

Forging a Bright *Future*

How Logan County
Keeps Building



PREPARED BY THE HARWOOD
INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC
INNOVATION IN PARTNERSHIP
WITH HONDA

BY RICHARD C. HARWOOD,
MICHAEL PRIHODA, AND
JOHN CONROY



HONDA

The Harwood Institute for Public Innovation
4915 St. Elmo Avenue, Suite 402
Bethesda, MD 20814

American Honda Motor Co.
24025 Honda Parkway
Marysville, OH 43040

phone 301-656-3669
fax 301-656-0533
email info@theharwoodinstitute.org
web theharwoodinstitute.org

web honda.com

The Harwood Institute for Public Innovation is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that equips people, organizations, communities, and networks with the tools to bridge divides, build capacity, and tackle shared challenges. The Harwood Institute's work is rooted in a philosophy of Civic Faith and the practice of Turning Outward. Founded in 1988, the Institute's approach has spread to all 50 states across the U.S. and 40 countries around the world.

For more than 60 years in the U.S., Honda has been committed to making positive contributions to the communities where its associates live and work. Honda's mission is to create products and services that help people fulfill their life's potential, while conducting business in a sustainable manner and fostering a diverse and inclusive workplace. Advancing its corporate social responsibility, Honda and the Honda USA Foundation support this direction through giving focused on education, the environment, mobility, traffic safety and community. Learn more at csr.honda.com/.

Forging a Bright Future: How Logan County Keeps Building was prepared by **The Harwood Institute for Public Innovation** in partnership with **Honda**.

Written by **Richard C. Harwood, Michael Prihoda, and John Conroy**

Research by **John Conroy, Marla Crockett, Gbenga Dasylva, Haley Harshman, Joe Krushinsky, William McGowan, Michael Prihoda, Dallas Robinson, and Valencia Stone**

With support from **Honda's Corporate Affairs Business Unit**

Assisted by **Ariadna Condezo Trinidad, Daniel Keener, Jax Martinez Franks, Kevin Obike, Julia Rahimzadeh, and Natalie Rogers**

Design by **Dresden Branding & Design**

Photography by **Bellefontaine City Schools, Citizens Federal Savings and Loan, CoverLink Insurance, Indian Lake Area Chamber of Commerce, Logan County Chamber of Commerce** (photographers **The Photo Booth** and **Kandalyn & Tony Green Photography**), **Logan County Libraries** (photographer **Juliette Tanner**), **Mary Rutan Health, Ohio Hi-Point Career Center, The Steinhelfer Firm, LLC, Village of West Liberty** (photographers **Elle A. Design Co.** and **Lane Yoder**)

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the initiative in Logan County.

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Letter from Honda

Honda believes in The Power of Dreams. We proudly have been working to power dreams in Logan County since 1989, when production at Honda's East Liberty Auto Plant began. In 1996, we dedicated the Honda Transmission Manufacturing Plant in Russells Point.

Over these three-plus decades in Logan County, our commitment to quality and the unstoppable spirit of our highly skilled associates have allowed us to set new standards of engineering and production excellence. Today, our Ohio operations include five state-of-the-art manufacturing plants, a North American automotive development facility, parts centers, purchasing operations, and support functions that employ more than 15,000 associates and contribute millions of dollars to the Ohio economy every year.

Beyond providing thousands of jobs in Logan County, we work to ensure our associates have opportunities to engage with and serve the community. We are dedicated to ensuring that Honda's philanthropic investments create sustainable impact aligned with the community's shared aspirations.

Reflective of the company's values, Honda's five pillars of Corporate Social Responsibility are Education, Environment, Mobility, Traffic Safety, and Community. In Logan County, and across the country, we seek to make

investments that advance these areas. That's why we partnered with The Harwood Institute for Public Innovation.

Honda neither conducted this research nor produced this report. The views reflected in this report are not necessarily reflective of the company's perspective. Still, we believe this report can help illuminate the county's strengths and the key issues that matter to residents. It can also help catalyze the community to work together in new ways and forge an even brighter future. Honda will use this report—and the discussions that come from it—to help inform our strategy for future community investments. We deeply value the trust and relationships we have built across Logan County and look forward to discussing how Honda can best partner with the community in the future.

In addition to our belief in The Power of Dreams, we believe in being a company that society wants to exist. We hope this report helps residents and leaders as they continue their important work. Honda is so proud to be a member of this community, and we are excited and ready to help forge an even brighter future in, and with, Logan County.



Yvette Hunsicker

VP of Corporate Social Responsibility and Inclusion and Diversity, Honda

Preface

Logan County is close-knit, has great schools, and local pride runs deep among residents. Still, the community is dealing with an array of challenges and faces a critical choice: stay on the current path and potentially stagnate or get on a more productive path by coming together to forge a bright future.

Communities can shape their own futures. Yet not all communities grab hold of the opportunity to engage people, address hard issues, and tackle shared challenges. They don't always come together to create a greater sense of shared purpose. So, while conversations and actions related to change take place, they may not truly address key issues.

When you listen to the voices of Logan County, what becomes clear is that people are seeking new ways to forge a brighter future. They want to engage authentically and tackle shared challenges. In a time of growing national division, this community yearns strengthen its close-knit, neighborly feel.

This report doesn't prescribe specific solutions; instead, it seeks to illuminate a path forward that enables people across the county to bridge divides, generate shared purpose, and discover ways to move forward together.

During my more than 35 years of doing this work, I have seen what it takes for communities to move forward. Enough people must make the intentional choice to step forward, Turn Outward toward one another, and set in motion meaningful actions that spread throughout a community like a chain reaction. New initiatives and programs cannot be our sole focus. Communities like Logan County must remember that how we do the work is as important as what we do. Our work must forge a stronger civic foundation upon which positive actions can take root, grow, and spread over time.

Our country needs more examples of communities coming together to forge a common future, especially amid people's real differences. To achieve this, people must show up and work together to shape the community's future. In Logan County, the opportunity is ripe to build on the good while creating new ways to move forward together.

Forging a bright future in Logan County requires answering the call to step forward and engage. Now is the time to come together.



Richard C. Harwood
President and Founder

A Guide to this Report

In 2022, Honda began discussions with The Harwood Institute for Public Innovation about how to help strengthen the Logan County community. As a down payment on this work, Honda asked the Institute to help them learn more about the community by identifying strengths to build on and things to address moving forward. This report, *Forging a Bright Future: How Logan County Keeps Building*, presents what we found. Honda neither conducted this research nor wrote this report. As such, the views contained within are not necessarily reflective of Honda's perspective.

This report is not intended to be a scorecard on the community; nor does it prescribe specific solutions for moving forward. Instead, it is intended for the community to better understand how people across the county see and experience life in Logan County, and to offer key areas for strengthening civic culture so the community can come together to determine how best to move forward.

Over a six-month period, The Harwood Institute undertook a series of 16 conversations with community residents from different areas across Logan County, with multiple conversations held in Bellefontaine, the county seat. Each conversation was held with cross-sections of approximately 10 people. We held two conversations specifically with high school students.

In addition, The Harwood Institute conducted 36 in-depth interviews with community leaders, which included elected officials and leaders from non-profits, education, religious institutions, businesses, and other areas. There is one additional point to be made about how the report was done: Each individual quote was selected only if it represented larger patterns found in the research. The selected quotes come from across all of The Harwood Institute's interviews and conversations.

Here are the sections of the report that follow:

Introduction

This section provides an overview of the report. In it, we outline four main themes that emerged from the conversations and interviews in Logan County.

Our Voices

In this section, you will hear people in Logan County describe how they see and experience the community and share their hopes and concerns about the future.

Logan County's Public Capital

This section is a snapshot and analysis of the fundamental structures, networks, and norms of Logan County through the lens of The Harwood Institute's Public Capital Framework. This snapshot reflects what it takes for a community to work together effectively. It was developed through the Institute's research and on-the-ground work in communities in all 50 U.S. states.

Building the Community's Civic Strength

This section lays out key recommendations for Logan County to invest in and develop its civic capabilities alongside the steps to catalyze and grow efforts that build trust and renew a sense of possibility and hope.



Introduction

Logan County is a great place to live. So many people love life here because of the close-knit community, neighborly feel, amazing environment, great schools, and ongoing revitalization in Bellefontaine. Pride runs deep among residents, many of whom were born and raised in the area. As one East Liberty resident said, “Logan County really has a lot going for it.”

Yet amid all the good, real challenges exist.

People want Logan County to keep building on the good and forge an even brighter future. To achieve this goal, the community has some fundamental questions to consider and act on, together. How does a community that has so much good going for it productively tackle its challenges? How does it face the hard issues and ensure that people with different perspectives and priorities have a real say?

Where the Community Stands

People here care about their neighbors. “Everyone is always watching out for each other,” one Russells Point resident said. This commitment to one another is one of Logan County’s many strengths,

which some communities can only hope for. Given the county’s position, staying on the current path might be easier and would perhaps be favored by some people. But at what risk? Current challenges, if left unaddressed, have the potential to fester, grow, and even undermine Logan County’s cherished quality of life. Many people believe that for the county to thrive—now and into the future—a different path is needed.

“It’s hard to change good enough into let’s grow, let’s thrive,” one leader said. “If we’re not moving forward, then we’re moving backward.” The vital choice facing Logan County is whether residents and leaders will come together to forge a shared purpose for moving forward while building on the community’s many strengths. To productively engage with that choice—and actively shape the future—the people of Logan County must work through a variety of issues and take action together.

“ Staying on the current path might be easier. But at what risk?”

Our interviews and conversations were held across the county with residents, leaders, and youth. They revealed four overarching themes, each of which needs the community's concerted attention and action.

– **Logan County must break down its silos.** Fragmentation in the county occurs on various levels. People tend to identify with their local area rather than the county as a whole. Further, silos exist within communities like Bellefontaine, Indian Lake, and others. And while many organizations are doing good work, with many of them working together, the dominant way of working is siloed. For Logan County to move forward, it will need to break down the silos that now hinder shared purpose and action.

– **The community needs to discuss and work through hard issues together.** There is a constellation of issues and concerns that both leaders and residents agree must be addressed, including the flight of youth from the area, housing, health, and workforce development. In addition, there is uneven economic development within individual communities and across the county. Right now, there is not a broad or deep ethic of community discussion in Logan County among residents or between residents and leaders. When residents do

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engage, it tends to be when they feel their individual interests are threatened, leading some conversations to become heated or important issues to be bypassed altogether. This dynamic needs to change if the county is to effectively tackle its pressing challenges.

– **Residents and leaders must fight against disconnection.** There is a disconnect in Logan County between residents and leaders. Many residents do not feel adequately seen and heard; others have retreated from civic life entirely. Meanwhile, many leaders believe that more opportunities for productive interaction and relationship-building are required, even while some say that enough is already being done. The bottom line is that a disconnect exists and it must be bridged in order for Logan County to get on a more sustainable path forward.

– **More civic capacities must be grown.** Logan County has many civic capacities that are well-documented throughout this report. Yet there is a clear need to grow more civic capacities in order to support residents, individual communities, and ensure the county can productively move forward. These include cultivating and making room for new leaders; creating new spaces for residents to discuss shared concerns and for residents and leaders to interact on those concerns; and generating stronger norms of collaboration and interaction in the county, which will support a stronger sense of shared purpose. Growing and developing these civic capacities is critical.

What Path Will We Take?

There is no guarantee that the future in Logan County will be as bright as the present. Communities retain their strength—and indeed grow it—only by developing the civic capacities that enable them to adapt to changing environments and conditions and to respond to people’s shared aspirations. This is particularly true today given the forces of change and uncertainty now acting on communities and public life throughout the nation.

Logan County has a choice about which path it will take. There is the path

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Communities retain their strength—and indeed grow it—only by developing their civic capacities.

of least resistance, which is rooted in keeping things as they are; and there is another, more productive path where people come together and find common ground to move ahead. In working to forge a bright future, the community must consider the following questions:

- How does the community build on the good things that are happening?
- How can it ensure that all people are included and that people do not get left out or left behind?
- What will it take to strengthen the civic capacities of the community in order to catalyze and support more progress?
- How can action be taken by honoring the past and seizing the current opportunities for intentional growth?

