a compelling and enticing vision for how Lorain County could evolve looking out to 2035. However, a vision needs actions, and this report provides initial achievable actions.

Steps in the process



Sections of the report





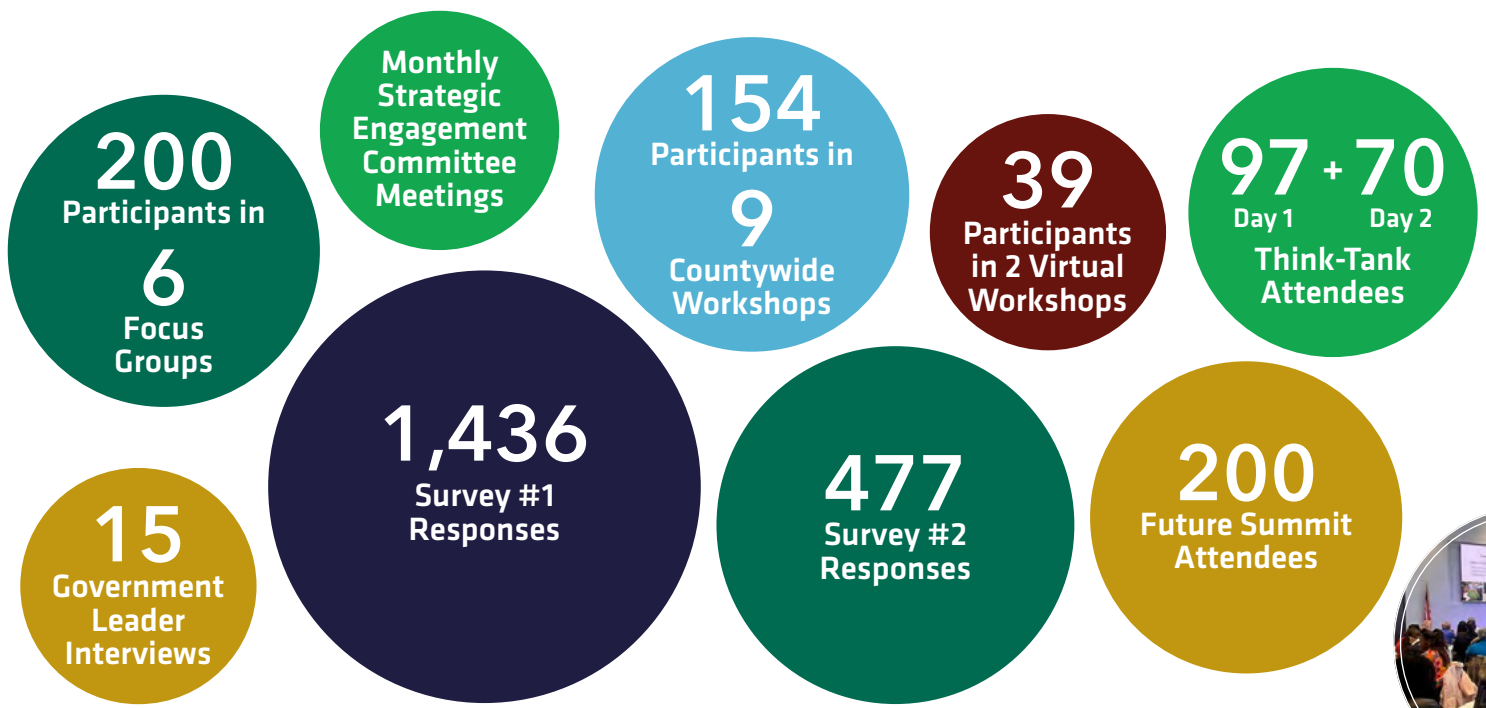
The Lorain County Strategic Action Plan involved a wide, deep, and transparent engagement process. Reports were published on the Lorain County Strategic Plan website, and the project was widely promoted across Lorain County by the Community Foundation of Lorain County.


3.0 | STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

3.1 | STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT METRICS

The Lorain County Strategic Action Plan has been built on extensive community and stakeholder input, which was the intention of the Lorain County Board of Commissioners at the project inception. This engagement was an integral and central design feature of the planning process. The engagement and data-driven methodology progressively focused the discussion on emerging key themes and stakeholder aspirations for the future. The purpose of the process was to arrive at a 'point of consensus' that represented the shared vision for the future, and a comprehensive strategic plan - with actions - that propels the region towards that preferred future.

A key feature of the engagement and planning process was the amount of and participation at many engagement sessions.





DataInsight

- The attendance and participation of Lorain County stakeholders and community members was exceptional regarding the quantity and especially the quality of input.
- The Community Foundation of Lorain County provided extensive community outreach, including outreach to the Spanish Speaking community with all materials translated into Spanish by El Centro.



3.2 | STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT STEPS

The stakeholder engagement steps allowed people to contribute via a variety of different ways, including surveys, workshops and focus groups.

The Lorain County Strategic Action plan process included numerous opportunities for stakeholders to have input. This engagement process was intended to create a unified community vision which will serve as the foundational support for future planning efforts.



DataInsight

- The seven-month engagement process allowed over 2,000 individuals to contribute to the development of the data-driven, consensus-based strategic action plan. This included a core group of several hundred people who participated in multiple sessions.
- The vision and set of actions have been developed in a consensus-based approach, with multiple validation steps. This ensures the plan and actions represent the collective desires of key stakeholders in the County.





4.0 | FUTURE STRATEGIC DIRECTION

Scenario planning provides a way to explore various plausible futures. This adds a richness and depth to the discussions about the preferred future, and a consideration of the intended and unintended consequences.

4.1 | IDENTIFYING THE PREFERRED FUTURE FOR LORAIN COUNTY

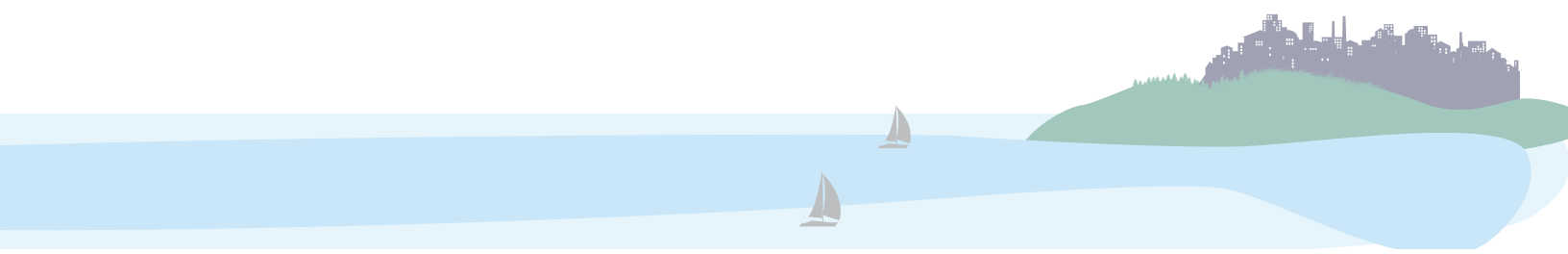
To identify the preferred future of Lorain County, looking out to 2035, regional stakeholders and community members participated in the scenario-planning Think-Tank. The six-hour Lorain County scenario-based Think-Tank event was conducted over two days on October 30th and October 31st, 2023. Approximately 100 people attended including key business, education, government, non-profit stakeholders, and community members. The Think-Tank was intended to build a vision for future planning for Lorain County that will guide the county looking out to 2035.

The scenario planning process provides a method to explore plausible futures and consider the implications of various future scenarios. The Think-Tank workshop aimed to:

- Deepen the understanding and examination of how external events and local conditions could shape decision-making
- Outline the results from the [Lorain County Strategic Action Plan Stakeholder Survey #1](#)
- Identify and understand the key influences, trends, and dynamics that will shape the region looking out to 2035
- Create and describe four plausible long-term scenarios for Lorain County
- Explore alignment around a shared future vision



The scenarios developed during the scenario planning process are important to provide a framework to discuss future possible outcomes and implications for strategies for Lorain County. In addition, the Think-Tank deliberations assisted in identifying key actions for the region and explored how various groups might collaborate to best contribute to future policy making. The process involved exploration of local trends and forces of change as well as the development of a scenario matrix defining four plausible scenario spaces for the future. The event concluded with discussion of the scenarios, selection of a preferred scenario, and the compilation of potential high-level strategic actions. For additional information and details on the Lorain County Strategic Action Plan Think-Tank, please read the [Lorain County Strategic Action Plan Think-Tank Report](#).



4.2 | SCENARIOS OF THE FUTURE FOR LORAIN COUNTY - FRAMEWORK FOR EXPLORATION

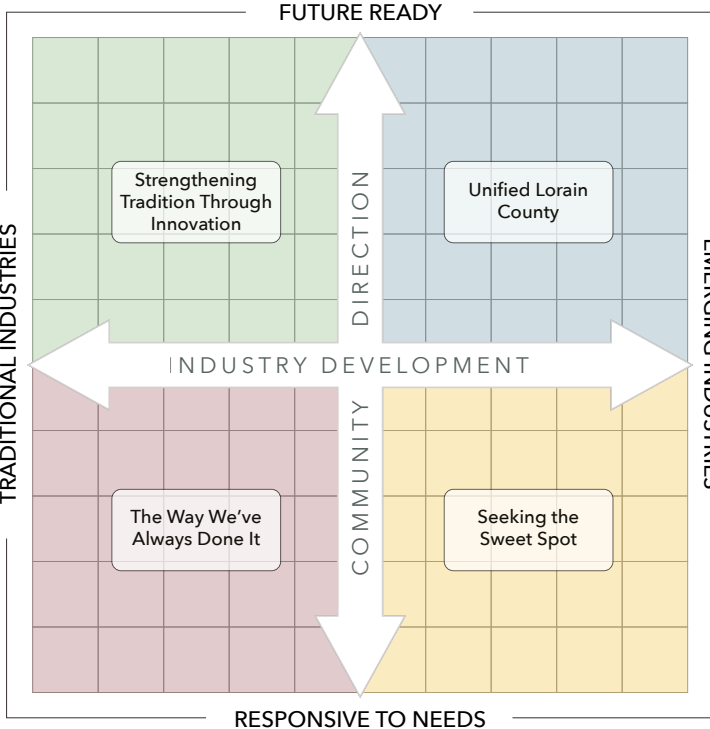
During the Lorain County Strategic Action Plan Think-Tank, four different future scenarios were created. The scenarios were created using the scenario matrix framework, which was built around the two macro themes of **Industry Development**, and **Community Direction**. An in-depth scenario planning process over two days enabled the development of four potential future scenarios. For more details on the Lorain County Strategic Action Think-Tank, please refer to the published in-depth [Think-Tank report](#).

The scenario development process at the Think-Tank allowed stakeholders to examine the implications and consequences of different and plausible future directions for Lorain County, looking out to 2035, against a backdrop of Macro Trends and the key drivers that are impacting Lorain County now and looking out to 2035.

There is intentional (and significant) investment in creating a 'future ready' community that focuses on youth, workforce and resident education. There is a focus on equity and community adaptability, with efforts to deliberately foster new ideas and innovation. There is a county-wide coordinated approach to partnerships and investment, that aims to elevate amenities such as transportation, safe and affordable housing, and education.

There is a focus on pursuing more tried and tested approaches to industry and economic development. Public Investment and policy is targeted towards more familiar industrial sectors, with each municipality and institution working on its own priorities. Community infrastructure focuses on 'suburban style growth model', and transit is predominately car oriented. Skills training is reactive to industry needs and direction.

There is a strong focus on emerging future-orientated industries. This builds on existing industries in creative ways; but also invests in emerging sectors such as technology, water and energy-based sectors, and food industries. There is a very collaborative and coordinated county-wide approach, with a focus on investment in creating a highly skilled workforce. There are high levels of institutional collaboration and policies that drive investment in critical infrastructure.

