

# What We Do

Since 2008, in the face of national economic hardship and the local economic disaster of the exit of DHL from the US domestic market and the loss of over 9,000 jobs at the Wilmington Air Park, the Clinton County Regional Planning Commission (CCRPC) [clintoncountyrpc.org](http://clintoncountyrpc.org) and the nonprofit Energize Clinton County (ECC) [energizecc.com](http://energizecc.com), which the CCRPC helped create and funds, adopted a community economic development strategy based on economic 'leakages' observed within the community.

The CCRPC/ECC established key 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 US EDA and USDA, to proactively address these leakages through a 5 Gaps Strategy:

**Local Business**

**Young Professionals**

**Local Food**

**Energy**

**Community Visioning**

The programs have been noted as models of proactive innovation, attracting national recognition and media attention including: Pop!Tech, VH1 Do Something, Pepsi, Toyota, National Audubon Society, *The New York Times*, *The Economist*, *National Public Radio*, Fox News, Glenn Beck, Great Lakes Brewing Co., Institute for the Future, MSNBC, Ohio Economic Development Association, American Planning Association and our local *Wilmington News Journal*.



*A project of the Clinton County Regional Planning Commission*

# Local Business

*Locally owned businesses have a higher economic multiplier than nonlocal ones, provide more economic diversity/resiliency, and provide more entrepreneurial opportunities for local citizens. Unfortunately, like many small towns, Clinton County has a lower percentage of locally owned stores today than previously and has lost many of the entrepreneurs who would have operated them.*

- CCRPC/ECC started Buy Local First Clinton County, based on helping local businesses better connect with consumers, share consumers with other local businesses, educate consumers on their economic impact, and create a foundation for future entrepreneurs with a consumer base already energized to 'buy local'. To do this, the team developed [buylocalcc.com](http://buylocalcc.com) and produces weekly email marketing pieces which highlight local monthly events, business specials/coupons, and a once-a-month 'focal local' spotlight of an area business and its owner produced in collaboration with the Wilmington City Schools media department and the Wilmington News Journal.
- In 2009, the campaign had 125 participating businesses and 1,720 consumers signed up for the weekly email list. By the end of 2011 there were 3,695 consumers with nearly 300 participating businesses. 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% said that it was important 5 years ago and 95% said that it is important today.
- A 2012 study completed by JP Morgan Chase concluded that businesses who participate in Clinton County's Buy Local First campaign have an approximately 10% sales lift over businesses in the same sector that do not participate. The campaign has been noted by Heritage Ohio as one of the most successful and the CCRPC/ECC won a Rural Business Opportunity Grant (RBOG) grant from USDA Rural Development to expand this grassroots campaign model in the Southwest Ohio counties of: Adams, Fayette, Brown, Highland, Scioto and Pike.



# Young Professionals

*Like many small towns, the loss of young professionals is a loss of the community's investment in an important human resource. Young professionals often are unable to fathom opportunities for themselves in the small town where they grew up, and local businesses need to hire people they know and trust.*

- CCRPC/ECC developed the Clinton Community Fellows [clintoncommunityfellows.org](http://clintoncommunityfellows.org) which introduces young professionals to local businesses to build community roots and provides businesses needed professional capacity. More than an internship program, the Fellows format was 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- setting up new accounting practices, doing market research for a new product, developing a new channel strategy, establishing a new web or social media presence.
- Through 2012, the Fellows have provided over 9,000 hours of 'change focused' consulting work for local businesses in Clinton County- from larger businesses like a tier 1 automotive parts supplier and the local hospital, to local retailers and restaurants. The program allows businesses the capacity to try new things and be more competitive while introducing young professionals to opportunities and organizations. This model has led to most of the Fellows who have participated being offered permanent positions in the community.
- The Fellows program 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 has increased local businesses participation rates with these small business assistance efforts and resources as the Fellows often introduce these services to local businesses.
- The Fellows program is interconnected with the other 5 Strategy programs, as an example: Branstrator Farms- a large, local specialty produce farmer- participates in the Buy Local First campaign, begins selling at our local Farmer's Market, and then receives a Clinton Community Fellow to expand a new product line. Swindler and Sons Florist becomes active in the Buy Local First campaign, the owner's daughter participates in the Fellows program and also learns of our energy efficiency program with the University of Dayton partnership, and then makes a significant purchase locally, upgrading their existing greenhouse glass to a more energy efficient one, with a less than 2 year ROI.