There is no clear cut way forward. Instead, there are choices and trade-offs to be made. In Logan County, people are calling to engage in that work, together.

Moving Forward, Together

Residents and leaders alike want Logan County to continue to thrive. This will take real work. It will require addressing hard issues and having hard conversations. It will require creating a greater sense of shared purpose in taking action.

But not all actions effectively move a community forward.

Over the past 35 years, The Harwood Institute has learned that it's at this very juncture that people must face reality if they are to create something different.

Too often, those seeking positive change reflexively embrace old habits. We choose a path of comprehensive, highly coordinated plans, where we attempt to bring as many people and groups together as possible. But such efforts often stall out, or fail outright, due to the unwillingness or plain inability of so many groups to work together. What's

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As communities grow themselves, a sense of possibility and hope grows, too.

more, too many community efforts do not truly know, or choose to ignore, what the community actually wants. We gravitate toward a one-size-fits-all approach, often imported from a different community with a different history and needs. Solutions are imposed upon communities, leaving change undelivered and people feeling that they've lost control over their own lives and futures. There is a failure to understand and account for the community's context.

At the root of such approaches is an assumption that communities need to be “fixed”—as if people and communities



are seeking to have someone fix them. As if the persistent challenges reflected in this report can somehow be easily solved.

Communities move forward and thrive by growing themselves. They unleash a chain reaction that begins with single steps and expands over time. Such actions, when they are strategic, address the community's concerns while tapping into people's shared aspirations. They are designed with the explicit intention to strengthen the community's civic culture: the relationships, norms, leaders, organizations, and networks that enable a community to work. Taken together, these expanding steps strengthen the community's civic confidence and belief in itself. Indeed, as communities grow themselves, a sense of possibility and hope grows, too.

Such hope is not based on wishful thinking; nor is it a false hope, made up of unrealistic expectations or

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We could sit and talk about ideas 'til the cows come home, but is someone going to step up and take action?”

utopian visions. What is needed is authentic hope—a hope built upon realistic promises and concrete actions taken and emerging over time.

“We could sit and talk about ideas 'til the cows come home,” said an Indian Lake resident. “But is someone going to step up and take action?” Logan County is well-positioned to answer this call to engage. When it does, it can truly begin to forge an even brighter future.



Our Voices

Listen to people who live in Logan County and you'll hear great affection for where they call home. Residents express love for the area's small-town culture and repeatedly mention that people are friendly and help each other out. As you listen to these voices, you can also sense a desire for parts of the county—and the county as a whole—to overcome its fragmentation. Some fear being left out or left behind. Not everyone feels that leaders are listening to their concerns or acting on what people care about most. What follows is a series of themes that emerged from our conversations with residents and leaders from across the county. Keep in mind that each quote was selected only if it represented larger patterns found in the conversations.

A Great Place to Live

All across Logan County—in Bellefontaine, around Indian Lake, and in various villages—people say their community is “friendly” and “close-knit.” A Bellefontaine resident said their area is “a safe place, a great place to raise a family.” In West Mansfield, “People here take care of themselves and their neighbors. We're like a great big family.” People who live near Indian Lake “are very friendly,” according to a local. “You get to know the neighbors.” The area is

“People here take care of themselves and their neighbors.”

“big enough to be inviting to everybody and small enough to be personal,” shared a Russells Point resident.

This friendly, neighborly atmosphere cultivates an environment of support and camaraderie. “There's always somebody behind you,” shared an Indian Lake student. “You always have a person there to help you when you need it.” This sentiment was heard throughout conversations and among different people. “Everybody is always watching out for each other,” emphasized a Russells Point individual. In DeGraff, one resident said, “People come together when there's a problem or an issue. Somebody needs help, they come together and support each other.” A West Mansfield resident described community closeness this way: “When one hurts, the whole community hurts.”

Residents also highlight the unique geography and natural beauty of the county. “Logan County really has a lot going for it,” an East Liberty resident said. “We have the Mad River Mountain, Marmon Valley Farm, Ohio Caverns, Piatt Castle. Those are all tourist

attractions." A Zanesfield resident agreed, stating, "There's so many things that Logan County has to offer." From "Indian Lake State Park at one end and Mad River ski resort at the other," a Huntsville resident said, "there's a lot of things to do for a lot of people."

The revitalization of downtown Bellefontaine is another point of pride for the area, especially for those who live nearby. "The downtown area has become a draw," said one Bellefontaine resident. Another resident shared, "I talk a lot about the downtown because that's what the biggest change is and it's nice to have access to that." One Zanesfield individual noted the restoration of the

Holland Theatre "has brought in a lot of business." Referencing the overall revitalization efforts, a leader said, "They're trying to do a lot more to build up the community, make our downtown area more friendly to visit and have community camaraderie."

The "sense of camaraderie" named by a Lakeview resident and others binds the community together. "You could walk down the street and see eight different people that you know. It's just a very tight community," a Bellefontaine student said. In Huntsville, an individual mentioned, "There's a lot of community effort to get people together."





People are Most Proud of Their *Local Area*

Rather than identifying with the county as a whole, many residents are most proud of their local area. One said, “Belle Center has always been a town that stuck together on things. The community does a lot together.” This sentiment of communities sticking together was heard throughout the county, particularly in less populated areas. “Everybody’s willing to help each other out, whatever it takes,” said one DeGraff resident. In West Mansfield, we heard from a resident who said, “West Mansfield has been taking care of itself for a long time.”

Another factor that supports local pride is the unique celebrations and events found in different parts of the county. “If you haven’t experienced a Memorial Day parade here in Lakeview, you are missing out,” said one Lakeview resident. In Indian Lake, the whole area is proud to “put on one of the biggest fireworks shows in the state of Ohio.” Distinctive local events happen in

different pockets of the county. One Bellefontaine resident said, “West Liberty has a Labor Day festival and the garage sale day. Everybody in town is all together those two days. Belle Center does a 4th of July and the whole town turns out.” Unique events on First Fridays in Bellefontaine and themed events on Fourth Thursdays in Indian Lake also bring residents together and engender a sense of local pride.

For many residents, the physical landscape makes their part of the county special. People in Zanesfield see the Mad River as “one of those small gems that we’ve got.” Another shared that, “There are people that come from all over the United States to come fishing” because “it’s a spring fed stream, it supports trout.” People in West Liberty are proud of the nearby Ohio Caverns and links to Native American history. The different communities surrounding Indian Lake also share a love for where they call home. One called the area “paradise” because of “the natural habitat. We have everything that we need here.”

A Fragmented County

With few residents identifying with the county as a whole, much of Logan County remains fragmented. One Bellefontaine resident summed up the current reality: “I find the county to be very siloed. The townships, the smaller villages, the county is just very much siloed.” Fragmentation not only exists across the county, but also within areas like Bellefontaine and Indian Lake.

In Bellefontaine, many people say the west side of town is split from the rest of the city. “The west side is probably the only neglected part of town,” a Bellefontaine resident claimed. “You go anywhere else, town doesn’t look like that.” One student shared, “It feels almost separate.... It doesn’t even feel like Bellefontaine.” Another said, “A lot of people just avoid going over the tracks.” The “tracks” as a dividing line came up on multiple occasions. A Bellefontaine individual said, “It seems like the tracks divide everything in town.” For some residents, the divide is more than physical. “The way people think around here is us versus them,” one said.

Meanwhile in Indian Lake, while many residents say the area should be “one Indian Lake,” it remains composed of small, fragmented communities, including Russells Point, Lakeview, and Chippewa Park. These divisions repeatedly came up in conversations

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“The townships, the smaller villages, the county is just very much siloed.”

as unresolved points of tension. “It’s a turf war. There’s a lack of vision for the whole area,” exclaimed a Russells Point resident. Another resident voiced a desire for the separate municipalities around the lake to undergo “consolidation with individuality, if that’s possible.” A different Indian Lake resident felt, “Going to one Indian Lake community rather than individual ones, that’s what’s going to help bring businesses here.” Another agreed, saying, “If we were one, you could develop the region, but because we have these pockets of power, you’re not bringing in funding, you’re not pooling your resources.” The fragmentation around the lake is also apparent in the divide between permanent residents and weekenders, who some colloquially referred to as “trunk slammers.” This latter group of people, in one resident’s telling, are “not involved in the community bettering itself or moving forward.”

On a county level, fragmentation sometimes leaves rural areas feeling isolated and lacking resources, even as they take pride in individuality and self-sufficiency. One DeGraff resident said, “We kind of have our own support system, but we have to go outside to get things.” In one exchange, when asked what a sign of progress would be, a West Mansfield resident said, “As long as we were in the same spot that we are right now, that’s at least not getting worse.” Still, many in small communities say there is a disparity in resources around the county. “Everything outside Bellefontaine is on their own,” said a Lakeview resident. One DeGraff resident took that idea farther, saying, “These small communities struggle because we don’t have the resources that bigger ones do. If we could all pull together it’d be better for all of us.”

Pressing Issues

During our conversations across the county, residents expressed a set of pressing concerns. In many cases, and to varying degrees, action is being taken to address these areas. In others, organizations, leaders, and residents will need to come together in new ways to address the issues that matter most to people.

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“If we could all pull together it’d be better for all of us.”

HEALTHCARE

The 65+ demographic is the fastest-growing age category in Logan County, growing by nearly 30% in just the past decade. This reality led one East Liberty resident to ask, “Are the elderly being taken care of? My top concern would be the elderly. It should be everybody’s.” For some, senior care is connected to a need for improved Emergency Medical Services. “Our EMS service has to come from 20, 25 miles away,” said a DeGraff resident. In Bellefontaine, a resident compared the situation with a nearby county, saying, “They have a solid senior services program where they have grant





funding every voting cycle that they're able to get money to help seniors. We don't have that in this community, so there's a huge gap in help for our senior citizens."

In addition to senior care, drug use and addiction are primary healthcare concerns in Logan County. "Drugs are a problem in every community, not just ours," shared a Bellefontaine resident. Nevertheless, drug use and addiction worry many in the community. "You have grandparents struggling to raise their children's children because their child may be in jail or not fit to parent because of drugs," another resident said. This problem is felt outside of Bellefontaine too. One Indian Lake resident said, "Problems with overdoses and addiction don't happen in the open. People don't realize what's right under their nose."

“A lot of kids are dealing with mental illness so it's hard for them to even feel loved.”

Another healthcare issue on people's minds is mental health among both youth and adults. "Where do I go?" wondered one Bellefontaine resident. "Because there is a six-month waiting list. It's so hard to get services and needs met." Another Bellefontaine resident agreed, saying, "It's just hard to find providers available" for mental health services. A Bellefontaine student emphasized the issue among youth. "A lot of kids are dealing with mental illness so it's hard for them to even

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“There’s not enough affordable housing. It’s hard for people to find places to live.”

feel loved,” they said. Some say the area is starting to address the issue, though more needs to be done.

HOUSING

“Affordable housing. There’s not enough of it. It’s hard for people to find places to live,” said a Bellefontaine resident. A lack of affordable housing—amid a growing cost of living—was a major concern for people in Bellefontaine conversations. Another individual noted how the city has “knocked down house after house. They were dilapidated and should be knocked down.” But, they continued, “We’re not replacing it with anything that’s affordable.” Another individual in Bellefontaine simply said, “I do fear that we are pricing folks out of this area.”

While the affordability challenge is felt most acutely in Bellefontaine, housing is an issue on people’s minds in other parts of the county as well. “We need more residential areas in the county,” said a West Mansfield resident. In Indian Lake, one resident connected lack of quality housing to concerns about workforce development. “You see so many ‘help wanted’ signs because the people that would work at these jobs have not got

a place to live here at the lake. We’ve got to get some kind of housing,” they concluded. Meanwhile, one Zanesfield individual worried about how the issue affects the county’s “large homeless population.” “Not much is being done for them,” they said.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

“What happened to the labor force?” someone in Bellefontaine asked. We repeatedly heard a similar refrain in different parts of the county. One Indian Lake resident put it this way. “Why should there be poverty? In Logan County, you see help wanted signs everywhere.” “It’s like nobody’s there to do the job,” a Bellefontaine resident said. As an example, they added, “People are always looking for nurses.” Another said, “We have so many job openings. When they say, ‘There are just no jobs to be had in this area,’ I say, ‘Then you’re not looking.’”