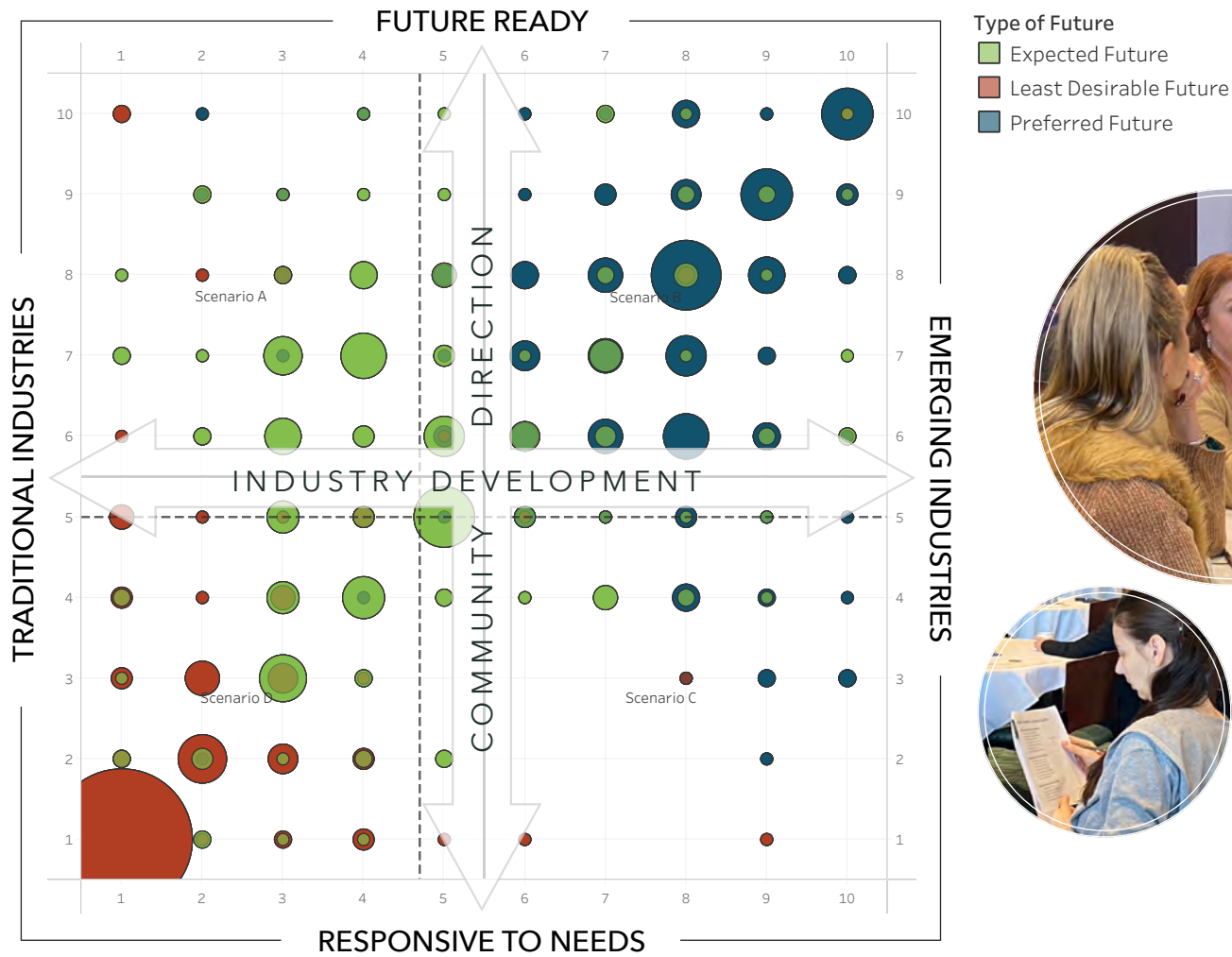


Community infrastructure, such as housing and transport, are market driven and respond to demands and needs. Land-use policy and community investment is driven by the priorities of individual communities. Approaches are institutionally driven; with a focus on existing services, and workplace-based training models. Communities are service driven, aiming to support traditional family structures.



4.3 | IDENTIFYING EXPECTED AND PREFERRED FUTURES

Having arrived at four plausible futures for Lorain County, Think-Tank participants were asked to plot their least desirable, expected and preferred future for Lorain County in 2035 via a 100-grid diagram. The results from each participant formed heatmaps which showed the preferences via color coding and size of bubble denoting how many people chose each section of the grid.



DataInsight

- There was a strong concentration of results for each type of future, with a particularly tight concentration of results for Least Desirable and Preferred Future.
- The participants expressed a clear preference for Scenario B, 'Unified Lorain County' as the preferred for Lorain County in 2035. Descriptions of the four scenarios can be viewed in the [Lorain County Strategic Action Think-Think report](#). However, most people believe the County is not currently headed in that direction.





4.4 | THE PREFERRED FUTURE FOR LORAIN COUNTY IN 2035 - "UNIFIED LORAIN COUNTY"

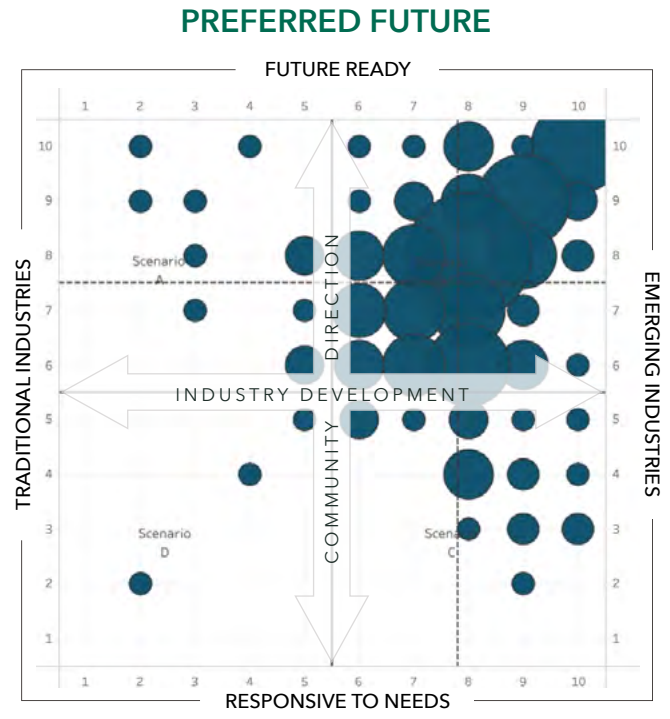
The preferred future generated from the work carried out in the Future Think-Tank was Scenario B - Unified Lorain County.

This scenario forecasts a future where Lorain County is focused on emerging and future-orientated industries and builds on existing industries in innovative ways. Critical infrastructure receives investment through high levels of institutional collaboration and forward-thinking policies. Lorain County adopts a regional and collaborative approach. While industry and economic development is vital and forward thinking, the community direction of Lorain County is also being intentionally created to be adaptive and 'future ready'. There is intentional focus on equity, inclusion, and elevating amenities such as transportation, safe and affordable housing, and education.



PREFERRED SCENARIO SNAPSHOT - FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

- Embracing emerging industries through building on to existing traditional industries
- Strong environmental focus
- Strong collaborative approach across the County
- Future ready community direction with intentional investment in youth, workforce, and resident education
- Diverse community with elevated amenities including transportation, safe and affordable housing, and education



4.5 | VALIDATING THE PREFERRED FUTURE

The Lorain County Strategic Action Plan Stakeholder Survey #2 asked ranking questions based on a 1 – 10 continuum to seek respondent input regarding their desire for change looking out to 2035 in the following areas:

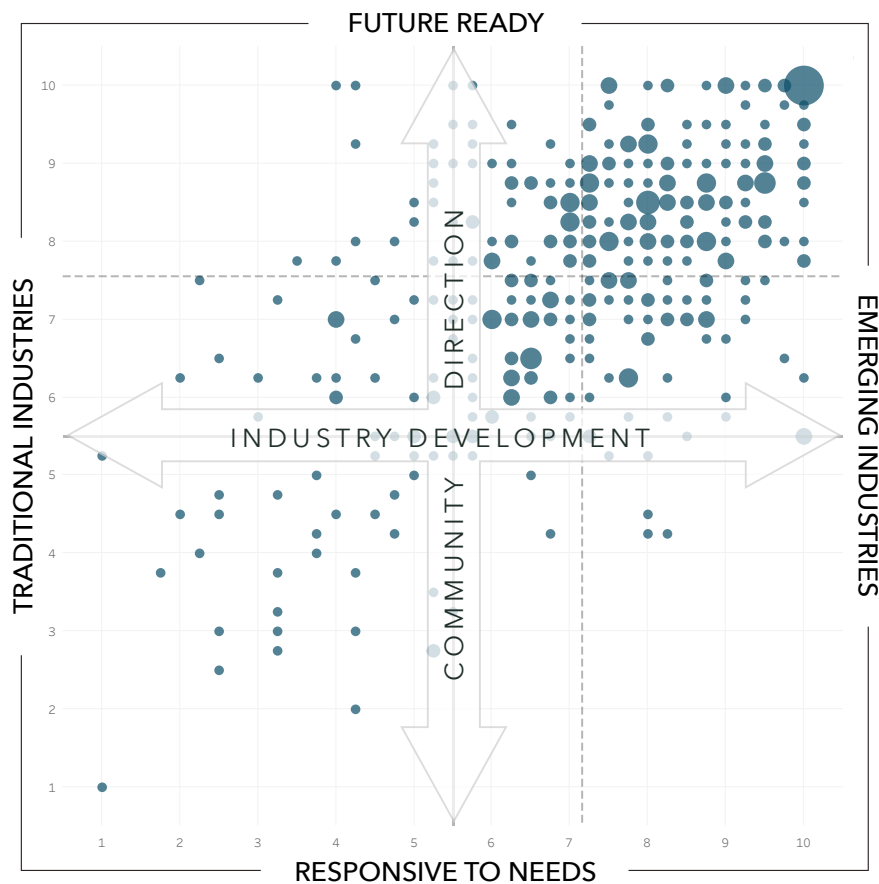
COMMUNITY OUTLOOK AND DIRECTION

- Countywide Collaboration
- Workforce and Education
- Community Reputation and Communication
- Community Orientation and Outlook

BUILT ENVIRONMENT AND INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT

- Industry and Business Development
- Housing Availability and Affordability
- Future Urban Development Patterns
- Transportation and Connectivity

Individual responses for each of these questions were recombined and plotted over the scenario matrix. This provided a way to validate the type of future people are interested in based on a series of specific topics.



DataInsight

- The eight questions in the survey were subsets of the themes that were laid out in the scenario matrix. Each question provided a scale, that allowed respondents to select where they thought the focus should be in the future.
- The recombined responses, based on a series of the eight specific topics, help validate the heatmaps for the preferred future in the scenario matrix. This provides a strong validation that the 'Unified Lorain County' is the desired future, from both an aspirational preferred future perspective, as well as from responses to a series of specific topics.