# Local Food

*Especially in an agricultural community, the lack of local produce and other value-added agricultural products is a missed opportunity with the local economic spend on those items leaking out of the local, state and even national economy.*

- CCRPC/ECC helped redevelop and expand the Clinton County Farmer's Market [clintoncountymarket.com](http://clintoncountymarket.com) and serves as the coordinating and fiscal agent. Since 2009 the market has doubled in size and offers a wider array of products, including higher margin and finished goods. The market hours were expanded to twice weekly during the larger summer market, and began a winter and spring market. In 2012, the market began accepting credit/debit and EBT (food stamps). The team linked marketing for the Farmer's Market to the entire Buy Local First effort and worked to interconnect the market with other local businesses. For example: local restaurants like the General Denver Hotel and Grille offer special menu items on the market day, using products the chef buys seasonally from the Farmer's Market.
- Working with many local stakeholders, CCRPC/ECC encourages the growth of the food processing industry locally. In collaboration with Wilmington College the team designed the layout and assisted with the site ready certification of a nearly 300 acre development site adjacent to the Wilmington Air Park. Along with a group of local farmers and the Wilmington College Grow Food Grow Hope program, the team created a local 'fresh network' which focuses on connecting local farmers with larger food distributors, processors, and regional food networks.



# Energy

*Many local businesses and citizens had little idea of what energy efficiency level they currently operate at, what improvements could bring savings and what the return on investment (ROI) would be for improvements. Lowering energy costs would make businesses more economically resilient, allowing them to invest more and operate with a higher profit margin. Understanding efficiency would provide all of these savings, along with the additional environmental benefit of less energy use locally.*

- CCRPC/ECC drafted legislation to designate the City of Wilmington as one of the nation's first Green Enterprise Zones (GEZ) which created specific incentives for green building within the City limits. The GEZ legislation was noted by the US Green Building Council (USGBC) as a 'Top 20 Public Policy Achievement' nationally in 2009. Clinton County has also attracted both utility-grade solar and wind companies to put land under contract in the County and the City of Wilmington developed its first solar PV facility on municipal property with an Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant (EECBG) won by the CCRPC/ECC.
- The team understood that the cost of an energy audit alone would often scare away a local business from understanding their energy efficiency and so developed a partnership with the University of Dayton's Building Energy Center which uses energy usage data of local commercial buildings 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 working with only businesses (and later homes) 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 which provided over \$30,000 for energy audits of local businesses in 2010-2011, including being highlighted nationally by the VH1 Do Something Awards for this program. Local businesses have implemented annual energy savings of over \$15,000 so far.
- University of Dayton's team has used the community outreach and the CCRPC/ECC network to devise a gaming platform called [dropoly.com](http://dropoly.com) which provides a fresh, user friendly interface to energy efficiency awareness for local residents and small businesses.



# Visioning

*Facing the local economic disaster and the national recession, many communities- especially small towns in rural areas like Clinton County- lack visioning capacity and any framework to properly plan for redevelopment. Even if resources were available for a plan, to be successful in a small town environment there needs to be extensive local participation and buy-in.*

- CCRPC/ECC engaged the University of Cincinnati, School of Planning to assist communities in local visioning in rural small towns. Traditionally, the UC School of Planning worked only with urban areas; but this new approach, labeled the 'immersion planning' model, placed planning and architecture students or recent graduates with sponsoring small towns to live within the community and develop hands-on comprehensive plans for these villages. With the guidance of the CCRPC's broader planning staff, the resources of the University, and the willingness of the community to host the planning student- this 'immersion planning' process developed first-ever plans in Lynchburg, New Vienna, downtown Wilmington, Blanchester, and Sabina: [imagine.energizecc.com](http://imagine.energizecc.com)
- CCRPC/ECC developed the Wilmington Air Park RFI/RFP process which allowed for fast-response re-visioning of the facility by leading redevelopment teams including several of the world's largest real estate, engineering and planning, and consulting firms through the initial redevelopment process. The RFI/RFP process directly led to the Wilmington Air Park Master Plan and Market Study process which was funded by the US Economic Development Administration (EDA) and the marketing of the facility which is ongoing. It is estimated the RFI/RFP process designed by the team allowed the planning process to begin a full year ahead of traditional redevelopment planning methodologies.
- The 'immersion planning' process was highlighted in 2012 testimony before the US Senate Agriculture Committee as a model for small towns to address planning and visioning challenges and the University of Cincinnati, School of Planning has undertaken 'rural visioning' and immersion planning type projects based on our model in Oil City, PA and LaGrange, KY.