Other residents share a different view, like this one from Zanesfield, who felt many jobs that do exist “don’t pay enough.” According to an Indian Lake resident, “If you don’t work at Honda, there aren’t a lot of good-paying jobs



around here.” A Bellefontaine resident echoed that by saying, “The railroad’s gone. The factories are gone.” For some residents, a lack of affordable childcare is a barrier to sustainable employment. “I’m a single mom, I just got a job, there’s no childcare for me. What do I do?” wondered a Bellefontaine resident. Summing up the current situation, one leader said, “I still think we got a long way to go as far as getting people to stay in our community and work here and grow our community.”

FLIGHT OF YOUTH

“Limited opportunities” are often mentioned as the primary reason why many youth leave Logan County. Many students agree. “For what I want to do, that’s not really possible in Bellefontaine,” one student said. Another said, “I think it’s a good place to come back to, but I don’t think I would live here.” That sentiment came across from an Indian Lake student as well. They said, “I could see myself coming back but definitely not in my twenties, thirties.” Some students do see a future for themselves in Logan County. A

Bellefontaine student believed, “It’s very possible for me to have success here.” Yet that opinion was the exception among the students we heard from.

This flight of youth after high school graduation is a concern for many in the community. Unless something changes, “We’re looking at a generation of kids being pushed out of their hometown where they otherwise would’ve found community,” a Bellefontaine resident said. Another resident shared, “The youth aren’t remaining in Logan County. They’re not staying because they’re not liking what they see.” One Zanesfield resident was thinking about his nephews when he said, “As soon as they got out of school, they were gone because opportunities were limited.”

Some action is being taken, with one example being the Logan County Collaborative’s 3E campaign that is designed to support every high school graduate with local employment, college enrollment, or military enlistment. But current initiatives are not stopping youth from leaving the county.

“We’re looking at a generation of kids being pushed out of their hometown where they otherwise would’ve found community.”

Youth Need More

Leaders and adults view addressing the flight of youth in the county as critical to the area’s future. In Bellefontaine, “The pool [at Rutan Park] in the summer is huge for the kids. It’s a huge hangout,” said a leader. But many see a need for additional activities and productive spaces for youth to gather. “I don’t think there’s anything for kids besides Rutan Park,” said a Bellefontaine resident. Elsewhere in the county, residents voiced a desire for youth mentoring. “I’d love to see Big Brothers Big Sisters or something,” a Russells Point individual said.

Some youth do see opportunities for themselves, with one Indian Lake student saying they have “way more opportunities than some kids do.” But most wish there was more to do and more access to opportunities. Another Indian Lake student said, “You’ve done everything there is to do around here multiple times.” And while Bellefontaine students appreciate developments

downtown, when asked about what there is for them to do, one said, “We have a Walmart, a Waffle House, those are big hot spots,” though another did say, “The pickleball courts were a great addition.” Students sometimes connect this gap in opportunities in their community to why mental health is such a pressing issue. “There’s a spike in kids our age with mental health issues. Part of that is because of COVID, but some of that was also due to not having opportunities,” said an Indian Lake student.



One bright spot to build upon is the support students feel from their educators. One Bellefontaine student said educators “do a good job setting us up for success in the future.” And an Indian Lake student noted, “I really like the school staff.” Still, youth needing more remains an issue and is deeply tied to whether or not youth stay in the county. As one West Mansfield resident said, “Our younger generation migrated to the city. We don’t have enough to do around here for people. They want to live closer to the city.”

A Desire for More Outward-Facing Leadership

To move forward and continue building on its strong foundation, Logan County needs more leaders who are turned outward and willing, in the words of one leader, to put “the future of our community” first. Right now, while positive examples of leaders exist, residents are not seeing enough leaders who put the community at the center of their decision-making. For instance, a Bellefontaine resident sees “a lot of looking inward” among leaders in the community, and a Zanesfield resident said, “I don’t see leaders asking me what I care about. I don’t see that two-way conversation occurring.”

Residents worry that some leaders are in it for themselves instead of putting the broader interests of the community first. One Bellefontaine resident pointed to an “individual getting a position of authority but doing nothing with it, protecting themselves.” In East Liberty, one person described a similar instance, noting sometimes leaders “make a 180 degree turn” from what they say they will do to what they actually do. A Russells Point resident said that while leaders are doing a good job overall, they still have concerns. “Some are honest and good and want to help and do things,” they said, before stating, “And some are in it for the photo ops.” The students we spoke with echoed many of these same points. One from



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“I don’t see leaders asking me what I care about. I don’t see that two-way conversation occurring.”

Bellefontaine described seeing some leaders who are “not open to hearing other opinions. It’s their opinion; the other ones are pushed aside.”

That student’s sentiment connects with others who worry that some leaders want to preserve the status quo. One leader shared, “We have leaders who engender a learned hopelessness in the sense that no matter what you do, things will never change.” One Bellefontaine resident wanted more leaders to focus on “outreach and getting ideas and bringing people in” in order to broaden the conversation. An Indian Lake resident felt that different parts of the county were being held back by an “old-guard type that don’t see the vision, don’t want to take the chance, to have their town improve.”

Many leaders do effectively garner trust from residents. One leader noted seeing “some very motivated and high-energy leaders” and another indicated some leaders “put their time and their money in. It’s not just their mouth.” Still, a Russells Point individual described local leadership as, “Fractured. Nobody can agree on what to do.” One Huntsville resident described attending a public

meeting and how they felt afterward by saying, “We know that it was just talk. It’s not going to get done. There’s no follow up.” Overall, residents desire more connection with leaders and want to see more leaders who are in tune with what the community needs.

Some People Feel Left Behind

Some people in Logan County feel like they are being left behind as the community moves forward. This is true both in Bellefontaine and in more rural parts of the county. In Bellefontaine, some community members worry the revitalization is not benefiting the west side of town. “That area of town is so neglected, and it feels like downtown is getting a lot of help,” said one Bellefontaine student. A Huntsville resident shared a similar perspective. “I will be honest with you. That side of town is neglected.”

Concerns related to whether or not development benefits all residents were heard throughout Bellefontaine. One resident said, “I work two jobs and I’m pretty sure I couldn’t go to any of those



stores in the downtown strip and shop because I can't afford to." Another voiced a worry that while revitalization efforts are "bringing people in, it's also pushing people out." They asked, "Why do I want to live in a town I can't afford to live in?" That rang true for a different Bellefontaine individual. While they weren't opposed to how "the majority of the county as a whole has the mindset of bringing people in," they felt it was critical to ask, "What about the people that are already here?"

Outside of Bellefontaine, many rural residents in these conversations feel ignored, even forgotten. One West Mansfield resident noted how "downtown Bellefontaine is growing." But, "If you go to a lot of the smaller villages, especially West Mansfield, they are dying. Everybody wants you to come and support downtown Bellefontaine, but nobody wants to come out and support those smaller villages." A Rushsylvania leader said, "I want to bring in some of that energy

that the county is experiencing to our area." Meanwhile, top of mind for some rural residents is solar farms increasingly coming into the area. "All this solar stuff is not benefitting us here," an East Liberty resident said. "It's going to bite us, using all this acreage for solar panels instead of farmland," a West Mansfield resident said.

Residents of color face particular challenges in the community. Individuals reported "having junk yelled at me" or "dealing with some racism through school, even with jobs, even into adult life." Another resident spoke of the

“ Some people in Logan County feel like they are being left behind as the community moves forward.

difficulty of “being a young black male growing up in a predominantly white neighborhood.” Some members of Logan County’s LGBTQ community also deal with challenges. “It is not easy to be in the position I am within the queer community here,” one leader said. “I get a lot of hate.” During one conversation, a Zanesfield resident referenced “some issues going on right now, basically attacking the LGBTQ community.” Importantly, not all interactions are contentious. For instance, West Liberty held a Pride parade in recent years without incident, prompting one person to share, “Everybody was so blown away that this was possible here. But it really is.” Still, the community is wrestling with ensuring a widespread sense of belonging.

A Call to Come Together

Currently, people say there needs to be more of an ethic in Logan County of coming together to work through shared challenges. A Russells Point resident said, “The only time people get involved with issues that they care about is when it truly affects them personally.” While people like this Huntsville resident say, “We do help each other out,” there is an undercurrent of detachment. Some people see indifference. “I would say the general population is kind of apathetic to what’s going on,” a West Mansfield resident explained. One Bellefontaine

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“The only time people get involved with issues is when it truly affects them personally.”

resident thinks, “People have changed since the pandemic. Everybody thinks their family comes first. It’s hard to get people to go to groups, meetings, classes, or anything.” Some people chalk this up to a lack of opportunities and awareness. A Bellefontaine individual pointed to a “lack of knowing there’s a meeting going on.” Another said, “Some people just live here and they’re kind of going through the motions.” Others, rather than interacting in person, are “keyboard warriors.”



While resident disconnection is real and widespread, some aspects of the community naturally bring people together. For instance, schools are a big rallying point. "I think our school is a big part of our community," a DeGraff resident said. A Bellefontaine student shared, "I feel like people really gather around things. Everybody supports the school a lot." At Benjamin Logan, "We are a family," declared a student. In addition to great schools, the county has other assets to build on, including tight-knit villages, Bellefontaine's revitalized downtown, amazing environment, and an economic anchor in Honda.

People across the county want more opportunities for youth, a robust workforce, preservation of the area's natural resources, and action on healthcare and housing. In individual pockets, there are even clearer areas to come together. In Indian Lake, it's improving connectedness and recreational areas around the lake. In DeGraff, people said "cleaning up the community is big." And in Bellefontaine, "It's time to start putting resources into the west side," said a student. The desire to create a broader sense of shared purpose is strong among residents. An Indian Lake resident put it this way: "Community means everybody comes together and not just their islands of people. We [need to] put our resources together for these needs and become a community." Regarding coming

together, a Russells Point resident added, "It matters. How does anybody move forward by themselves?"

For one Bellefontaine resident, a sign of progress would be for more people in the community to "be on the same page about things and be understanding of each other." To make real progress on issues that matter to people, the community must shift the way it works and develop new ways of doing things. Currently, "learning how to get those people together to talk and start it and see the action is what a lot of us don't understand," shared a Russells Point resident. A Rushsylvania leader concurred: "The majority want to do more and want to help but don't know how." By leaning in, learning to work better together, and taking meaningful action, Logan County can forge an even brighter future and take real ownership over the community's direction.

“ A sign of progress would be for more people in the community to be understanding of each other.



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CORE VALUES

- Positive Thinking is Powerful Thinking
- Look and act like a Winner
- Individual Commitment to the Group Effort
- Do the Right Thing
- Aim for the Highest Peak

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Logan County's Public Capital



The Harwood Institute's research and on-the-ground initiatives in communities across the U.S. and elsewhere suggest that for a community to work effectively, it needs a web of fundamental structures, networks, and norms. "Public capital" is what we call this rich, complex system. Nine factors make up The Harwood Institute's definition of public capital, each of which a community can actively develop.

In this section, we offer a close look at Logan County through the lens of public capital. This framework should be thought of as a touchstone—not a scorecard—for understanding the current conditions of the community and how to strengthen it so it can tackle its challenges and create a greater sense of possibility and hope.

While trying to picture how public capital works, keep in mind an ecosystem that exists right outside your door—or put more simply, think about how our air, water, land, and habitat interact daily. On their own, each of these factors seems quite simple and isolated at times. Indeed, each is often talked about as an independent element. Yet what makes an ecosystem work is not only the robustness of each element, but the healthy relationships between and among them. Public capital operates in much the same way. The nine factors are both independent and highly interdependent. It is the rich, complex interaction between them that makes a community work.

Public Capital

An Abundance of Social Gatherings — that enable people to learn about what is happening in the community and begin to develop a sense of mutual trust.

Organized Spaces for Interaction — where people can come together to learn about, discuss, and often act on common challenges. These spaces help a community begin to identify and tap resources to address concerns.