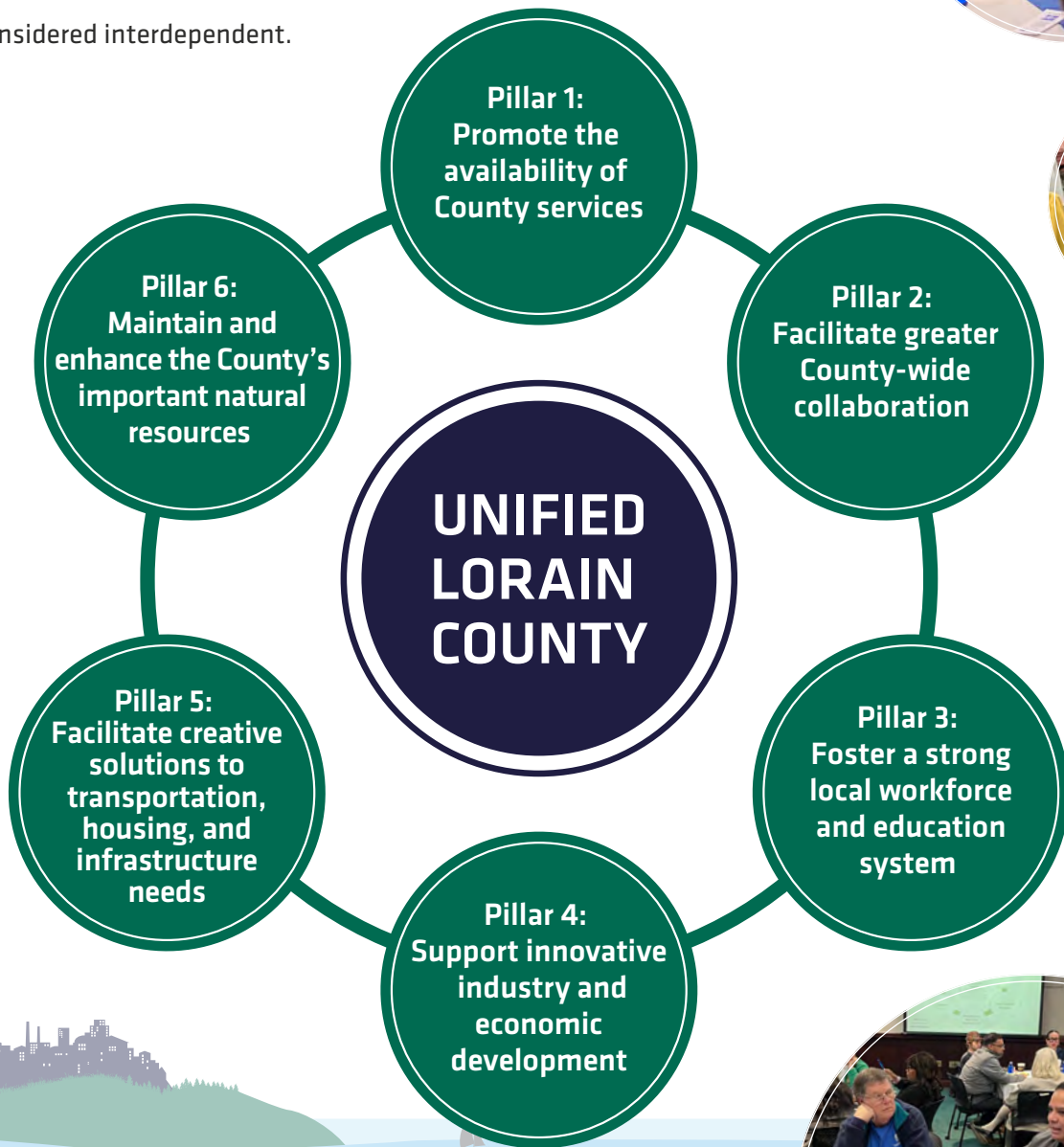


5.0 | STRATEGIC ACTION PILLARS FRAMEWORK

The key organizing framework for the plan is the six Strategic Pillars. The pillars represent the major theme or topic areas that underpin the preferred future for Lorain County. The key actions are structured around these six key strategic pillars, which are the fundamental building blocks that support the vision for the region.

The Lorain County Strategic Action presents a series of strategic actions that can be achieved in the short to medium term that will produce long-term results. They are intended to produce systemic and catalytic shifts that will drive the future economic growth, agility, and vitality of the region and attract new people and investments. These actions are designed to build the future pathway to the preferred future.

Pillars are considered interdependent.



5.1 | PILLAR 1: PROMOTE AVAILABILITY OF COUNTY GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Pillar 1:
Promote the
availability of
County services

Objective: To boost the residents' awareness of the range and scope of County services and improve the accessibility to these services.

5.1.1 | IMPORTANCE OF GOVERNMENT SERVICES

The desire for an enhanced ability to locate and access County Government Services has been highlighted throughout the Strategic Planning process. There is a great opportunity to make these services highly visible to residents and preferably consolidated so that people know where to access these services. Communication about these services is integral to ensure free flowing access to information and individuals related to each of these services. A County-wide Communications Strategy with a full time Communications staff member would assist with this as well as government staff being out on the road, meeting residents at organized monthly meetings across Lorain County.

Lorain County residents would like to have more knowledge of the (preferably consolidated) services that Lorain County offers, with ease of access to this information.



ResidentValue

- Residents would have access to everything they need in relation to what local government offers.
- Communication methods would be overhauled so that residents would benefit from regular, scheduled communication from local government through a myriad of communication methods.
- Residents would feel that this ensures transparency, accountability and would feel more confident in how local government was operating in their best interests.



5.1.2 | KEY ACTION AREAS

A key focus of the Strategic Action Plan process has been to engage a wide range of stakeholders. This has been done to ensure that the plan reflects the 'voice of the people'. This is part of the larger commitment to create meaningful collaboration and communication between the County organization and local residents.

Action 1: Create an inclusive County communications plan.

The County has not historically had a dedicated communications plan or function. With a population of over 300,000, it is important for the County to have a well-structured communication plan that allows residents to understand the services available and how to access these services. In addition, the County has an important role in thought-leadership and helping inform residents of emerging changes and how they are relevant to the residents. The proposed communication plan should be aimed at getting a range of relevant and useful information to residents in a timely and regular manner.



Action 2: Host regular community meetings across the County.

Throughout the engagement sessions, participants have expressed a desire to have greater connection with leadership in the County, including Commissioners, senior staff and directors. There have been suggestions of the County holding regular meetings in different locations across the County, to provide easier access and build profile. These could be designed as more informal listening sessions, to hear of local concerns, challenges and perspectives.

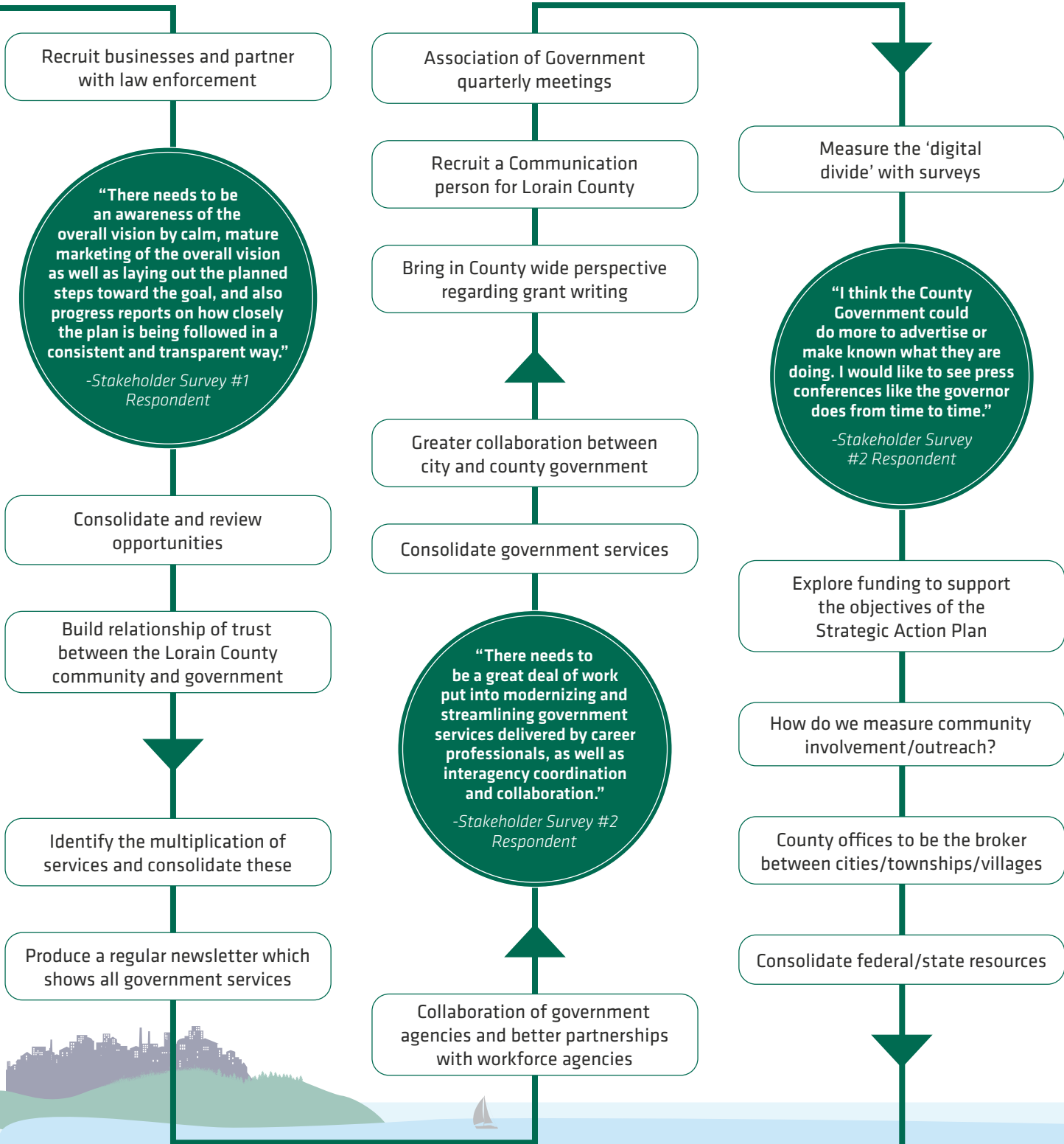


Action 3: Explore potential for County satellite offices and online services.

The County is unique in that it includes a range of geography, from very rural areas in the south, to more densely populated urban areas in the northeast. During the engagement sessions, there were suggestions made to provide satellite offices or annexes, that could help make the County services more accessible.



The following bullet points are ideas and actions that emerged during the engagement process. Focus group participants and survey respondents were asked for specific ideas on actions that could be taken to achieve the preferred future, 'Unified Lorain County'.



5.2 | PILLAR 2: FACILITATE GREATER COUNTY-WIDE COLLABORATION

Pillar 2:
Facilitate greater
County-wide
collaboration

Objective: Improve co-ordination of government services across the County, helping improve efficiency and the quality of services to residents.

5.2.1 | IMPORTANCE OF COUNTYWIDE COLLABORATION

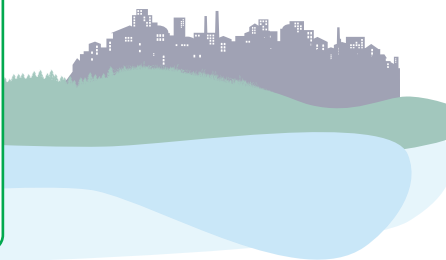
Countywide collaboration has been a key topic throughout the Strategic Planning engagement process. In some cases, this was expressed as concerns about duplication of services and municipalities working in silos across Lorain County. However, the bigger theme is that people are enthused by the idea of creating more collaborative approaches that will help spur innovation and creative ideas. The County is seen by many as having an important and natural role in convening and facilitating collaborative approaches. This is especially connected to the process of implementing the Strategic Action Plan, and the need to have collaborative taskforce groups. Many people recognized that today's world is one of co-operation and collaboration, rather than competition and silos. This approach has great promise in Lorain County, as there is such a genuine and authentic desire to work together.

Collaboration was a key theme running through all the engagement work. Stakeholders are keen to see the County take on a leadership role in helping convene groups to work together on the grand challenges.



ResidentValue

- Greater County-wide collaboration will help provide better access to services and new efficiencies and quality in service delivery.
- Any of the biggest challenges in the County, such as housing and transportation, will require across government solutions, and public-private partnerships. Building these collaborative approaches will help spur new solutions and accelerate outcomes.





**Pillar 2:
Facilitate greater
County-wide
collaboration**

5.2.2 | KEY ACTION AREAS

The overarching approach in the Strategic Action Plan is collaboration. The suggested key actions are drawn from the stakeholder engagement work and offer ways that collaborative frameworks and approaches can be developed.

Action 4: Convene and host taskforces groups for each of the Strategic Pillars.

The implementation of the Strategic Action Plan is based on the Strategic Pillars framework. This provides a way to focus efforts of the identified priorities and build on the engagement work in the Strategic Action Plan process. It is proposed to convene multiple taskforce groups that can come together and collaboratively problem solve actions needed to implement each pillar topic. This process will initially run for several months, and then longer-term partnerships can be created to implement medium term plans.



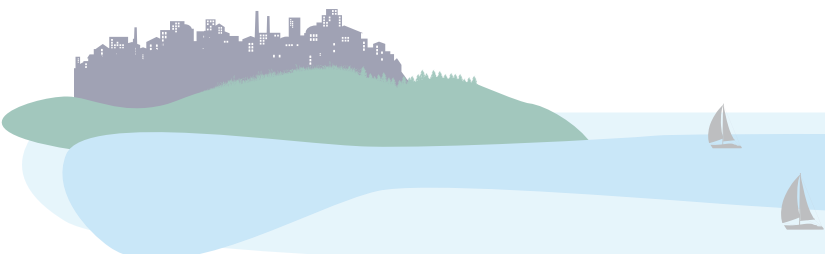
Action 5: Host regular cross-government collaboration meetings with key entities in the County.

One of the features of the engagement process was the number of institutions represented. These included government groups, not-for-profits, community based groups and business alliances. There was particular interest from the government groups in continuing the collaborative meetings. There is potential for the County to host such cross-government sessions, on a range of topics to help accelerate information flow and build greater collaboration.

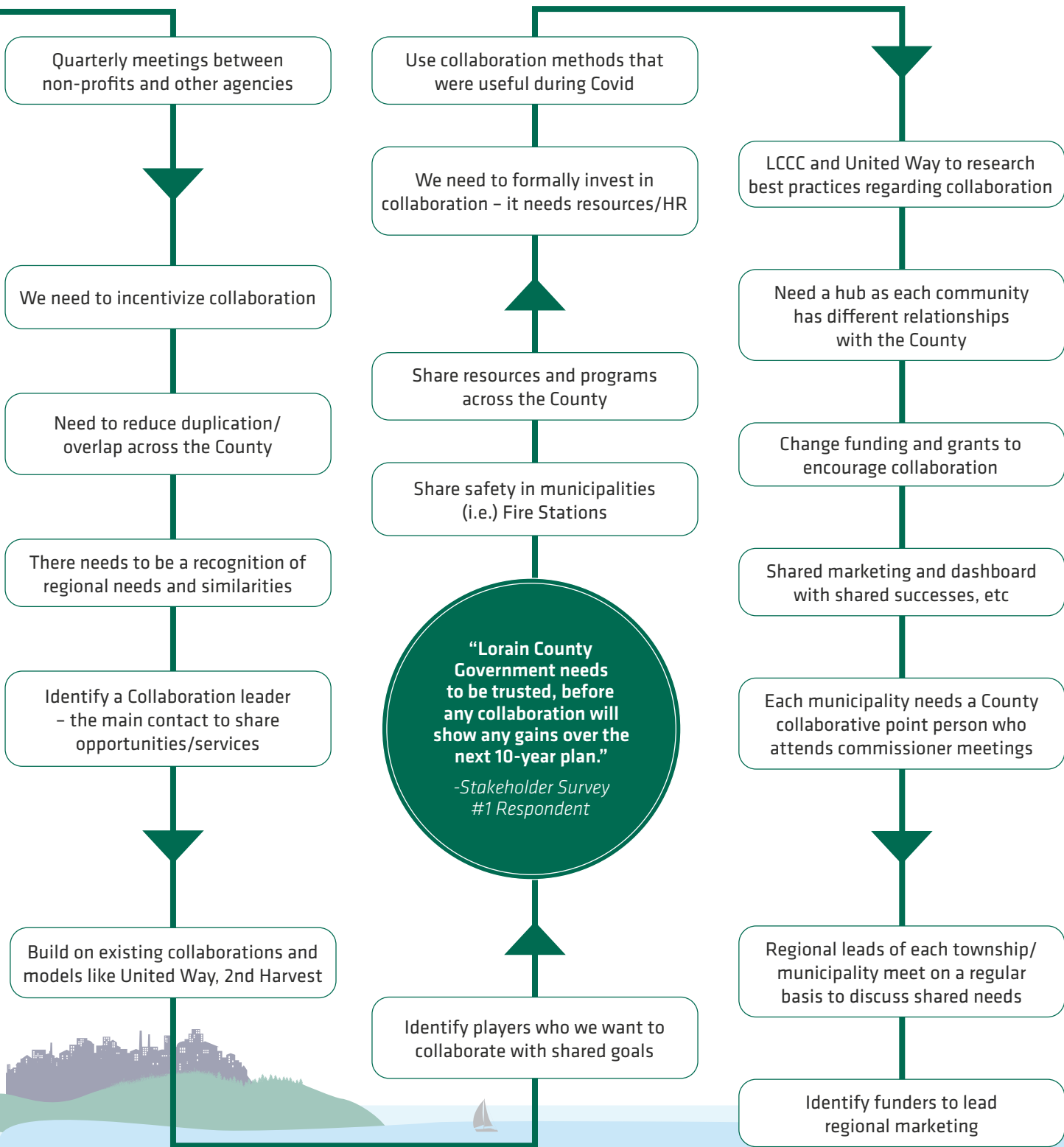


Action 6: Identify opportunities to provide shared services between government entities.

Lorain County is a mixture of governments, including cities, townships and villages. They all have services to deliver and key roles to play, however people are looking for increased coordination and efficiency of service delivery. There are already great examples of shared service models, including emergency responses, waste water and public safety. The increased collaboration model offers a way to continue to explore ways to identify and deliver shared services, ultimately delivering better value to residents.



The following bullet points are ideas and actions that emerged during the engagement process. Focus group participants and survey respondents were asked for specific ideas on actions that could be taken to achieve the preferred future, 'Unified Lorain County'.



5.3 | PILLAR 3: FOSTER A STRONG LOCAL WORKFORCE AND EDUCATION SYSTEM

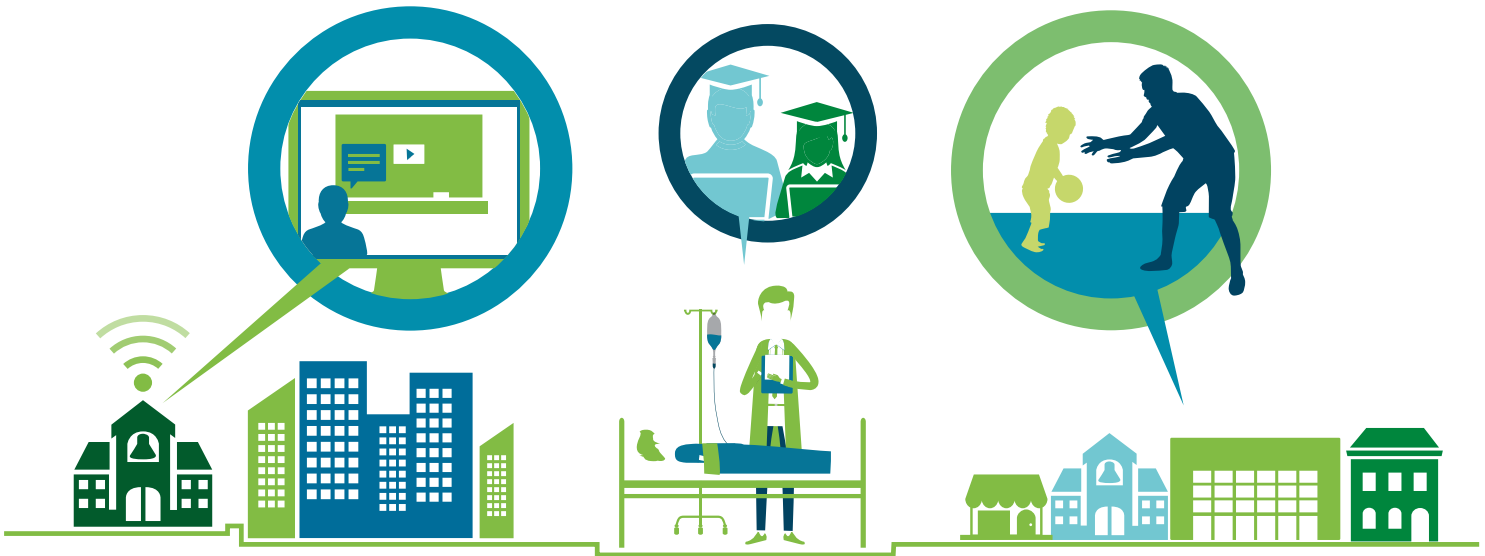
Pillar 3:
Foster a strong local workforce and education system

Objective: Create a strong future-ready local workforce that has strong skills and can adapt to emerging trends and the changing needs of business.

5.3.1 | IMPORTANCE OF WORKFORCE / EDUCATION

Throughout the strategic planning process, there has been considerable discussion about the focus and orientation of workforce development in Lorain County. Workforce is an area of concern for many cities and counties in the US. The need to retain the current workforce is key but the attraction of a new workforce, with the necessary skills looking out to the workforce transformation by 2035, is critical. Lorain County is fortunate to have excellent educational establishments including the often-mentioned Lorain County Community College, among others. The connection between education and workforce is critical for the future of Lorain County in relation to retaining talented students and attracting new students to these excellent places of learning. This connects to marketing Lorain County as a destination/place to relocate to for new families. This in turn will assist with the workforce challenges that Lorain County is experiencing.

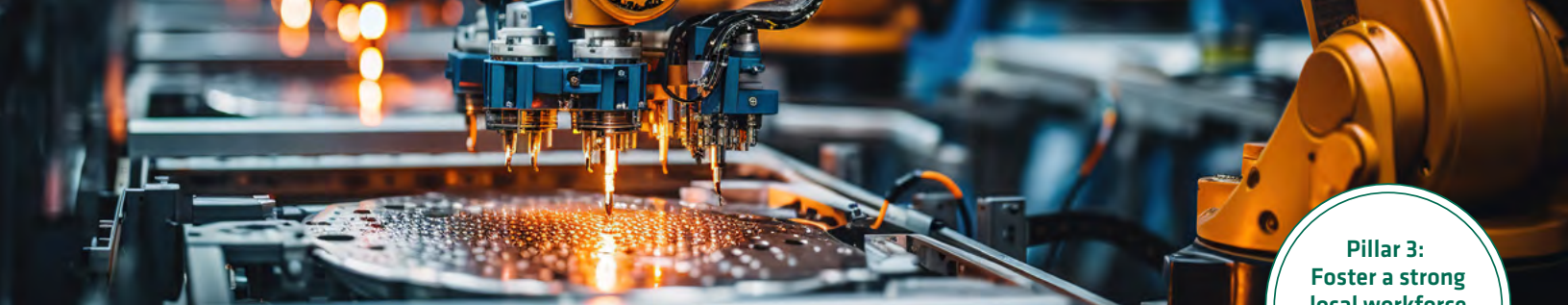
As a key portion of the workforce ages-out and retires over the next 10 years, it will be critical for Lorain County to continue to reskill its current workforce, as well as build and attract a new workforce.



ResidentValue

- The connection between Education and Workforce has never been as critical as now, with the increasing adoption of Industry 4.0 technologies and with new patterns of workplaces since the pandemic. To be attractive for investment, Lorain County will need to have a strong workforce and education system.
- Lorain County is growing as people are attracted by the cost of living and amenities. To continue to build a strong future, the County must ensure that the educational systems are high-quality and provide relevant and future-orientated skill sets.





Pillar 3:
Foster a strong local workforce and education system

5.3.2 | KEY ACTION AREAS

The engagement process has identified the need and desire for a future-ready approach, where the community and people of Lorain County understand emerging trends and the changing demands on the workforce. This is a system-wide approach, that includes the ability to forecast future needs, an understanding of the future, and high levels of collaboration.