Catalytic Organizations — that help engage people in public life spur discussion on community challenges and marshal a community's resources to move ahead. These organizations help lay the foundation for community action, but do not act as the driving force.

Safe Havens for Decision Makers — where a community's leaders can deliberate and work through community concerns in "unofficial," candid discussions.

Strong, Diverse Leadership — that extends to all layers of a community, understands the concerns of the community as a whole, and serves as a connector among individuals and organizations throughout the community.

Informal Networks & Links — that connect various individuals, groups, organizations, and institutions together to create the cross-fertilization effect of experiences, knowledge, and resources. People carry and spread ideas, messages, and community norms from place to place.

Conscious Community Discussion — where a community has ample opportunity to think about and sort through its public concerns before taking action. People play an active role in helping decide how the community should act.

Community Norms for Public Life — that help guide how people act individually, interact, and work together. These norms set the standards and tone for people's engagement.

A Shared Purpose for the Community — that sends an explicit message about the community's aspirations and helps reinforce that everyone is headed toward a common goal.

An Abundance of Social Gatherings

One of the most tangible dimensions of public capital is the presence of social gathering spaces. From youth sports to potluck dinners, these are occasions for people to learn about what is going on in the community, forge relationships, and begin to develop a sense of mutual trust. These gatherings are the seedbed for creating and maintaining public capital.

WHAT'S GOING ON?

Downtown Bellefontaine is an important social hub. Recent revitalization efforts are “generating kind of a different vibe” in Bellefontaine and “making our downtown area more friendly to visit,” according to two leaders. Coffee shops—Sweet Aromas and Native Coffee Co. in particular—are key social gathering places in Bellefontaine. “Our coffee shops are definitely places where you got people coming together, sharing ideas or just sitting there talking,” said a leader. In addition to new businesses and storefronts attracting people, First Fridays—community-wide events hosted downtown the first Friday of every month—bring people from all over the county to the downtown area. An Indian Lake student said, “I really like how Bellefontaine has been engaging people with their First Friday events because people notice stuff that they hadn’t before.”



Restaurants are important across the county. “Our local restaurant has a lot of regulars that go there,” said a leader. This refrain was a common one across the county. In West Liberty, it’s the Liberty Gathering Place. For Zanesfield, it’s Firehouse Pizza and Subs. One Lakeview resident said people “come down here for the ice cream place or the Mexican place.” Restaurants across the county function as key social gathering places, with many of them in Bellefontaine and around Indian Lake. “People gather at restaurants’ happy hours and talk about the day’s events,” said a leader. Referencing a local eatery, another leader said, “A lot of informal conversations happen there.”

Outdoor activities bring people together. “We have an absolutely gorgeous area geographically,” one leader said. Logan County is home to Mad River Mountain, Marmon Valley Farm, Myeerah Nature Preserve, Indian Lake State Park, and Zane Shawnee Caverns, among others. This abundance of outdoor spaces and activities are enjoyed by locals and attract tourists.

Sports games are also popular gathering places for the community. “Sporting events are where people get together from different walks of life,” a leader shared. “There are conversations at the ballpark, at soccer games. That’s where a lot of your younger generation parents are spending time,” said a Zanesfield resident.

Churches are important gathering places for many. Churches are a “place that people connect.” “It seems like everybody is connected to a church,” one leader remarked. Another shared that churches are “where families migrate to” in order to find community. Churches bring people together on Sunday for service and throughout the week for social activities. We heard examples of this from across the county. In DeGraff, a resident said their church hosts a “fifth quarter” community gathering following football games. They also host a “free community produce tent” and are “helping with lunches in the park.” An Indian Lake resident said their church hosts a community lunch every Tuesday for “anybody that lives here.”

WHAT LIES BEHIND IT?

Bellefontaine’s downtown improvements have generated renewed social energy. Residents of all ages see and appreciate the transformation taking place in downtown Bellefontaine. “Our town has a lot more

“ Residents of all ages see and appreciate the transformation taking place in downtown Bellefontaine.

attractions, and we have a lot of places to hang out and do activities together. So I feel like we can bond together more,” said a Bellefontaine student. Meanwhile, a leader highlighted the downtown area as “one of the success stories of our town.” Another resident echoed that sentiment by saying, “I talk a lot about downtown because that’s where the biggest change is and it’s nice to have access to that.” Others in the county notice this renewed energy too, with one Huntsville resident noting “the revitalization of Bellefontaine going on” and that “there’s a lot of things to do for a lot of people.”

Areas outside Bellefontaine have fewer gathering places. While downtown Bellefontaine is experiencing revitalization, “You’re not seeing this in Russells Point. You’re not seeing this in Lakeview. You’re not seeing this in DeGraff,” said a Bellefontaine resident. An Indian Lake resident said, “We used to have a movie theater. We used to have a bowling alley. We used to have different things. We don’t have all that anymore.”



One West Mansfield resident identified their new community center as a “big thing.” But another resident worried it wasn’t yet fully utilized as most of the time “the building’s locked up.” In Indian Lake, one person said, “A community center would be really nice.” Most areas outside of Bellefontaine have “limited recreation for people,” according to a leader.

Many gathering places lack connectedness. “There’s a lot here,” said a Bellefontaine leader. “But our parks, our trails, our connectivity, our playgrounds are woefully lacking.” Two Bellefontaine residents raised the issue of connectedness in a brief exchange. “We have the YMCA. It’s clear out of town,” one said. The other chimed in, “They built a brand-new park. It’s not within walking distance at all for any kids. It’s outside of town.” In the Indian Lake area, multiple residents voiced a need for “connecting trails” as a means of “linking people” and helping to unify the communities around the lake.

Organized Spaces for Interaction

These spaces provide room for people in a community to come together to learn about, discuss, and often act on common challenges. Organized spaces for interaction help a community begin to identify and tap resources to address concerns. The focus is on the opportunities that exist for people to come together—and not necessarily the existence of physical buildings.

WHAT’S GOING ON?

Numerous organized spaces exist.

Logan County has an array of organized spaces, including those hosted by the Logan County Collaborative, the Downtown Business Association in Bellefontaine, the Mental Health Board, and the Indian Lake and Logan County Chambers of Commerce. For example, the business community meetings hosted by the Logan County Chamber of Commerce “give the different elected officials and different leaders of the community a chance to get together and talk about things that are on their mind and see things that need to be improved,” said one leader. Other important spaces are led by the Indian Lake Watershed Project and the Indian Lake Development Corporation. One Indian Lake resident noted the importance of their spaces, saying they function “to help keep the lake clean.”



Ad hoc groups have also brought people together to mobilize action around solar farms, wind turbines, and arming teachers. One leader said these spaces put on by ad hoc groups are popular because, “People will get involved if they perceive a problem.” Referencing the spaces ad hoc groups have created, one Bellefontaine resident said, “Those rooms are filled with people.”

Organized spaces are critical to the community’s progress. “One of the real blessings that we have here is we work together as a team,” one leader said. Organized spaces are key ways the community marshals resources to address shared concerns. Following the Community Health Assessment conducted every three years, spaces led by Mary Rutan Hospital and other

organizations help form community coalitions that work to address challenges. “There’s a housing coalition. There is a coalition dealing with suicide prevention and mental health. There’s a coalition that’s working on the workforce issue,” a leader explained. Another leader shared the impact stemming from the coalition formed to combat drug abuse. “You had law enforcement, the medical community, the faith-based community, and providers of treatment all got together and came up with different projects and solutions.” In response to Indian Lake’s explosion of weed growth in the lake, the community held “a lot of community meetings for people from surrounding areas to open up lines of communication. Positive things have come from it,” said an Indian Lake resident.

Residents are not a part of most organized spaces. Referencing the interactive opportunities held by various active coalitions and groups in the county, one leader said, “The average Joe doesn’t come together and talk about this stuff.” Indeed, it is a common sentiment that the general public is not a part of most organized spaces. “I would love to see more of the general public,” said one leader. “I don’t think initially that was what the Logan County Collaborative was for but I think we’re at the point now where it’s time to invite them in.” Thinking more generally, one leader said, “As far as that town hall type setting, I’m not aware of anything like that happening.”

WHAT LIES BEHIND IT?

Cross-sector spaces are highly valued. Of the many organized spaces in Logan County, some of the most effective operate across sectors. The Logan County Chamber is valued by many leaders because they foster “plenty of conversation” between “different agencies.” The Logan County Collaborative provides a monthly space to tackle workforce issues and create opportunities for youth. The highly-regarded 3E campaign—which “honors high school graduates whether they’re going to employ, enlist, or enroll”—came out of this collaborative space. Another valued cross-sector space is led by The Coalition Advisory Board, which oversees the coalitions taking

action on the Logan County Community Health Assessment. According to one leader, “It’s a mix of government, for-profit, nonprofit, schools, basically representation from all these different segments of the population.” These coalitions “have done really good work to move the needle,” shared another leader.

Many spaces include the same leaders.

“If you go to a Chamber meeting, you’ll see a group of people and then you go to a United Way meeting, you’ll see a set of people and they’re intertwined,” shared a leader. Many leaders we spoke with referenced that it’s typically “the same people doing the work” and showing up. “I don’t see it as being a negative,” said one leader. But another felt, “Increasing the circle, getting more people at the table, getting more representation. That’s probably where the biggest opportunity lies.” Still, according to one leader, there are some “stalwarts that you would see bringing collaborative people together pretty consistently.”

“ The community held a lot of meetings to open up lines of communication. Positive things have come from it.

“

Getting more people at the table, more representation. That’s probably where the biggest opportunity lies.”

Communication about spaces is not widespread or robust. Due to a lack of accessible information, some residents are unaware of places to learn about, discuss, and act on common challenges. One Bellefontaine resident said, “There’s no central place for people to go to find things out.” Another Bellefontaine resident sees a lack of centralized places for holding organized spaces, noting that most parts of the county “don’t really have any kind of community center or anything like that.” Meanwhile, a Zanesfield resident felt that “people rely on social media rather than face-to-face discussion.” One leader hopes more communication about opportunities to engage could result in “more people involved on the front end and sharing ideas rather than sharing displeasure about the outcomes.”

Catalytic Organizations

Catalytic organizations engage people and institutions in the work of public life, spur discussions on community challenges, and marshal community resources to move ahead. These

organizations help lay the foundation for community action, but once an initiative is up and running, these organizations often move on to the next challenge.

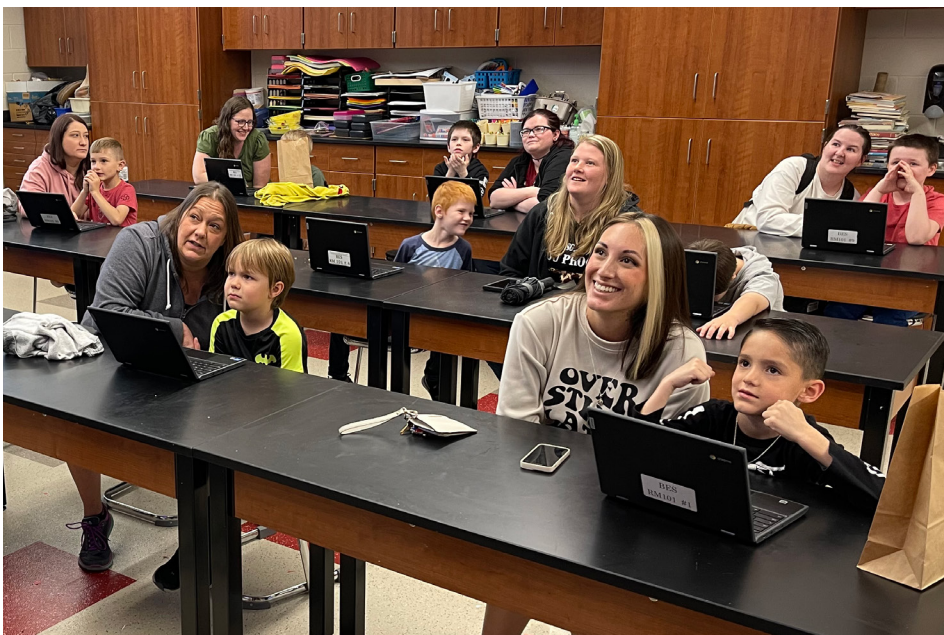
WHAT’S GOING ON?