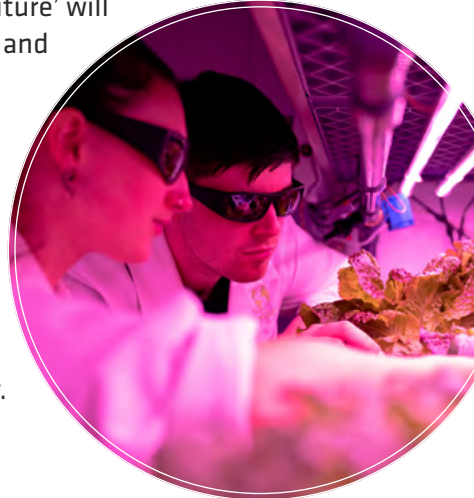
Action 7: Work with the K-12 system, the Lorain County Community College (LCCC) and local businesses, to forecast and promote the future needs for skills and workforce in the County.

The workplace is changing rapidly, as new technologies and workplace models emerge. Being future-ready means knowing what the future might look like, and understanding the future skills needed to support the current and future local businesses. Working with partners to ‘model the future’ will help with this forecasting. Promoting these future needs will help telegraph to families and students what the likely future jobs will be in Lorain County.



Action 8: Develop a program to educate the community on key emerging trends and opportunities.

Lorain County will change a lot over the next decade, and having the community prepared is critical. This is especially important, as some future opportunities will likely require significant investment and support from the community. Having a proactive forward-looking community will help accelerate positive change in the County.

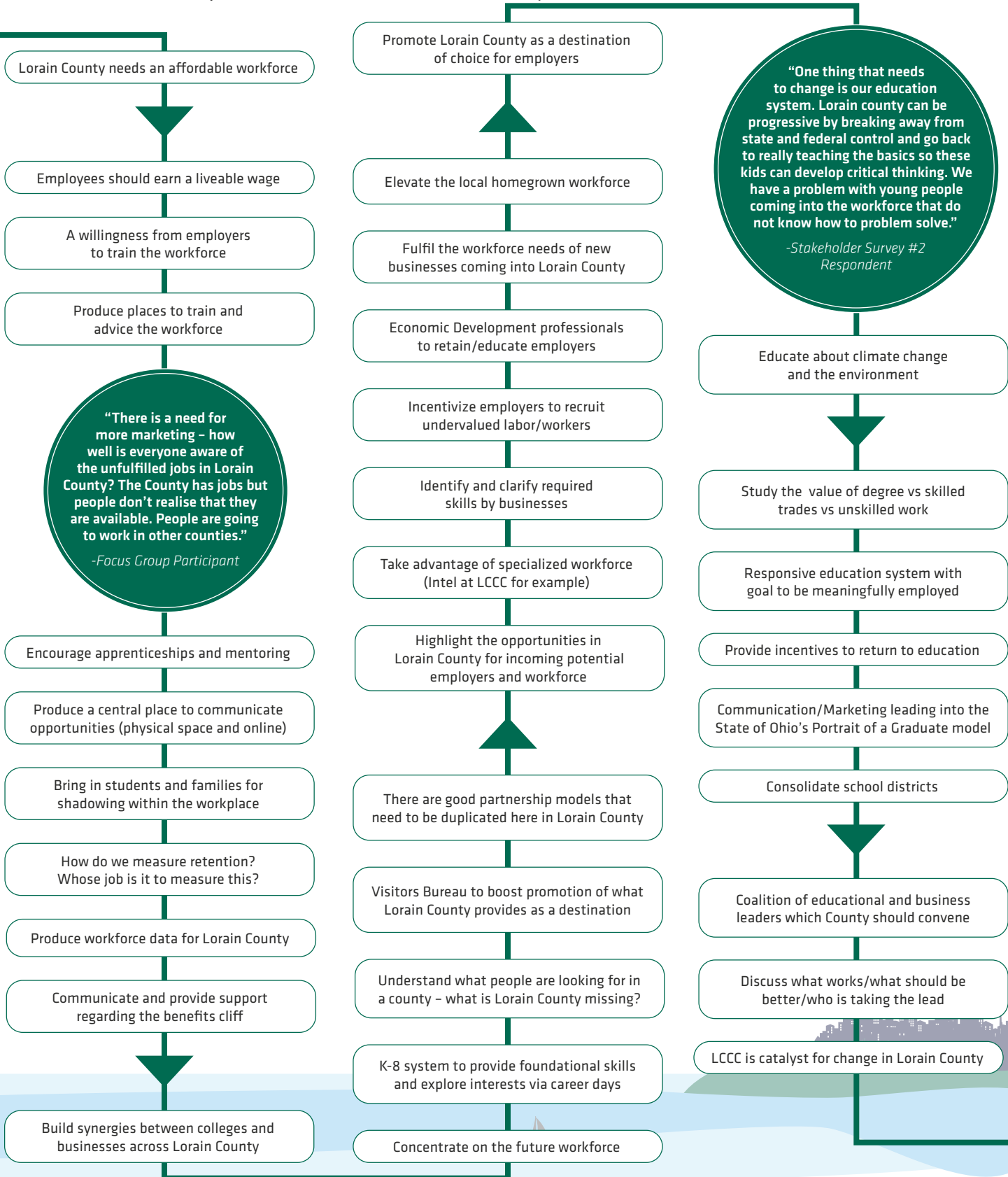


Action 9: Help facilitate close collaboration between businesses and the educational system.

To build the optimal local workforce and education system, there needs to be close collaboration between the business community and the educational system. This will help ensure future needs are being identified as quickly as possible, to allow time for the skills training and educational systems to adjust.



The following bullet points are ideas and actions that emerged during the engagement process. Focus group participants and survey respondents were asked for specific ideas on actions that could be taken to achieve the preferred future, 'Unified Lorain County'.



5.4 | PILLAR 4: SUPPORT INNOVATIVE INDUSTRY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Pillar 4:
Support innovative
industry and
economic
development

Objective: Build on existing industries in creative ways, and invest in emerging sectors such as technology, water and energy-based, and food industries.

5.4.1 | IMPORTANCE OF INDUSTRY, BUSINESS AND DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL

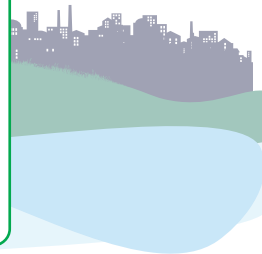
From the initial Think-Tank workshops, the importance of economic development has been highlighted. It is recognized that Lorain County has a long history of manufacturing and agricultural industries. The unique location of Lorain County, within the peri-urban sphere, means it is well suited as a location for rapidly growing industries associated with energy, logistics, distribution, manufacturing and food. There are likely future opportunities in industries that require natural resources such as water and food. Leveraging these natural advantages, and pivoting to emerging industries, will require innovative approaches and a strong focus on economic development. In addition, the County has the chance to invest in its legacy downtown areas, and expand its inbound destination tourism sector, by carefully leveraging the recreation assets, including the lakefront location.

Lorain County has the potential to redefine itself and offer a compelling location for emerging and cutting-edge industries, especially ones that can harness the natural resources and local workforce.



ResidentValue

- Economic development drives community prosperity, which delivers jobs, amenities and services to the local community. Proactively engaging in innovative economic development should be at the forefront of the Strategic Action Plan.
- Lorain County has a range of existing tools and mechanism to support economic development, and these are being applied in creative and useful ways. These tools are designed to help the community shape its economic future, and to support the type of investments that align with community aspirations.





Pillar 4:
Support innovative
industry and
economic
development

5.4.2 | KEY ACTION AREAS

Innovative industry and economic development have been a key part of the planning discussions and focus group work. This is an area that is well recognized as a priority, and can help deliver many benefits for the community, including jobs and local prosperity.

Action 10: Help facilitate the revitalization of key downtown areas.

The County has numerous downtown locations. Many of these are functioning well as important parts of their local community and provide amenities and experiences. However, the two main downtown locations (Lorain and Elyria) are lacking the vitality and investment they deserve. These are potentially important community centers, and offer the potential as destination locations. There should be a concerted and collaborative effort to revitalize these important economic drivers.

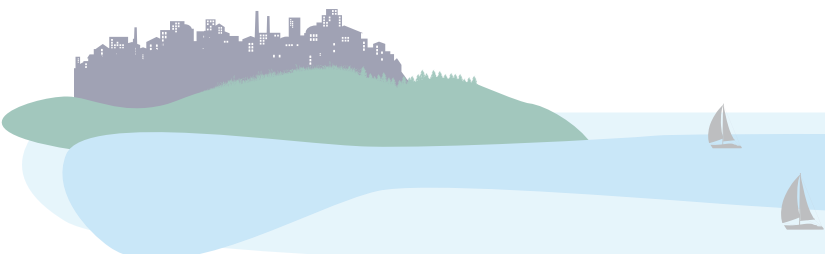
Action 11: Encourage the attraction of emerging future-orientated industries.

The planning process has identified that there is a strong desire to attract emerging future-orientated sectors such as technology, water and energy-based sectors, and food industries. Attracting these types of industries will require a very collaborative and coordinated county-wide approach, that promotes the opportunity in a compelling manner.

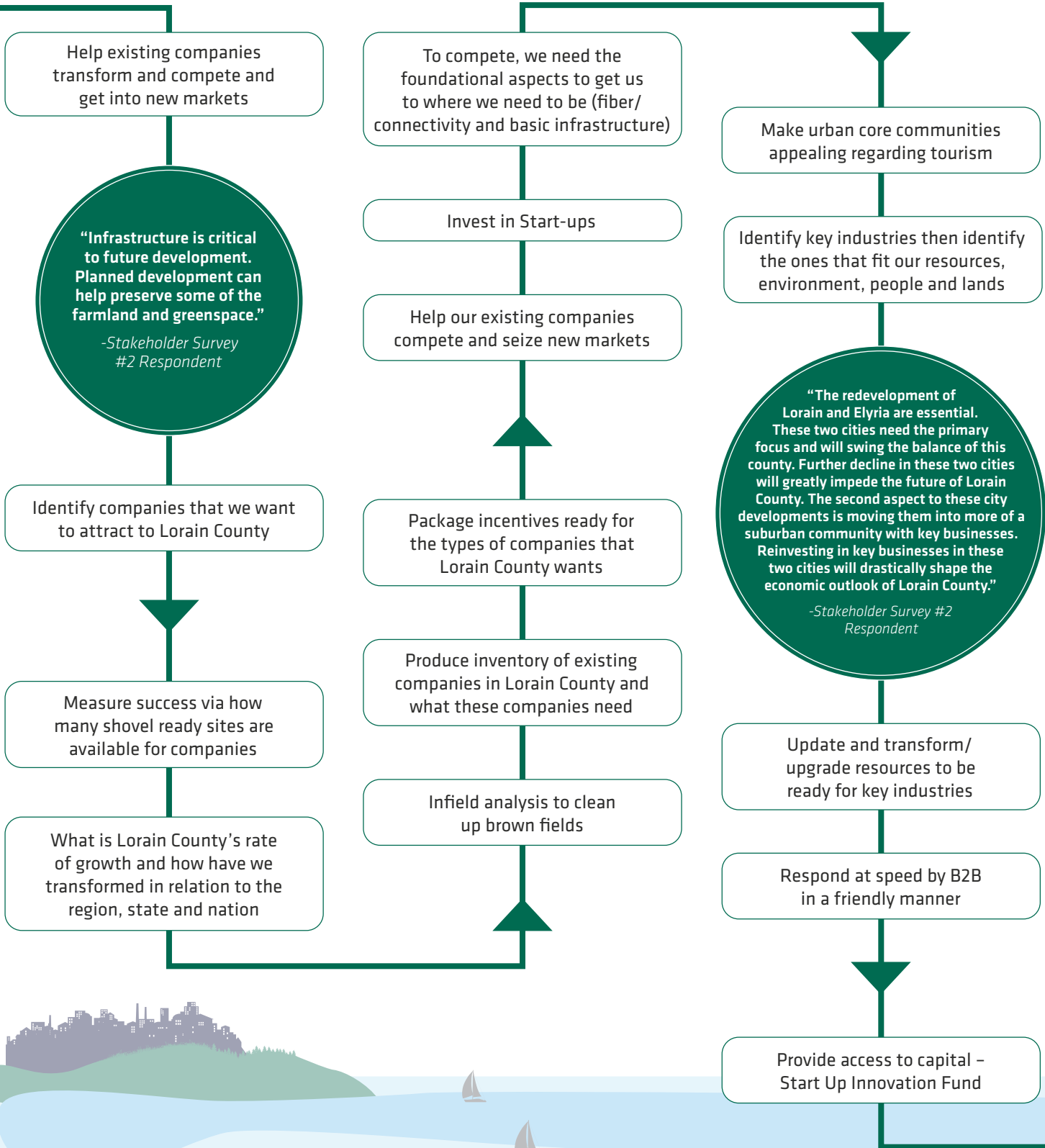


Action 12: Promote the County's strategic positioning in manufacturing and food industries.