Small Nation’s work stands out as catalytic. Residents and leaders across Logan County recognize Small Nation for its work “steering and heading” the redevelopment of downtown Bellefontaine. Downtown becoming a “thriving point” is often attributed to Small Nation’s “influence and well-established team.” A Zanesfield resident said, “Small Nation bought run-down buildings, rehabbed them, and found new tenants to bring in,” addressing “what has been the problem for every downtown across America.” One leader reported Small Nation “set out to create a vibrant community” by finding “entrepreneurs that want to build community and create energy.” While there are some concerns about increased rent and a lack of distributed ownership, “The downtown area has become a draw,” per one Bellefontaine resident.

There are other important catalytic organizations. Key catalytic organizations in Logan County include the Logan County Chamber of Commerce, Indian Lake Chamber of Commerce, United Way of Logan County, and Mary Rutan Hospital along with a few entities in Indian Lake. One leader shared, “The Chamber of Commerce does a lot. Don’t underestimate what they do...they pull things together.” The United Way was described by leaders as “very strong in our community,” “trusted,” and “an organization that’s good about trying to bring the community together.” Mary Rutan Hospital is another community pillar. A leader shared that the “goal of the community assessment” conducted every three years by the hospital is to

create “shared vision of the issues we need to be focusing on and working on as a community.” Meanwhile, in the Indian Lake area, “Indian Lake Development Corporation, Indian Lake Chamber, Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Indian Lake Watershed Project, all those entities work together as a wheelhouse,” explained a leader.

Churches and faith-based organizations catalyze important efforts. “Our local churches are very involved and looking to better the community and not just their congregations,” said a leader. Many residents shared similar sentiments about the importance of churches to what goes on in the community. One resident in Huntsville said, “A lot



of community action is born within churches. Our church answers needs in the community." A Bellefontaine student noticed "an awakening" at their church. They said, "There's already community built in, and we're told to serve. I think that mixed with the fire of youth is a dangerous combo—in a good way." Faith-based organizations that grew out of different churches in the county are also key to delivering critical community services, namely Our Daily Bread through Lutheran Community Services and United Christian Services' food pantry.

Honda is a key community contributor.

"I don't think Bellefontaine would be here if we didn't have Honda," one Bellefontaine resident said. Pride in—and appreciation for—Honda as the "economic engine" behind "major improvements" in Logan County is widespread. In East Liberty, a resident mentioned, "If it wasn't for Honda, people would really be struggling here." Many residents equate Honda's impact with "good jobs" either through direct employment or in the "subsidiary positions" offered by their many suppliers. Many residents also see the charitable impact from Honda's investments. One Indian Lake resident said, "They put a lot of money into the

community and do a lot of good things." Still, others in more rural areas wish Honda would be more present. "I feel Honda focuses on the bigger cities," said a DeGraff individual.

A number of respected organizations

exist. Residents and leaders named a number of other respected organizations, including St. Vincent De Paul, Pathfinder Group, Downtown Business Association, Drug and Alcohol Services Board, Bridges Community Action, Logan County Department of Job & Family Services, LoCo Gap Year, and others. Union Station is seen as a "one-stop shop" for resources and programming geared to those in need. Notably, some organizations work hard to engage or lift up youth. For instance, "Key Club partners with Our Daily Bread and Meals on Wheels," shared an Indian Lake student. In addition, the Chippewa, Western, and Russells Point Neighborhood Outreach Centers work closely with local schools and organizations to provide "after school activities and programs" for students. These outreach centers offer a "sense of belonging" and "makes youth feel that, wow, here someone cares," according to one leader.

“ Strong organizations are the lifeblood of Logan County.



WHAT LIES BEHIND IT?

Organizations are the bedrock of Logan County. From nonprofits to Honda to Small Nation to churches, strong organizations are the lifeblood of Logan County. Residents and leaders speak highly of the work these and other organizations do to move the area forward. For instance, “The Chamber has tried to pull things together [when] there’s been little disagreements on various topics,” said a leader. When the United Way identifies an issue, “the community hears it and they’re more likely to rally to support it,” shared another leader. In Russells Point, a resident and member of the Indian Lake Development Corporation expressed pride in the organization’s work “putting money towards good projects and getting results.” Across the county, respected organizations tend to lead the way in addressing community challenges.

Many organizations work in silos. Despite the presence of strong organizations, some worry that too many of them work in silos. “I feel like

in Logan County, there are more silos than anything else. Everybody’s worried about their own problem as opposed to the larger community,” a leader said. The reason for silos, according to one leader, is that organizations can be stretched thin. “I think it all comes into funding and with limited resources people become very guarded,” this leader said. A Zanesfield resident felt insularity was more at issue because “clubs and organizations tend to take care of their own business.” That sentiment was echoed in Bellefontaine, where a resident said, “In this community, it feels like groups are just so fragmented.” One leader pushed for “people to think broader.” They hoped to see more organizations shift from asking, “What is best for my organization?” to “What is going to be best for our community and the people that we serve?”

Logan County needs more organizations to work together. Some organizations successfully work together on shared goals. Speaking about the United Way, a leader said, “They really get people involved. It’s not just one part

of the county or the city. They make sure they involve the whole county.” Another leader felt some “agencies do collaborate and come together. Unfortunately, some of the ones that don’t are high profile.” Overall, residents and leaders see a need for more organizations to come together and work toward a shared purpose. “We have 17 food pantries in Logan County. They don’t play well together. Everybody believes they can do it better,” said a Bellefontaine resident. For another leader, the limited collaboration stemmed from organizations serving “different communities and just not crossing over.”

Safe Havens

Safe havens are places where community leaders—leaders at any level—can come together to talk and work through community concerns in “unofficial,” candid conversations.

WHAT’S GOING ON?

Some small groups of leaders connect in safe havens. The county’s “small-town culture” lends itself to leaders being able to connect in small groups. “Long-standing relationships allow room and opportunity for leaders who know each other to connect and talk over their problems,” said one leader. In Bellefontaine and the surrounding areas, leaders tend to gather in intimate settings like coffee shops and restaurants. For Bellefontaine, one leader noted,

“There’s some small groups of people that get together for the regular morning coffee at the local coffee house.” Another echoed that, saying, “I know our coffee shops are always busy, those are places where people get together and discuss challenges. Those are definitely safe havens.” In West Liberty “there’s a bunch of guys that meet at the little restaurant downtown” and in DeGraff “there’s the creamery and a group that sit at the front table,” which both offer places for local leaders to connect. Meanwhile, elected mayors across the county engage in the Mayor’s Association, which one leader described as “a good discussion group. It’s a good brainstorming session and we learn a lot.”

Leaders connect one-on-one more often. “So what I do is when I need to talk to a leader, I say, ‘Do you want to grab lunch?’ I think those are more powerful than anything else, having those one-on-ones.” The preference for connecting individually is something we heard during many leader interviews. One leader preferred connecting individually because, “We’re so busy. We all know each other so you just text.” Another leader said, “I can call whoever I need to call and know that I’m going to be able to have a conversation with that person.” Reiterating the impromptu nature of these connections, a leader said, “I don’t think it’s formal. They go for dinner and they see this individual over here and they just discuss what’s happening.”

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Leaders must understand the concerns and aspirations of the community as a whole.

WHAT LIES BEHIND IT?

Leaders don't always talk about the hardest issues. "When you want to have those conversations and you want to bring everybody together to have an open and honest conversation, you don't get a lot of people to show up," said a leader. A different leader felt a penchant for wanting to "hold the status quo" keeps some leaders from deeply engaging. Part of the explanation for avoiding hard issues, according to one leader, came down to the fact that "people don't like to put themselves out there." Another leader shared a similar view, noting "98% of our population, whether they're leaders or people, are afraid to have tough conversations." At the same time, this person stressed the importance of having "tough conversations about things that need to change without hurting someone's feelings."

Leaders have hard conversations with those they deeply trust. "Hard conversations" tend to occur primarily between leaders who have a great deal of trust with one another due to a fear of being "exposed." One leader explained that, "Because we're such a small community, there's a concern of

having something misheard and how that can reflect on me as an individual." This can stop some leaders from "diving as deep as we need to." Another leader mentioned that frank conversations were possible within their office, among just their staff. However, they shared that when thinking about the wider community, "I don't know that there's a physical space or regular meeting where they would be comfortable doing that."

Strong, Diverse Leadership

Strong, diverse leadership must extend to all layers of a community. Leaders must understand the concerns and aspirations of the community as a whole; they must serve as connectors among individuals and organizations throughout the community.

WHAT'S GOING ON?

A handful of business leaders are top of mind. Both leaders and residents name business leaders first. Frequently, foremost among these is Jason Duff. A fellow leader described Duff as "one man that really wanted to make a change and he's done a great job." One Bellefontaine resident said, "He's invested a lot of

money into the community and revitalized a lot of dilapidated buildings into this very vibrant, bustling small town.” In addition to Duff, Ben Vollrath of the Logan County Chamber of Commerce and Amber Fagan of the Indian Lake Chamber of Commerce were named as key business leaders in the county. The number of women-owned businesses in Bellefontaine was also noted as a community strength. The community has “powerful women that are able to make change with their voices and their actions,” according to a Bellefontaine resident.

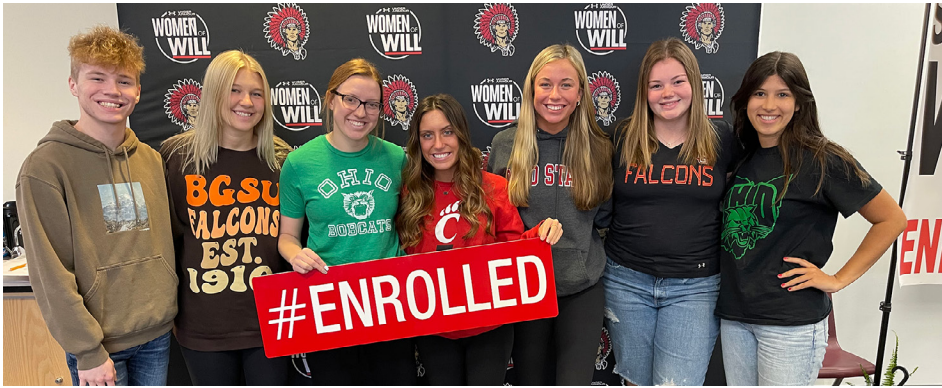
Nonprofit, education, and faith leaders are well-regarded. Many in the community speak highly of Dave Bezusko and Melody Couchman from the local United Way. “Dave is a motivator. He just gets the job done,” one leader said. Another noted how Couchman started the Doors of Encouragement program to support people suffering from cancer. “She’s somebody that people respect a lot,” they said. School leaders, including superintendents and local principals, are also highly-respected leaders among many in the community. And in many areas, people look to faith leaders for personal and community guidance. A

Huntsville resident said, “Pastors are the ones that are going to band everybody together.” West Liberty residents described one of their local faith leaders as “loving, caring, and concerned.”

Views on elected leaders are more mixed. Some people mentioned local elected officials as people to “go to” because “they have the general population in mind,” as a Bellefontaine resident put it. In Zanesfield, a resident said they would call the mayor if they need something done because, “He’s a good guy and he’s around all the time.” Around Indian Lake, “You could go to Robin (Reames), the Mayor of Russells Point and talk to her. Ryan Shoffstall (Lakeview’s Mayor) doesn’t need an appointment. Our township trustees, I’ve just been in touch with them.” Still, some people don’t know their elected leaders. Several people said, “I don’t know council members” or “I couldn’t picture [the mayor’s face].” Others express negative views on elected leaders. One resident talked about, “old-guard type of council, mayors, and township trustees that don’t see the vision.” Residents said things like, “the sad thing is, a lot of us won’t see our elected officials” and

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“We got to start promoting young leaders. We got to start getting more people involved.”