As the manufacturing sector transforms, and supply chains continue to re-shore, there are opportunities for Lorain County. With its deep manufacturing history, and with room for development and redevelopment, Lorain County can offer a strategic positioning for industries that are relocating or starting. This strategic position needs to be part of the narrative about Lorain County.



The following bullet points are ideas and actions that emerged during the engagement process. Focus group participants and survey respondents were asked for specific ideas on actions that could be taken to achieve the preferred future, 'Unified Lorain County'.



5.5 | PILLAR 5: FACILITATE CREATIVE SOLUTIONS TO TRANSPORTATION, HOUSING, AND INFRASTRUCTURE NEEDS

Pillar 5:
Facilitate creative solutions to transportation, housing, and infrastructure needs

Objective: Create a county-wide coordinated and partnership approach to finding creative ways to provide local transportation systems, safe and affordable housing, and quality community amenities.

5.5.1 | IMPORTANCE OF TRANSPORTATION, HOUSING, AND INFRASTRUCTURE

This Strategic Pillar includes the 'grand challenges' of Lorain County. The issues of transportation (public transit), housing, infrastructure and community amenities have been discussed at most of the engagement sessions. These issues include the 'hard' infrastructure and the 'soft' infrastructure such as child care, community amenities and services. These are basic building blocks for people to have successful and productive lives. There is a need to tackle these issues, especially in the more impoverished neighborhoods and cities. The County has a key role to help facilitate creative solutions by convening organizations and helping access to new funding sources.

This pillar covers the basic building blocks that are needed to have safe and productive communities, families and businesses. The solutions will require creative approaches, significant investment and time for implementation.



ResidentValue

- The livability of a community is largely correlated to the cost of living and the availability of amenities. Focusing of solutions that improve the amenities and quality of life will benefit all residents.
- The targeted issues in this pillar are also particularly relevant to low-income households who often rely on public services and amenities. Addressing these challenges in creative ways will help people build pathways to prosperity for themselves and their families.





Pillar 5:
Facilitate creative solutions to transportation, housing, and infrastructure needs

5.5.2 | KEY ACTION AREAS

The area of community infrastructure was a key focus group topic and has been raised numerous times throughout the planning process. This is an area that will require clever solutions, long term investment and high levels of collaboration between agencies and governments.

Action 13: Establish and facilitate multi-disciplinary taskforces to tackle transportation and housing needs.

As part of the implementation phase, it is proposed that some multi-disciplinary taskforces are formed to tackle some of the big challenges. The County has a key role to initiate these groups and help facilitate their work. These are massive topics that will require time to make meaningful impact. An initial step will be to understand what resources and programs are available at a national and State level, that could be accessed in Lorain County.



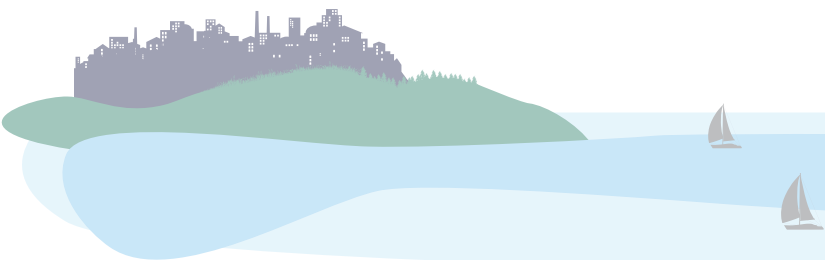
Action 14: Host summits that showcase available resources and best practice solutions to building community infrastructure.

Across the country, numerous cities, counties and organizations are experimenting with new and novel approaches to tackling systemic issues such as housing affordability and availability, child care, and homelessness. Best practice examples from this broader work should be showcased, to help spark innovation, creative local ideas and action.



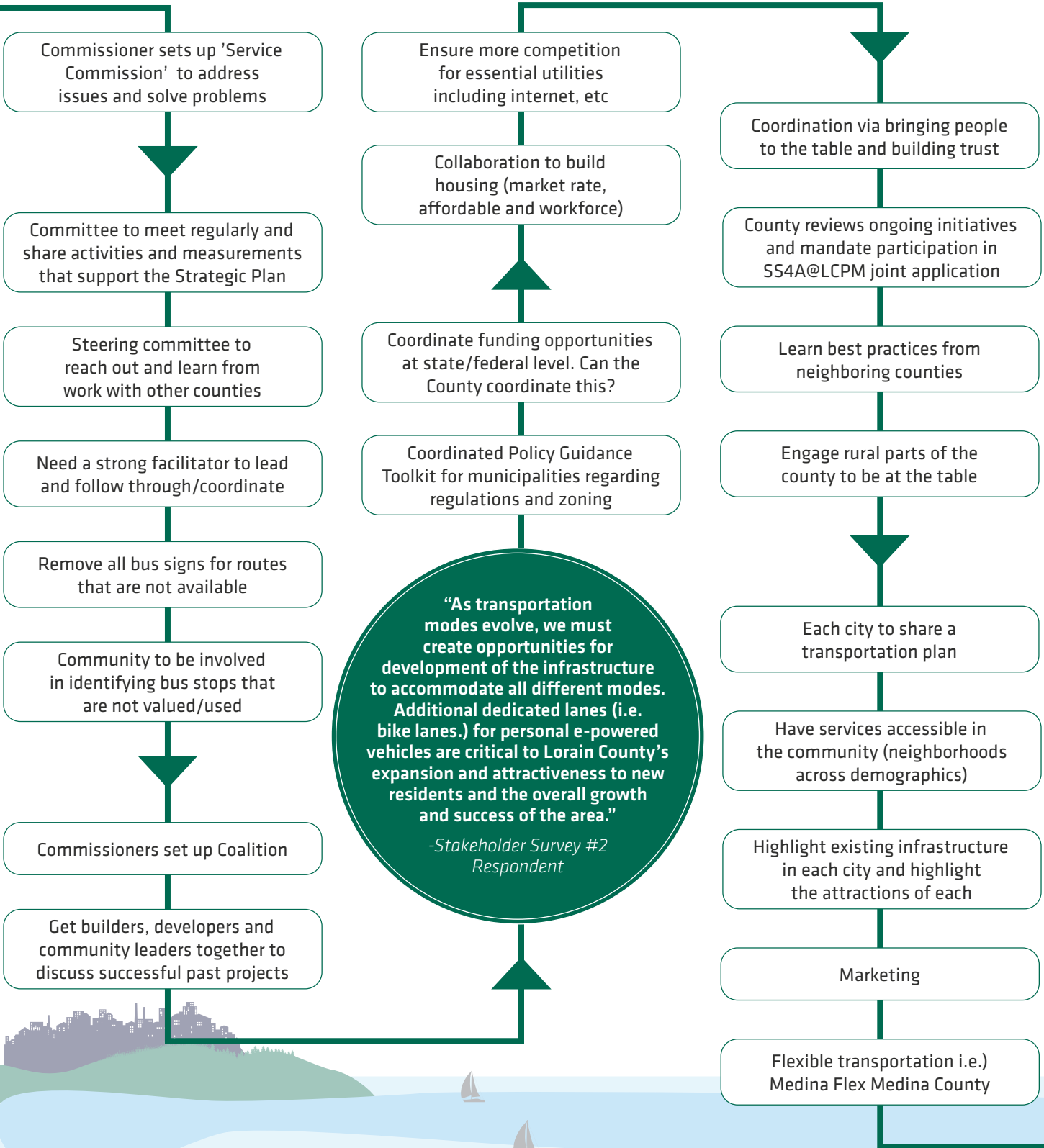
Action 15: Forecast future infrastructure needs and develop long-term investment plan.

Lorain County is growing, and there are current and future infrastructure needs. Mapping out the future needs will help quantify the scale of the investment needs, and how this will impact future County budgets and revenue. Many County responsibilities, like jails and waste water treatment, often require large once-off capital investments. These costs, together with providing the required services, mean planning for the future is essential.



5.5.3 | IDEAS FROM THE COMMUNITY

The following bullet points are ideas and actions that emerged during the engagement process. Focus group participants and survey respondents were asked for specific ideas on actions that could be taken to achieve the preferred future, 'Unified Lorain County'.



5.6 | PILLAR 6: MAINTAIN AND ENHANCE THE COUNTY'S IMPORTANT NATURAL RESOURCES

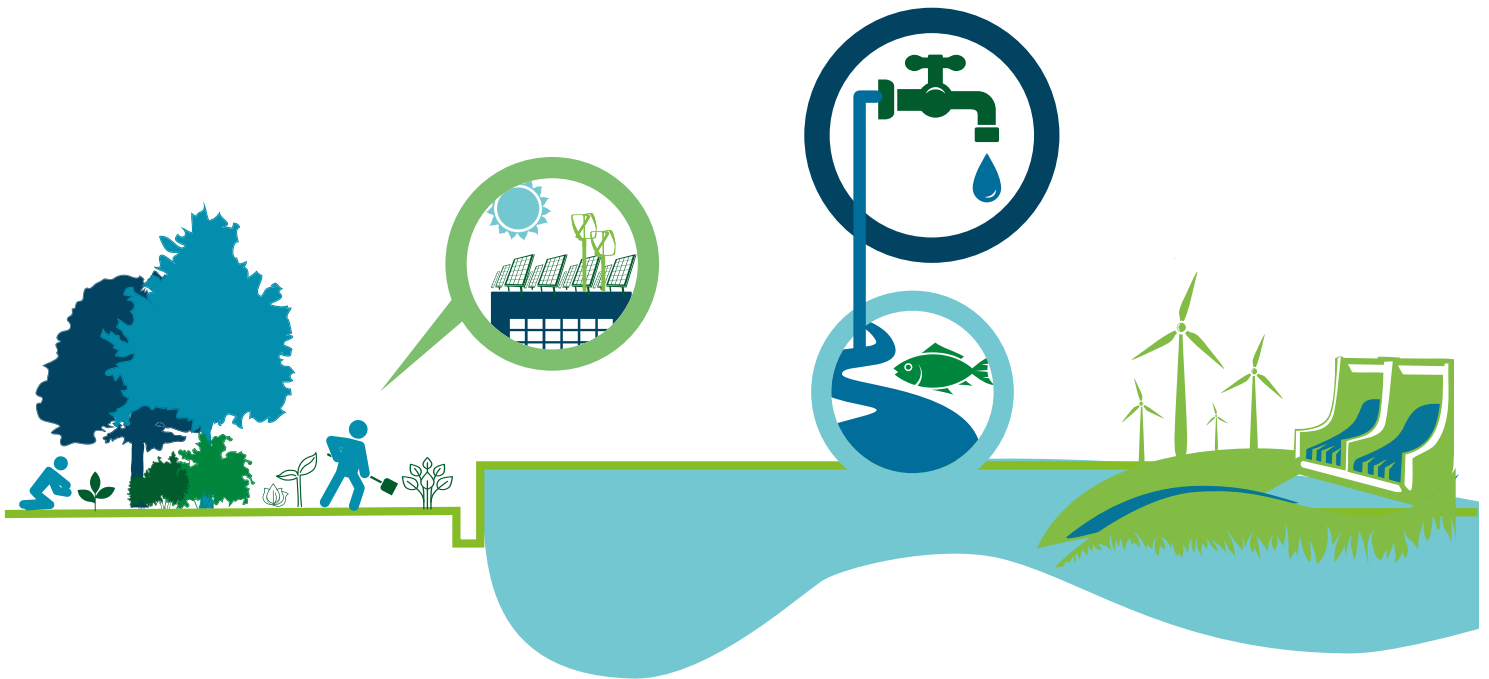
Pillar 6:
Maintain and
enhance the County's
important natural
resources

Objective: Develop a long-term approach to maintain and enhance the County's natural resources, so they can continue to provide for the community and support a healthy ecosystem and environment.

5.6.1 | IMPORTANCE OF NATURAL RESOURCES

This pillar was identified in the engagement process, especially in the focus groups and in the second community survey. Climate change will have numerous impacts on Lorain County, including having to adjust to different intensity rainfall events, higher temperatures and extreme weather. This is coupled with increased community sensitivity to issues of pollution, environmental degradation and quality of natural resources, such as air and water. Overall, these changes will drive cities and counties to adopt more environmentally sustainable management practices. Lorain County is a geographically large county and will need to intentionally manage the future of the natural resources, and invest in planning, policies and infrastructure to adapt and build a climate resilient future.

As climate change impacts the world, Lorain County will need to put in measures that will assist residents to accommodate and adapt to changing conditions.



ResidentValue

- Lorain County is home to some fantastic natural resources assets, such as water, river and green spaces. These will need managing and protecting, as urban and industrial development expands. Having a long term and thoughtful plan helps keep the right balance between maintaining natural resources and supporting community and economic growth.
- Many residents of Lorain County are attracted by the semi-rural feel and open spaces. Careful planning can help enhance this experience and provide important outdoor amenities such as recreation areas and green spaces.



5.6.2 | KEY ACTION AREAS

Lorain County is blessed with valuable natural resources. These have helped build the economy over many decades, and resources like abundant fresh water could power the next phase of industrial development. Managing the natural resources, while helping the community grow and prosper is a key strategic pillar. This pillar focuses on sustainable management and enhancing and maintaining the natural resources.

Action 16: Create a collaborative county-wide plan to identify and enhance important green spaces.

Green spaces are important to protect the rural and semi-rural feel of urban locations. These green spaces also help retain a healthy ecosystem and provide important ecological services and benefits. In addition, well designed green spaces offer excellent recreational amenities.



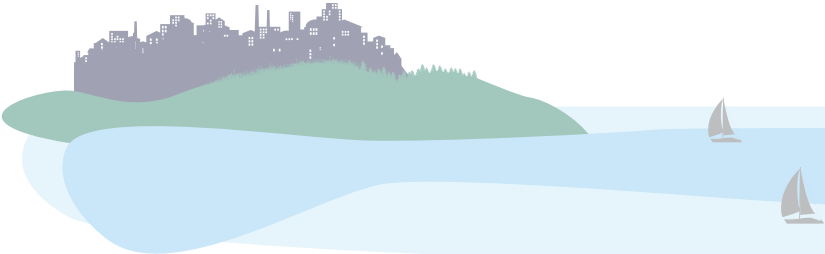
Action 17: Develop a comprehensive county-wide sustainability plan that focuses on climate mitigation and adaptation.

A county-wide plan could help anticipate where climate impacts might occur and build in mitigation and offset strategies. This proactive planning approach helps avoid the 'crisis-management' scenario and creates resilience in infrastructure and emergency response systems. Such a forward-looking plan can also address the overall environmental impacts, and explore expanding options such as recycling, moves to emission reduction and zero waste.



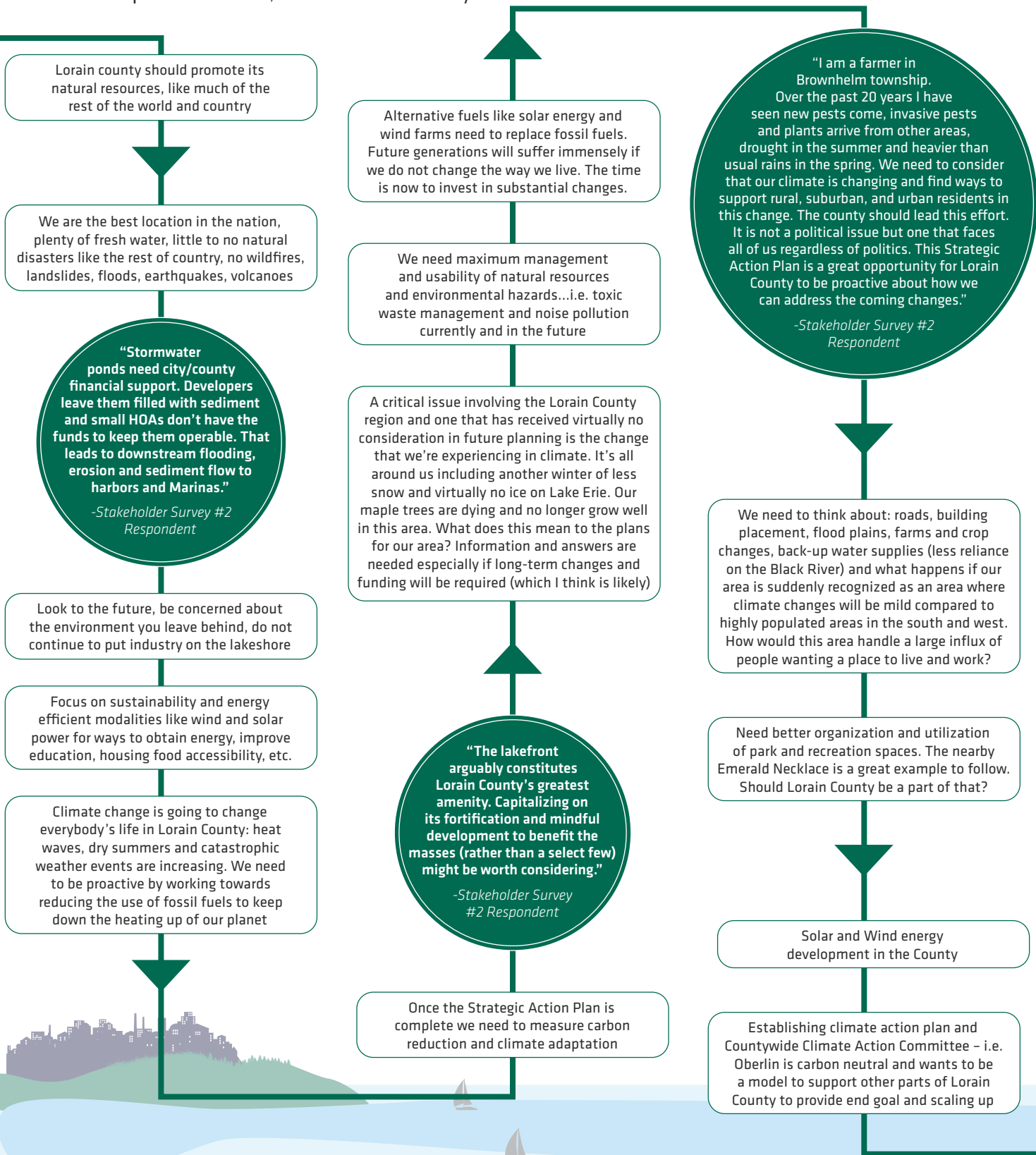
Action 18: Enhance and maintain important agricultural and water resources for long-term use.

The agricultural landscape is an important part of the heritage and the economy of Lorain County. This landscape can get absorbed by urban expansion unless careful long-term planning is in place. The agricultural landscape, together with the water resources, offer a lot of future potential for Lorain County. Development decisions should be made with an 'eye on the future', and their potential impact on these important resources.



5.6.3 | IDEAS FROM THE COMMUNITY

The following bullet points are ideas and actions that emerged during the engagement process. Focus group participants and survey respondents were asked for specific ideas on actions that could be taken to achieve the preferred future, 'Unified Lorain County'.



6.0 | COMBINED STRATEGIC ACTION FRAMEWORK

The framework for action developed through the strategic action planning process has identified a set of key actions that will help Lorain County pivot its trajectory towards the 'Unified Lorain County' future. This framework is the culmination of extensive engagement and input via surveys, in person events and deliberation by the focus groups. The resulting overall framework creates the basis of the roadmap to the future and the guiding vision that will inform future planning efforts by Lorain County.



- ### KEY ACTIONS
- Action 1: Create an inclusive County communications plan
 - Action 2: Host regular community meetings across the County
 - Action 3: Explore potential for County satellite offices and online services



- ### KEY ACTIONS
- Action 4: Convene and host taskforces groups for each of the Strategic Pillars
 - Action 5: Host regular cross-government collaboration meetings with key entities in the County
 - Action 6: Identify opportunities to provide shared services between government entities



- ### KEY ACTIONS
- Action 7: Work with the K-12 system, the Lorain County Community College (LCCC) and local businesses, to forecast and promote the future needs for skills and workforce in the County
 - Action 8: Develop a program to educate the community on key emerging trends and opportunities
 - Action 9: Help facilitate close collaboration between businesses and the educational system



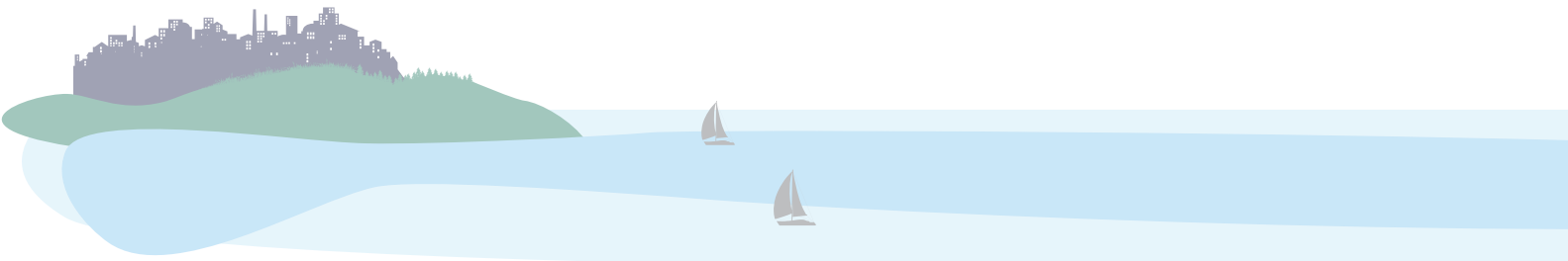
- ### KEY ACTIONS
- Action 10: Help facilitate the revitalization of key downtown areas
 - Action 11: Encourage the attraction of emerging future-orientated industries
 - Action 12: Promote the County's strategic positioning in manufacturing and food industries



- ### KEY ACTIONS
- Action 13: Establish and facilitate multi-disciplinary taskforce to tackle transportation and housing needs
 - Action 14: Host summits that showcase available resources and best practice solutions to building community infrastructure
 - Action 15: Forecast future infrastructure needs and develop long-term investment plan