“they feel that they are above reproach.” While views of elected officials vary, a Bellefontaine resident reflected a common sentiment: “The elected are by default leaders in the community.”

More young leaders are needed. Many shared that the community needs new leaders to step up. Some already see this happening to an extent. For instance, in talking about current leadership demographics, a leader said, “There’s fewer of them, but I think there are some young people. I see it looking better than it did 10 years ago.” Others feel much more still needs to be done. “We got to start promoting young leaders. We got to start getting more people involved,” said one leader. Another said, “Some younger people that I know have the talents to be more involved. We need to motivate those people to get more involved.” A Bellefontaine resident said, “Every community ebbs and flows as their community leaders age. There’s not a new young group that’s all set to come in.”

The efforts of some community leaders are vital, though less visible. “There are people behind the scenes who work tremendously hard, and we never hear about that sort of thing,” one leader said. This invisible layer of community members who lead in key ways came up for multiple people in conversations. A Bellefontaine resident reflected about a few local business owners they respected, saying, “These people really cared about making this community better and not about making money.” Others see people like this in schools and volunteer organizations. One leader said, “We have a lot of folks who are leading and maybe don’t want anybody to know it. We see them all over the place.” Students in the county see a similar trend among their educators. One Bellefontaine student said, “A lot of my teachers are pushing us to make change.” Mentioning their homeroom teacher, a student said, “She’s not necessarily the one being our mouthpiece, but she’s encouraging us to speak up for ourselves.”

WHAT LIES BEHIND IT?

People trust leaders who put the community first. The leaders people look to and trust the most are those who aren't in it for "recognition." "They're doing it to help others. It's just a service heart," explained one leader. Another stated that "their willingness to go above and beyond is what makes them stand out." For an individual in Belle Center, the mayor garnered their trust because, "He's a hometown boy. He wants us to be a great community." One leader spoke about an example of effective leadership they witnessed when a group of farmers and business owners came together to figure out how to get expanded internet connectivity to rural residents in the county. They said, "We had a few really forward thinking community leaders that said, 'We're going to find a way to make this happen and we're going to take some risk in doing it.'"

There is an undercurrent of wanting to preserve the status quo. "It's hard to change good enough into let's grow, let's thrive," one leader said. "Enough with this 'good enough.' If we're not moving forward, then we're moving backward." This frustration is shared among some in the community who see certain leaders bent on preserving the status quo rather than helping the community move forward. Sometimes, this stems from leaders being "hesitant to touch" taboo issues like mental health

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If we're not moving forward, then we're moving backward.”

or substance abuse. But one leader felt "some people that have the power to make a change are quiet. It's like you don't want to get your hands dirty." A Bellefontaine resident put it this way: "Some people in leadership positions can develop a little bit of insular tunnel vision. So there's a lot of looking inward sometimes." Echoing that sentiment, a Bellefontaine student said, "I feel like it's more what they know and they're not open to hearing other opinions."

Circles of leadership must be broader. When talking about what current leadership looks like, one leader named a group that "people refer to as the 'good old boys.' When I speak of civic engagement, it is about creating a society where merit prevails over stodgy thinking." "I think a lot of goals might be better achieved by looking outside, and outreach, and getting ideas, and bringing in people," shared one Bellefontaine resident. When asked what community leadership should look like, someone in Bellefontaine said an "open door." Pondering why circles of leadership were not yet broader, one DeGraff resident said, "Sometimes



people forget that it's okay to reach out to other areas and learn from them and get what you can from them."

People want leaders who are inclusive and truly listen. A Russells Point resident appreciates village leadership because, "If I make a phone call, they're going to try and answer my questions." One West Mansfield resident referred to township trustees as "the most in touch people because when they go to the store, barbershop, or gas station, they have to answer to everybody they bump into." While some leaders truly listen, many residents, including this Huntsville individual, expressed a desire for more leaders who "listen and seem to want to listen and care." Someone in Zanesfield brought up a past leader who fit this description because "he went to where people were and talked with them." But

current leaders with this orientation seem few and far between. Residents from Bellefontaine and Belle Center mention issues "falling on deaf ears" when they are brought to leaders' attention. Youth especially want more from their leaders, with one wishing they would, "Be slow to speak and quick to listen. I don't think that's followed very well."

Informal Networks and Links

Informal networks and links work to connect various individuals, groups, organizations, and institutions together to cross-fertilize experiences, knowledge, and resources. Through these networks and links, people carry and spread ideas, messages, and community norms from place to place.

WHAT'S GOING ON?

Strong business-focused networks exist. Logan County's various business networks connect groups of business owners and leaders across the community. The Logan County Chamber is "the glue between the different municipalities and communities," explained a leader. Business leaders have coffee together on the first Thursday of each month, which "brings people together to talk about what's going on, whether it's their business or their community, or just to share their ideas and what's working for them," explained another leader. A group of young entrepreneurs also meet monthly, and the Chamber has an annual leadership cohort whose participants "stay connected." Further, the Downtown Bellefontaine Business Partnership and Logan County Visitors Bureau also foster networks of "different small businesses that cooperate." In northwest Logan County, a network of business leaders exists, strengthened by the Indian Lake Chamber's "networking, either coffee or a lunch and learn, [held] about every other month," explained a leader.

Important civic networks drive progress. The United Way of Logan County fosters a network of various entities. One leader said they "help with communicating different messages" to leaders and organizations in the community. The Logan County

“ Across Logan County, networks form around people's passion for service, sports, education, and other areas.

Collaborative, another key civic network, connects leaders in education and industry. One leader described how collaborative members work together by saying, "Job and Family Services can hear one of the businesses say, 'We really need training on this.' And they're like, 'Well, you know what? We could get this training for you.'" In Indian Lake, one leader shared that "everything here has been started by grassroots efforts—like-minded people who went, 'We need to change.'" People repeatedly mentioned Indian Lake Development Corporation and the Indian Lake Watershed Project as critical hubs and networks that mobilized the community to deal with the recent weed issue. Other smaller networks exist around Indian Lake, including the Chippewa Neighborhood Association and Long Island Neighbors.

Churches forge strong resident networks. Across Logan County, "churches are a place where people

connect,” explained a leader. Another said, “There are a lot of small pocket churches. They’re all proud of what they have and what they do.” The strongest church-based networks are individual congregations, but some churches do forge networks across congregations. Discussing cross-congregation networks, one faith leader shared, “We realize as a group, it has to be Christians, Methodist, Presbyterians, etc. If there’s a good cause, they all come together and the pastors have meetings together [as] a clergy group,” shared a leader. Our Daily Bread, led by Lutheran Community Services (LCS), serves daily community meals in Bellefontaine and Chippewa Park. While LCS is “the central organization, different churches within the community provide volunteers to assist,” explained a leader. At Our Daily Bread, “people come in and build their network of friends,” shared another leader. “If you come in here, you’d be surprised at the community that you see.” In DeGraff and Quincy, the Greater Riverside Area Community Encouragers network leads “ongoing mission outreach to support the community.”

Networks form around people’s shared

interests and identities. Across Logan County, networks form around people’s passion for service, sports, education, and other areas. Regarding service, “you’ve got the Elks, you’ve got the Lions,” explained a Zanesfield resident. The Rotary Club and Kiwanis Club allow

people to form relationships and work on community projects. And networks around sports are also strong. In West Mansfield, one resident said the Ball Association “brings people together” and is a point of “community pride.” In Indian Lake, a strong pickleball community has formed and is now working together to raise money for court construction. A Belle Center resident and others reported that networks of parents form around youth athletics. Beyond sports, many parents form networks with other parents from their school. Extending the Branch has helped forge a network that promotes inclusivity and support for the LGBTQ community and allies. A Bellefontaine Black Lives Matter group assembled in 2020 and remains a loose network. Other examples of networks that form around shared interests include the American Legion; the Community for Ongoing Recovery efforts, which brings people together to deal with the struggle against opioid addiction; and a group in West Mansfield that formed to oppose the introduction of solar panels.

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“There are just some people that rather sit on the sidelines.”



WHAT LIES BEHIND IT?

Involved individuals link key networks together. In Logan County, “You’ve got a small-town feel. People are so intertwined in different circles,” explained a leader. Another added, “I’ve experienced it myself where you’re here for one meeting but before and after, you’re talking about things that happened at a different one and what direction the community should be moving.” Leaders repeatedly said, “It’s almost always the same people,” showing up to things. These links between groups are helpful for spreading information, ensuring alignment, and making sure people are “pulling in the same direction,” said a leader. “It makes it much easier to communicate and work together,” explained another leader.

Networks that span sectors are critical to making progress. People appreciate when entities like the United Way, the Logan County Chamber, the Indian

Lake Chamber, and others bring people together across sectors so they “know what each other are doing,” explained a leader. Cross-sector networks prevent leaders and organizations from “feeling left out or like they’re not at the table,” which can lead to them “going off on their own,” said one leader. “Ten years ago, I would have told you that our Indian Lake had a school community and a business community, and they were two completely separate entities,” a leader said. “But our school superintendent has done a great job of getting those to overlap more than in the past.” Meanwhile, the United Way board is seen as a key source of “cross-pollination” between organizations in the county. “Some [members] then sit on other volunteer boards, so it really helps with communicating these different messages,” shared one leader.

Some residents have disconnected.

While strong networks exist, a portion of the community remains disengaged. “I always try to encourage folks to be involved personally,” explained one leader, “but there are just some people that rather sit on the sidelines.” Another leader added, “You can’t force people to participate. There are a lot of people that are more skeptical or negative.” In some communities, this disengagement has resulted in a notable decline in some local organizations. In DeGraff, “We had Friends of DeGraff and they disbanded,” explained a resident. A West Mansfield resident shared a similar phenomenon, saying, “We don’t have service organizations anymore. We disbanded the Lions because we got down to seven members and couldn’t get anybody to show up.” In Zanesfield, “The cattle association can hardly find people to spend a shift at the beef trailer during the fair.” A Bellefontaine resident shed some light on the attitude of some in the community who have disconnected, saying, “To each their own, as long as you leave me alone.”

People go where they are comfortable.

Networks by definition are made up of people who share a common interest. Still, it is worth noting that in Logan County, “People find comfort in memberships of like-minded people. They gather and are drawn to that group for a reason, for their ideals and thoughts. They see themselves as part

of that group,” explained a leader. One Bellefontaine resident explained it as “fear of being different and not mixing in.” For them, “Being outside the box is a challenge. It is scary.” That leads many to stay where they feel safest. Another leader shared that, “Some people really want to operate in their own silo and would benefit from community collaboration.” Yet often, “some [people] just pick a group and stick with it,” explained another leader.

Conscious Community Discussion

It is through conscious community discussion that a community creates opportunities to think about and sort out its public concerns before taking action. Communities that work together make a conscious point to constantly engage each other—citizens, institutions, leaders, and others. This is a key part of creating a shared sense of purpose and direction within the community.

WHAT’S GOING ON?

Few opportunities for authentic engagement exist. There are opportunities for people to “interact and provide feedback at Bellefontaine city council, the village councils throughout the county, school board meetings, and county public meetings,” one leader said. Another leader thinks residents should, “Get your five minutes, and be ready for

what you need to say.” But many residents say these formal, highly structured meetings don’t provide opportunities for deep, authentic engagement. One Zanesfield resident put it plainly. “Part of the problem is meetings where we discuss common issues don’t happen.” One leader did highlight a couple listening sessions hosted by Second Harvest Food Bank. “We held two listening sessions to hear, ‘What are some of your struggles?’” But this was one of the only examples of authentic engagement we heard about in the county. Several residents, including this one from DeGraff, said more opportunities like that are needed: “It’d be a good thing for the community to get more people involved and voice their concerns.”

Resident engagement is thin until something fires people up. Leaders and residents repeatedly mentioned a lack of community engagement. One leader shared this regarding school board meetings: “If things are going well, you may have one or two people in attendance.” Another leader felt that people “don’t come to council meetings unless there’s a controversy and then you can’t put enough chairs in [the village building].” Leaders and residents alike mentioned that people are focused foremost on their “personal interest” and that it takes “trigger points” to generate engagement. Youth notice the community’s general lack of engagement too. One Bellefontaine student said,

“There are groups of people that are really involved but there are some people that aren’t. They just live here and kind of go through the motions.” A leader declared, “We have to find a better way to engage people.”