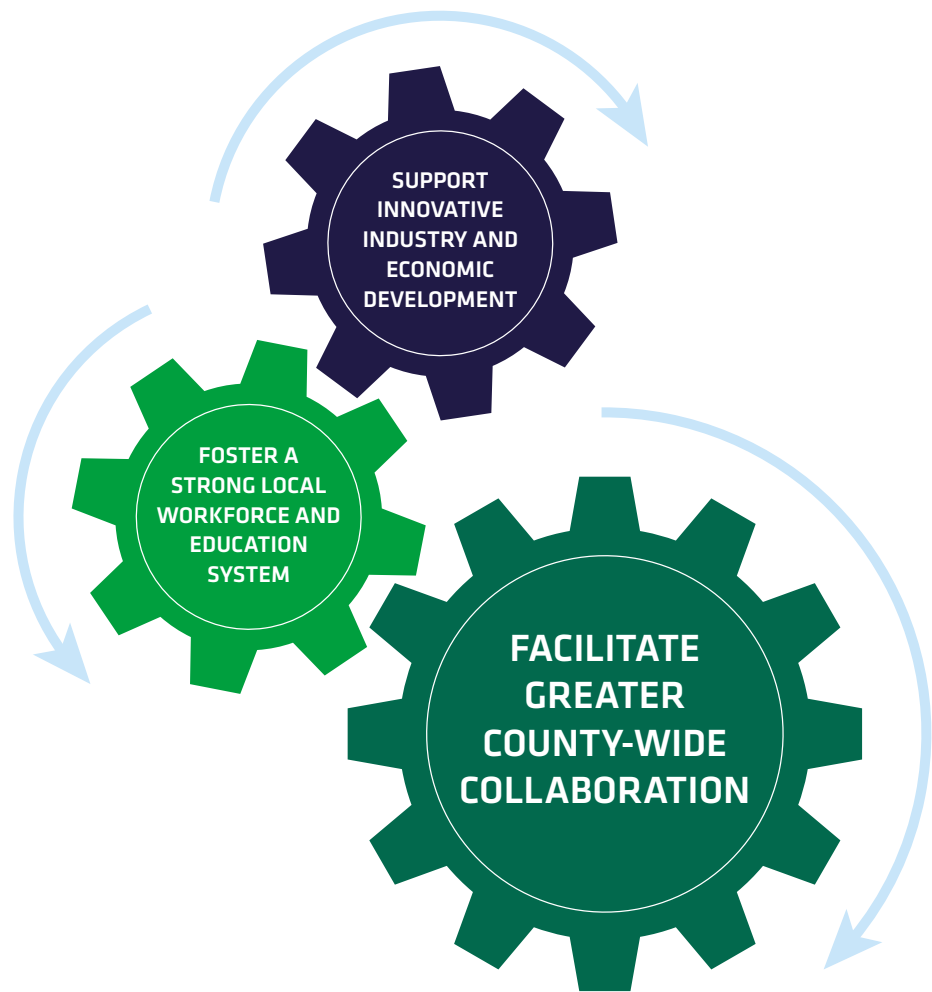
- ### KEY ACTIONS
- Action 16: Create a collaborative county-wide plan to identify and enhance important green spaces
 - Action 17: Develop a comprehensive county-wide sustainability plan that focuses on climate mitigation and adaptation
 - Action 18: Enhance and maintain important agricultural and water resources for long-term use





7.0 | DYNAMIC SYSTEMS-THINKING APPROACH

Communities function as ecosystems, where action in one area can impact other areas. The recommended strategic pillars and actions for Lorain County will be most effective if they operate together.

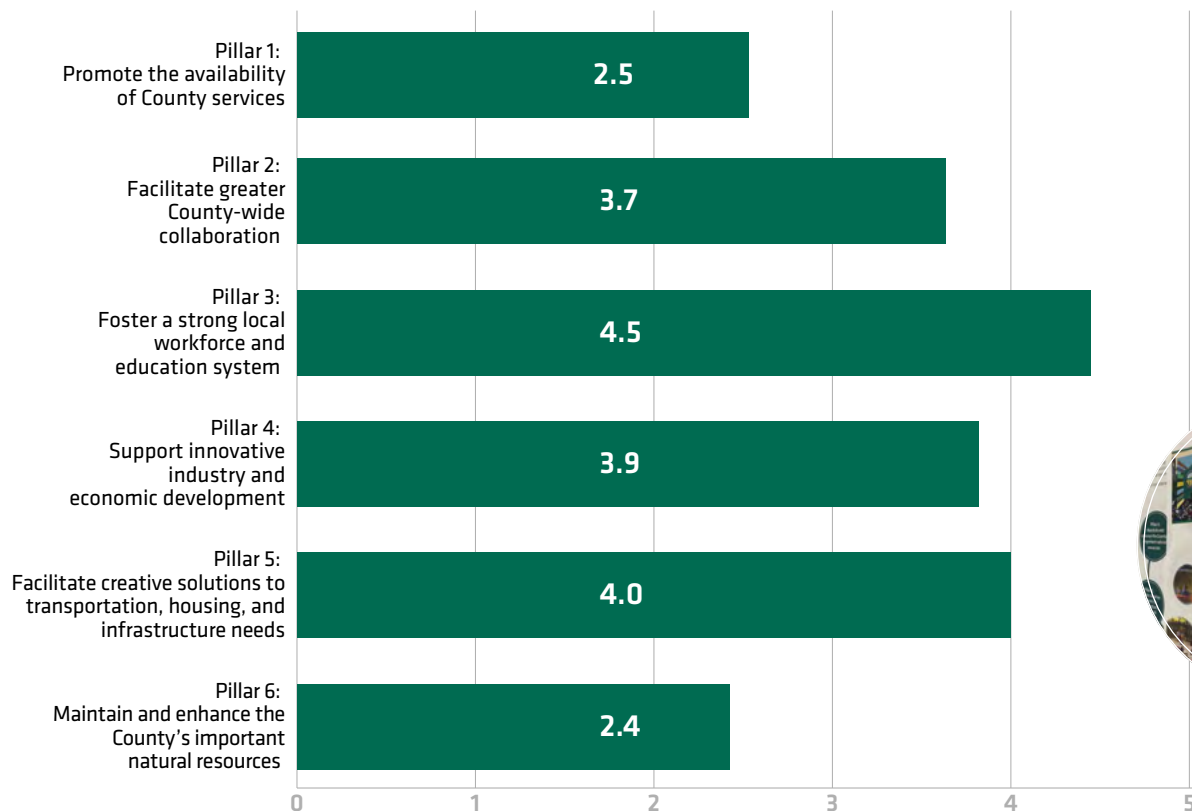




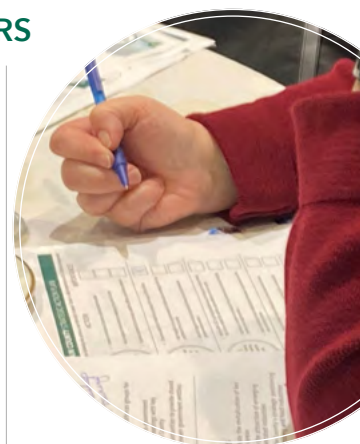
8.0 | FUTURE SUMMIT AND INITIAL PRIORITIZATION

Nearly 200 local stakeholders and local leaders gathered at the Lorain County Community College for the Future Summit on Monday, March 25, 2024. The Summit included an overview of the Strategic Plan and associated Strategic Pillars and action areas. At the conclusion of the Summit, participants were asked to score the importance of the 18 actions, and to rank the Strategic Pillars, in terms of short-term and medium-term priorities.

RANKING THE PILLARS IN ORDER OF IMPORTANCE, OVER THE NEXT 1-2 YEARS



NOTE: The higher the number, the greater the importance.



DataInsight

- All the 18 proposed actions were scored as important, with 17 actions scoring over 7 on a 1-10 scale (10 being critically important for the future). This provided good validation for the proposed set of actions.
- The Strategic Pillars were ranked based on importance in the next 1-2 years, and the next 5-10 years. The scoring in both timeframes was similar. This data helps guide the prioritization of next steps.



9.0 | NEXT STEPS – ROADMAP TO THE FUTURE

Lorain County has undertaken an extensive strategic planning process that has produced the following outcomes:

- Documented a detailed understanding of the community’s views across a range of important topics and future shaping factors.
- Allowed detailed examination of plausible future scenarios, explored expected, least desired, and preferred futures, and built an understanding of the implications of these future options.
- Identified a preferred vision for the future, acknowledging that there are a variety of viewpoints.
- Identified key strategic pillars, objectives, action areas, and community ideas.

The community of Lorain County has shown a healthy appetite for change going forward. This is the first step toward the preferred future ‘Unified Lorain County’, that will guide the County’s future planning efforts.

This work has been built on public participation and open and transparent dialogue. Now, the next phase of work needs to begin. The following immediate next steps are recommended:

- Six in-person Pillar Discussion working sessions with Task Forces for each pillar - to be held April - June 2024 at Lorain County Community College. Registration details to follow the launch of this Strategic Action Plan.
- Incorporation of the key elements of the Strategic Action Plan into the County’s future planning efforts



10.0 | ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Lorain County Strategic Action Plan process has been guided by the Strategic Engagement Committee, established at the start of the project in August 2023. These committed individuals met in person monthly for the duration of the project. We would like to acknowledge their input and expertise throughout the process.



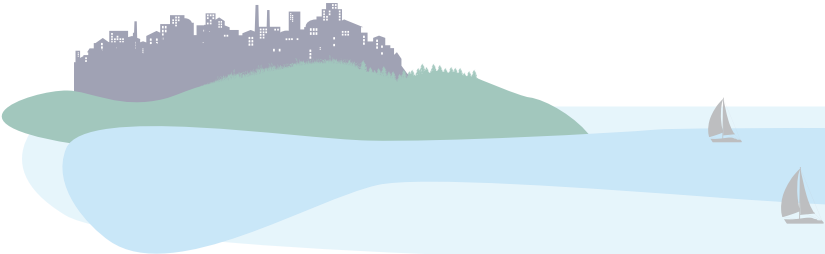
STRATEGIC ENGAGEMENT COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Tom Demaline	Eric Flynn	Mark Costilow
Mary Felton	John Ciarrone	Jack Bradley
Barb Tamas	Dave Blevins	Jeff Riddell (Lorain County Commissioner)
Sean Brady	Tracy Green	
Ben Norton	Marcia Ballinger	
Neil Lynch	Bryan Jensen	



Community members and stakeholders from across Lorain County engaged in the strategic action planning process with great enthusiasm and commitment. Their passion and interest ensured discussions were open, thoughtful, and reflective of the myriad of perspectives that exist within Lorain County. This dedication is also reflective of the deep commitment participants have to the future of Lorain County.

- Additionally, appreciation is especially extended to **Dave Greenspan** (Special Projects Coordinator/Manager, Lorain County Commissioners) who managed this project and worked with Future iQ on a weekly basis on the organization, content, and direction of the project.
- We would also like to extend our appreciation to **John Gall** (Administrative Assistant to County Commissioner Jeff Riddell) and **Chris Kish** (Executive Assistant to Administrator) at Lorain County Government who provide the local expertise that helped guide this project. Their time and dedication are greatly appreciated.
- Appreciation is also extended to **Cynthia Andrews** (President and CEO, Community Foundation of Lorain County) and the team at the **Community Foundation of Lorain County** for their extensive outreach to the Lorain County community for this important process. Victor Leandry from El Centro provided all the Spanish translations for promotional materials and reports.
- We would also like to thank **Tracy Green**, Vice President, Strategic and Institutional Development at Lorain County Community College (LCCC) and the team at LCCC for ongoing support and for providing a fantastic venue for the Think-Tank, Focus Groups and Future Summit.



11.0 | FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information about the Lorain County Strategic Action Plan Project, and next steps, please contact:



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Lorain County Commissioners
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Information about the Lorain County Strategic Action Plan project can be viewed on the unique project portal at:

lab2.future-iq.com/lorain-county-strategic-action-plan-project/



THINK-TANK REPORT

November 2023



BENCHMARK REPORT

December 2023



STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN

March 2024

To learn more about Future iQ, visit www.future-iq.com or email info@future-iq.com. To learn more about Future iQ's role in the Lorain County Strategic Action Plan project, please contact:

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LORAIN COUNTY STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN

OHIO, USA

MARCH 2024