Real barriers keep people from engaging. An array of barriers prevents residents from engaging, including busyness, a lack of awareness, skepticism, and mistrust. Busyness is a real barrier for those “already working full time [with] a family,” explained a Bellefontaine resident. Another Bellefontaine resident chalks up the lack of engagement to “a lack of knowing there’s a meeting going on.” A DeGraff resident agreed, saying, it’s about “just not being aware.” Further, one leader says that “people are not in the know, they don’t have access to the internet, or they’ve moved from another community.” Meanwhile, a Belle Center resident said, “What discourages people is a lack of organization. If I notice how messed up it is, I’m not going back.” Others have gone through “not feeling validated” to

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“It’d be a good thing for the community to get more people involved.”

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“There is a misconception that if you disagree with someone on a given point, you disagree with them as a person.”

things “falling on deaf ears,” explained a Bellefontaine resident. A Belle Center resident echoed “things falling on deaf ears” as a deterrent to engagement. Importantly, some note leaders’ reluctance to make room for residents to engage. One leader said, “The people in charge don’t want to face the issues of the community, so they’re not going to promote open conversations.”

Facebook is often people’s first stop.

“Facebook is used a lot here,” shared a Russells Point resident. In fact, many residents talked about Facebook being the go-to forum for residents to discuss issues. “I think people rely on social media to be that form of communication rather than face-to-face discussion with somebody,” said a Zanesfield resident. Facebook pages and groups have formed for Logan County, Bellefontaine, Indian Lake, and other villages. Talking about the page for Indian Lake, one resident shared, “You can ask a question or find out what’s going on at the lake.” For the average Logan County resident, Facebook is the most accessible way to share opinions on issues. Still, people noted the limits

of Facebook when it comes to real community discussion. While online forums “allow people to comment on things” and are helpful in promoting interaction and spreading information, “the internet is a different animal because people can be much more aggressive and anonymous,” explained a leader.

WHAT LIES BEHIND IT?

People fear speaking up. Across the county, residents talked about the fears people have with public conversations. Bellefontaine residents mentioned “fear of rejection,” “fear of loss or of losing,” and “being afraid of repercussions” as discouraging factors. One resident explained, “That fear is a small-town issue. You have to fit in here.” A Belle Center resident mentioned fearing “being judged by somebody. ‘What are they going to think of me?’” A Lakeview resident said, “People don’t want to get involved when there’s going to be drama.” Finally, one leader said, “There is a misconception that if you disagree with someone on a given point, you disagree with them as a person.”

Some leaders feel residents have ample opportunities to engage. While some leaders recognize why many residents are disengaged, others feel that residents have ample opportunities. One leader said, “They have public meetings. So to say, ‘I feel shut out,’ that’s a feeling, but the truth is, it’s a public meeting. There’s an avenue for everyone’s concerns to be heard.” Another leader said, “I think if they want to be seen and heard, they have opportunity. I don’t know of any organization that would repel people from being a part of the conversation.” One leader emphasized local school board meetings as opportunities for residents. “Every month, there’s an opportunity at all the different local schools to have a voice there,” they said. But residents tend to have a different perspective. A Zanesfield resident said, “I don’t see [leaders] asking me about what I care about. I don’t see that two-way conversation occurring.”

“ Across the county, leaders and residents alike noted the benefits that would come from more discussion.

Both residents and leaders see the benefits of real discussion. Across the county, leaders and residents alike noted the benefits that would come from more discussion. A Belle Center resident said, “You need to have a way for more people to have a voice and talk about their experience.” One leader noted the importance of holding discussions with “people of all classes.” They voiced a desire for “meaningful listening sessions to hear what are the real concerns, issues, barriers that people are facing.” A DeGraff resident



said, “We don’t want to get into fights. We just want to be informed of what’s going on and what we can do.” In West Mansfield, a resident pondered the benefits of having more genuine discussion, saying, “I think as much as we are a tight-knit community, I think our connections as a community would be even closer. We’d be able to help each other more than we already do.”

Community Norms for Public Life

Common community norms for public life help to guide how people act individually, interact, and work together. These norms set the standards and tone for public life and engagement.

WHAT’S GOING ON?

People in the community support one another. “Everybody is always watching out for each other,” a Russells Point individual said. We heard this sentiment around the county, with people often pointing to stories where people helped each other. For instance, a Belle Center resident recalled an ice storm from a few years ago. “It was just amazing how everybody pulled together, cutting trees up, clearing trees, helping each other out,” they said. One leader noted how churches have “a very active and important role in our community” when it comes to activating service and providing support. Meanwhile,

“Some people don’t want to change. Some refuse to listen to suggestions and some are just downright stubborn.”

one Huntsville resident found deep support for their family through the local schools: “From the experience we have had with our kids in school, everybody seems to help each other.” Students also notice and appreciate the helpful, neighborly feel in the county. “You’ll always have a great community behind you,” an Indian Lake student said. The community is “always looking to support people,” another student said.

Some people resist change. “It feels like the fabric of our lives is being threatened,” one Huntsville resident said regarding the changes they are witnessing at the national and local level. This sentiment and other similar fears can lead many to resist change, a norm we heard about across the county. A West Mansfield resident said local opposition to solar farms came about because they exemplify the “threat of change” and would impact “quality of life.” In Bellefontaine, one resident said, “Some people don’t want to change. Some refuse to listen to suggestions and some

are just downright stubborn.” One leader talked about the skepticism residents in the area had when leadership was trying to implement a big change. The leader was repeatedly told, “It’ll never go. It’ll never happen.” A Bellefontaine student felt this norm was unlikely to change among current adults, saying, “I’m more hopeful for us, when we become adults, to be open-minded. We’re going to be the ones that have to go ahead and change things in our community.”

The community often avoids dealing with hard issues. Logan County faces distinct challenges that are not yet being widely discussed, including healthcare, housing, workforce development, flight of youth, and other pressing issues. Today, the community does not have an ethic of deeply talking about and working through its hardest challenges as a community. “There definitely needs to be more,” a Bellefontaine resident said when referencing the current level of community discussion. An Indian Lake resident, when reflecting on the openness and depth of the conversation they participated in as part of this report, said, “We don’t talk about items like we are here today.” As to why these issues were



not yet being dealt with, one West Liberty leader concluded, “There’s no forum for attitudes that are maybe different. I think there’s a lot of fear.”

Residents and leaders rarely come together. The lack of coming together between leaders and residents is felt among both groups. For instance, a leader shared that “there are forums” for leaders and residents to come together but “there may not always be the greatest attendance.” A Zanesfield resident said, “I can’t count how many times I’ve heard [leaders say], “The villagers never come to us. They just

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Some see inclusivity as key to creating a better sense of community.

complain behind our backs.” One Belle Center resident expressed a commonly-shared desire for “more ideas and initiatives from the bottom up instead of the top down.” Currently, Logan County needs to generate a stronger habit of getting leaders and residents together to work through community challenges. An Indian Lake resident shared, “The only way you get change made is getting people together. The hard part is getting people together.”

Those who are different do not feel welcome. “If you’re already part of the ‘in group,’ you’re fine. If you’re not, you are excluded. I think that’s kind of universal, but it does happen here,” said a Bellefontaine resident. Another in Bellefontaine saw “inclusivity” as key to

creating a better sense of community. They explained, “I mean that in many different ways. I mean that in growing our youth and growing our understanding of marginalized communities here.” Many in the LGBTQ community reference experiencing “hate” and “fear.” “I know a lot of the prevailing attitudes about queer and trans people around here, so I don’t feel perfectly safe,” a Bellefontaine individual shared. One Black community member described experiencing “racism through school, even with jobs, even into my adult life.” Another person of color said, “It’s not everybody, but the ones who are discourteous, there’s enough of them where you notice.” Ultimately, the small-town feel in the county can intensify feelings of being different or unwelcome. Shared one



Bellefontaine resident, "You don't have to fit in when you're in a metropolitan area because everybody's different and diverse. You have to fit in here."

WHAT LIES BEHIND IT?

People in Logan County want the area to thrive. "Build on it. This community is awesome," declared an Indian Lake resident. Indeed, residents love the area and want to ensure it supports people and thrives. A Huntsville resident said, "I think there is a lot of good about Logan County. It says something about the people when you have that kind of vision, progress being made all across the board." The "vision" and "progress" noted by that Huntsville individual is exemplified for many by Bellefontaine's revitalization. "Before, Logan County was just a county you drove through. Now, it's actually a place people want to come," said a leader. This element of wanting to keep the area moving in a positive direction is key to build on.

Faith and service are foundational for many. "We're a Christian-based community," said one leader. Indeed, faith is a defining element in many people's lives in Logan County. "Everybody seems to be involved in a church," another leader said. An emphasis on service is an outgrowth of faith for many people in the area. "I know our church here answers needs in our community," said a Huntsville

individual. Talking about a group of churches, one leader said, "They're always there to back us up. We're seeing people struggling to pay for school lunches. They step in and pay off somebody's lunch account. So I would say the area churches are amazing."

Complaints take up space. When people do engage, both leaders and residents see complaints getting in the way of productively working together. People "don't come to council meetings unless they've got something to gripe about," said a Russells Point resident. One leader said they have seen some forums "start focused" but "devolve into gripe sessions." In the words of another leader, "There are people that feel the need to express their frustration." Public spaces being filled by complaint leads many to disengage. "People don't want to get involved where there's going to be drama," said a Lakeview resident. To avoid discussions becoming gripe sessions, one leader called for "trying to find the neutral parties that are able to lead meetings more effectively."





Shared Purpose

When communities have a shared sense of purpose, explicit messages exist about the community's aspirations and about everyone heading toward a common goal—or at least trying to work at common goals.

WHAT'S GOING ON?

Shared purpose has formed in pockets but is not yet widespread. Different groups in Logan County are working together on common goals. For example, the Mental Health Board “works across multiple providers when it comes to behavioral health and substance abuse. They bring people together,” said a leader. The Logan County Collaborative’s 3E campaign brings partners together around youth opportunities and workforce development, while Indian Lake Development Corporation and Indian Lake Watershed Project bring people together around maintaining and improving a healthy lake. Meanwhile, one leader described how a group of

churches “stepped forward and started a homeless shelter.” Schools are another area of shared purpose for many. Yet one West Liberty leader was blunt. “Beyond the school, I just don’t think there’s a common purpose or shared vision.” Overall, the community does not have a broader ethic of working together on common goals and it lacks a wider sense of shared purpose. Indeed, even as various groups come together to work on issues, the dominant way of working and living in Logan County is siloed. As one leader said, “There are more silos than anything else. Everybody’s worried about their own problem as opposed to the larger community.”

“Beyond the school, I just don’t think there’s a common purpose or shared vision.”

Quality of life is a priority. Improving quality of life and taking care of family is a key, fundamental shared purpose among many in the community. “I think people have the same desires to get ahead to make life better for their kids,” a Zanesfield resident said. One Lakeview resident described what they feel unites people in the area: “It’s just the small town community, the get-togethers, the camaraderie, Friday night football games. It’s just a way of life.” A Bellefontaine resident described the common values people share, saying, “Community, friendliness, loving thy neighbor, vibrant school systems. I think we all share that.” But, they concluded, “We just don’t all realize.”

Local geography and celebrations are points of pride. “We have a lot of beauty,” said a Bellefontaine resident. “You can go to one part and it’s rolling. You can go to another part and it’s sandy and a lake and another part it’s flat.” Indian Lake is “a beautiful area,” explained a resident. This appreciation for and desire to preserve the area’s amazing geography is widespread and creates a point of shared purpose across the county. Meanwhile, local celebrations provide rich opportunities for people to come together to collectively cherish the community. An individual in Bellefontaine said, “We have little nuggets throughout the county that each shine.” From the block party in Zanesfield to the Labor



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Many people in Logan County face this critical choice: remain disconnected or come together to shape the future?

Day Festival in West Liberty to 4th of July fireworks in Indian Lake, the county is full of festivals that generate engagement and community pride.

People want to invest in youth and keep them from leaving. Many in the community see a need for deeper investment in youth. One West Mansfield resident called for “investing in our youth. Finding a new outlet for them.” Without this, some people, including this Bellefontaine resident, fear “the mass exodus of our youth.” In fact, some residents already see it taking place. “Our youth are getting a degree and they’re not staying,” one Bellefontaine resident said. A Zanesfield resident expressed that improving “quality of life” is critical to keeping youth in the community. They said, “If you knew that when you lived in this community, the chances were fairly good that you were going to have a good job, were able to afford the American dream of having your own place, of achieving.... You’d stay.”

WHAT LIES BEHIND IT?

People are not yet in it together. “To make something happen to pull a group together... it takes a tremendous amount of effort,” a Zanesfield resident said. Currently, not enough efforts are being taken to bring the community together around a shared purpose. A Belle Center resident felt that, “all together, we are strong.” But the community is not yet “all together.” One Bellefontaine student said, “Finding a way to make them care is difficult but would be very helpful to the sense of community.” As a Russells Point individual said, “You can either be one who sits back and does nothing or you can be active and try to change it.” Many people in Logan County face this critical choice: remain disconnected or come together to shape the future?

Fragmentation gets in the way of shared purpose. “In this community it feels like groups are just so fragmented,” said a Bellefontaine resident. As discussed throughout this report, Logan County’s fragmentation creates real challenges. Critically, this fragmentation gets in the way of coming together

around a wider shared purpose. In Russells Point, someone bemoaned the lack of “any cohesive plan. We are a hodge-podge.” Another resident in Indian Lake mentioned a “fairly significant distinction between the full-timers and part-timers” that makes shared purpose harder to generate. Bellefontaine’s west side is isolated from the rest of the city. “A lot of people avoid going over the tracks,” one resident said. As already mentioned, schools are fertile ground for shared purpose in the community. Yet a Benjamin Logan student noted the county’s geographic spread sometimes impedes coming together. “I’ve lived rural all my life. All of my friends are 45 minutes away at this point because of how large our school district is.”

An ethic of community service has declined. Community service is important to many people in Logan County. Yet several residents note a marked decline in people engaging in community service. “I can remember when I was a kid, every man and woman I knew was part of some service organization,” said a West Mansfield resident. But that has changed and now, “There’s no sense of service to our fellow individual.” A Russells Point resident felt, “We’re seeing our society move away from the importance of volunteerism.” Another in Russells Point framed the decline as generational: “We

have parents not raising kids to be civic-minded because they weren’t raised to be civic-minded. That’s a building block of community and we don’t have it.” A Zanesfield resident concurred, saying, “The people who are not volunteering is the next generation down.”

The community needs stronger civic capacities to act on underlying shared purpose. “We could sit and talk about ideas ‘til the cows come home,” said an Indian Lake resident. “But is someone going to step up and take action?” That question was on the minds of many people. A Russells Point individual felt “the more people we get involved, the better off we’re all going to be.” But to move forward, Logan County needs stronger civic capacities, including more real discussion, deeper connection between residents and leaders, broader circles of leaders, and more productive norms that allow shared purpose to grow. One real barrier is a lack of know-how to strengthen these civic capacities. “Learning how to get people together to talk and start action is I think what a lot of us don’t understand,” a Russells Point resident said. What’s clear is more people need to “take ownership over the community,” claimed one Bellefontaine resident, because, “When you feel invested in it, you’re more inclined to stick around and contribute.”



Building the Community's Civic Strength

“ If people truly want to forge an even brighter future...it is essential for the community to create a new trajectory of hope.

Forging a Bright Future is about how Logan County can cultivate authentic hope for a better future by coming together around a shared purpose. But let's be clear: There's a difference between false hope and authentic hope. False hope is rooted in wishful thinking and setting unrealistic expectations that fail to deliver results. Authentic hope is created when people see real action on issues that matter to them. As people work together and see meaningful progress, civic faith is renewed and positive narratives begin to take root, grow, and spread.

In order to move forward, Logan County must invest in two critical areas: growing the community's civic capacities and paying attention to how change happens. This section outlines critical levers for accomplishing each. Doing one without the other will continue to

fragment the community and challenges will mount. Fragmentation will increase and further normalize. Hope for continued quality of life will diminish.

None of that is inevitable. But if people truly want to forge an even brighter future—and deal with the pressing challenges facing the county, especially the flight of youth—it is essential for the community to create a new trajectory of hope. That starts with growing civic capacities and paying attention to how change happens.

Growing Civic Capacities

Logan County must invest in and develop its civic capacities. Otherwise, the community will become stuck amid fragmentation, unaddressed tension, and mistrust between residents and leaders. It will be unable to get on a more hopeful path. The community's

civic capacities cannot be built by one entity; no single organization, leader, or group can do all the work on their own. Nor is simply launching or expanding strategies, initiatives, and programs the answer. Moving forward demands stronger civic capacities. Nothing can replace these.

The good news is that building Logan County's civic strength is actionable, doable, and achievable. Here are a few key areas to focus on to accomplish this.

- **Develop leaders who are turned outward.** Logan County needs more leaders who have the community in their line of sight, who are focused on the shared aspirations and concerns of all residents, and who work to bridge divides in the community. When developing plans and making decisions, leaders must take into greater account the views of residents from different areas and with various lived experiences. Mistrust, division, and frustration fester when communities do not



Moving forward demands stronger civic capacities.

have enough leaders who are turned outward. Logan County must cultivate existing leaders and develop new ones who hold a mindset of being turned outward toward the community and each other.

- **Engage residents in authentic ways through existing organized spaces.** Organized spaces are where people come together to learn about, discuss, and often act on common challenges. These spaces help a community identify and tap resources to address shared concerns. Logan County is home to numerous organized spaces. But these spaces tend to include too few leaders while leaving residents out or not providing meaningful opportunities for engagement. For Logan County



to address its current challenges, existing spaces must convene broader circles of leaders together with residents to work through differences and forge a purposeful path forward. While leaders must create room for residents, the community must also step forward and show up. As one DeGraff resident said, “It’d be a good thing for the community to get more people involved and voice their concerns.”

- **Deal with tough issues and find common ground.** Throughout this report, residents and leaders said that more authentic conversations that deal with tough issues must take place in Logan County. These conversations are needed for people to work through tension, articulate their shared aspirations for the future, and forge pathways forward based on common ground. Right now, the community lacks an ethic of engaging, both among residents



and between residents and leaders. Indeed, there is a gap in the know-how needed to meet people where they are, work through hard issues, and find common ground. Without making progress in this area, the community will be increasingly stymied. Logan County must invest in developing the capabilities of organizations, groups, leaders, and residents to engage each other authentically and stop avoiding hard conversations around what one resident termed “trigger points.”

- **Come together across silos.** Our conversations revealed that Logan County is fragmented across the county and within local areas. Work often happens in silos, which crowds out opportunities to collaborate and cooperate for the community’s benefit. In order to move forward, people need opportunities to come together across silos to discover what they are collectively learning, how efforts reinforce one another, and how to recalibrate when necessary to create alignment and impact. Coming together will also help illuminate gaps and areas where the community needs to marshal its shared resources to address shared challenges. It is through new, collective understandings that further possibilities for innovation, collaboration, and change are unlocked.



– **Galvanize the community to address the needs of youth.**

Youth themselves speak clearly about both their love for the area and their frustrations with adult mindsets and a lack of appealing opportunities. To address youth flight, the community must activate itself to provide more support and opportunities. If not addressed, the drain of youth from the area following high school graduation will continue, even accelerate. One Bellefontaine resident put it this way: “We’re looking at a generation of kids being pushed out of their hometown where they otherwise probably would’ve found community.” This is far from

inevitable. But the community needs to come together to support youth, include their voices, and get on a more purposeful path forward—one where youth feel like Logan County is a place they can build community.

- **Rediscover shared purpose.** People in Logan County repeatedly said the area is a great place to live, filled with amazing geography and neighbors who help each other in times of need. People across the county also have shared aspirations like a desire for a high quality of life, preservation of the area’s natural environment, and investment in youth. Yet as a county—and even in some local communities—people feel separate



The community needs to rediscover its shared purpose and work together to take action.

or disconnected. “Community, friendliness, loving thy neighbor, vibrant school systems. I think we all share that,” one Bellefontaine resident said. But, “We just don’t all realize.” To forge a bright future, the community needs to rediscover its shared purpose and work together to take action on shared challenges.

How Change Happens

Communities that are fragmented must find ways to create a new trajectory of hope, with growing momentum and ever-expanding civic confidence. Coming together to take actionable, doable, and achievable steps forward is critical. Then, it is possible to unleash a chain reaction of actions and ripple effects that grows over time and spreads like a positive contagion. Through these actions, shared purpose emerges and solidifies.

Make no mistake: None of this happens all at once, and there is no silver bullet. Change happens only over time. Here are some guideposts for how change can happen as Logan County seeks to forge its future.

- **Focus on areas that are ripe for making progress.** When communities are fragmented, they often seek to solve the biggest, most complex issues through comprehensive plans. Yet at this stage, what is most critical is engendering a sense of belief that people can actually come together to get things done. Thus, efforts should focus on issues that are ripe for action, where the possibility—indeed the probability—for forward movement is high. This can include hard, critical issues—such as youth support, affordable housing, mental health, and workforce development—but the initial emphasis must be placed on creating wins. Starting



too big, or taking on too much, will cause efforts to collapse under their own weight. As noted throughout this report, actions are already being taken in Logan County that can, and should, serve as a foundation for making real progress.

- **Prioritize demonstrating concrete action, however small.** Residents in Logan County worry that leaders will not address the issues they care about most. Nor do they believe that enough leaders are listening authentically to their concerns. Taking real, concrete actions that address residents' concerns are a down payment on creating a new trajectory of hope. It is also a requirement for generating lasting trust. For now, such actions can be small. What matters most is that action occurs and that additional actions grow from there. This will demand disciplined, vigilant follow-up from conversations and meetings. Silence only confirms people's mistrust.
- **Build together, not apart.** People develop trust and a sense of possibility when they come together to build things. Building together can take many forms—from developing and implementing efforts to address common problems to coming together with others to meet the basic needs of the community. But make no mistake: Building together



is not about simply activating more volunteerism. It is about forging new, common efforts that go beyond one-off service projects to deeply address ongoing issues that matter to people. To take effective action and strengthen civic culture, people will need to bridge divides. This effort should begin with those who are ready and willing to engage and grow through a series of intentional steps. At each turn, people must be open to discovering new partners and contributors who want to be a part of forging a bright future. Building together is critical. Nothing replaces discovering the innate capabilities and shared humanity of other people.

- **Make the invisible visible.** Civic confidence and belief grows from people seeing that progress is possible. But far too often, the progress that is being made remains invisible to the wider community. Sometimes it is even obscured from

those who are helping to create the progress. Making the invisible visible enables people to see that progress is possible and that it's happening. Doing this requires intentional efforts to identify where progress is already happening in Logan County and where new actions are being taken. From there, it means lifting up and spreading those stories. Only then can a new, hopeful narrative begin to take hold and spread. It is critical to avoid overstating results or glossing over challenges as that will undermine authentic hope.

- **Be prepared for resistance and actively address tension.** Making progress will not magically eliminate division or satisfy those who want to reinforce the status quo. In fact, making progress might even intensify disagreement in the short-term. Those who seek to come together and forge Logan County's future with the community at the forefront must prepare themselves for resistance. Tension must be named and addressed, even though full consensus is not the goal. The work ahead is difficult. Finding allies for support and persevering through resistance are both imperative.

Forging the Future

Logan County finds itself at a critical moment in its history. The investments highlighted here are key to its future. Simply staying on the current path, where fragmentation persists and many feel left behind, may erode quality of life and fail to address the flight of youth. But Logan County can create a different future—one that creates a new trajectory of hope—starting in the present.

Forging this different future means authentically engaging people to discover what matters to them and taking real action on those issues. In Logan County, more people “need to take ownership over the community.” The good news is that the solutions are here in the community. Logan County has the ability, the resources, and the people to own its future and forge an even brighter one, together. ■

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