

**Plan Forward**  
Preparing Our Future

# HARDIN



# COUNTY

Chamber & Business Alliance  
Five-Year Strategic Plan  
2015-2019



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the past few years, Hardin County has been well positioned for economic growth and expansion. Hardin County continues to provide a strong and reliable workforce, a centralized location to major markets, and a vibrant community welcoming new opportunities for people to build here, invest here, work here, live here, learn here and love it here!

In 2014, Hardin County has seen tremendous growth with **\$150 million** of new construction and business expansion. This has created over **350 new jobs** and lowered **unemployment below four percent**, which is a three percent drop compared to the previous year.

Now, as we “plan forward” and prepare our future, the Hardin County Chamber and Business Alliance has developed a new five-year strategic plan for years 2015 - 2019. Over the next several years, leading up to a new decade in 2020, the Alliance is taking proactive measures to prepare and position for another phase of new growth, jobs and investment opportunities to advance Hardin County’s economy. In preparation, we are developing a strategic roadmap and a set of business priorities to promote a prosperous business, agricultural and educational climate, strengthen the local economy, and improve the quality of life making Hardin County a great place to live, work and prosper!

In preparing this document, the Alliance Strategic Planning Committee, along with the board leadership and staff, held several meetings to 1.) redefine the organizations vision, mission and core values, 2.) develop a set of goals, objectives and action items, and 3.) define key outcomes for the five-year period. In addition, we gathered community feedback by way of membership surveys, BR&E (business, retention & expansion) visits to local businesses, and focus group sessions with small business owners, civic leaders and core employers representing retail, manufacturing, education and agribusiness industries.

Through this process, we have outlined **six core goals** that focus on business, workforce, community and our own operational excellence. The six goals outlined in this document include:

- 1.) Foster Economic Vitality:** Position for new growth, jobs and investment opportunities.
- 2.) Revitalize Our Communities:** Improve countywide image and appearance & enhance the quality of life.
- 3.) Invest In People:** Develop, cultivate and recruit workforce talent and entrepreneurial opportunities.
- 4.) Promote Agricultural Connectivity:** Advancing agricultural innovation with agribusiness opportunities.
- 5.) Build Community Collaboration:** Foster public-private partnerships with community stakeholders.
- 6.) Strengthen the Alliance:** Remain a professional and resourceful member-driven organization.

With regards to the operating structure of the organization, we have completed a board and committee restructuring process to streamline the efficiency and effectiveness of our board and committee meetings. This includes lengthening our board leadership terms to allow for consistent leadership towards the overall mission of the organization. We have also consolidated a dozen various committees into four core committees: **Executive, Chamber & Tourism, Economic Development and Community Development**. This committee structure will parallel and compliment the four divisions of the Alliance and will allow for greater member participation by those who take on volunteer leadership positions.

Finally, we have updated the organizational chart to reflect the new leadership structure incorporated into the Alliance’s four divisions, new committees and financial partners. The focus of the **Economic Development and Community Development Divisions** includes developing a prosperous, pro-business climate by expanding employment growth, cultivating entrepreneurship opportunities, advancing local innovation, and revitalizing our historical downtown communities to increase new growth, jobs and investment opportunities. The focus of the **Chamber of Commerce and Tourism Divisions** includes fostering community engagement, commerce and public-private partnerships by promoting, networking and advocating for our local businesses, educational institutions, agricultural heritage and historical communities through year-round tourism, community events, marketing and policy initiatives, educational and training programs and member services.

We look forward to having you review this new strategic plan and seek your ongoing input. It’s important that diverse voices are heard during the implementation process. Your participation and leadership is vital for the long-term success in helping Hardin County become a model community in Northwest Ohio.

**Tim Street**  
Board Chairman & **Jon Cross**  
President & CEO

# STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE

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**Patricia Arnett**  
Liberty National Bank

**Bret Bahr**  
International Paper

**Chris Barker**  
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**Jeff Bailey**  
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**Brice Beaman**  
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**Joy Bischoff**  
Hardin Memorial Hospital

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**Jennifer Penszarski**  
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**John Rohrs**  
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**Tim Street**  
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**Brad Wingfield**  
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**Peggy Wren**  
Century 21 Sunway Realty

**Ron Wyss**  
Ron Wyss Enterprises

**Ron Zimmerly**  
Liberty National Bank

**Rose Zuchetto**  
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## Thank You

We would like to thank the leadership of our Alliance Board of Directors and staff, as well as our Strategic Planning Committee, which included various agricultural, educational, business and community leaders representing diverse industries and communities throughout Hardin County.

We appreciate your leadership and support to help us develop and implement our strategic plan.



MOTTO

# Building Alliances & Creating Opportunities

## Vision

Unite our community heritage with new growth, expansion, innovation and talent for Hardin County to become a model community in Northwest Ohio.

## Mission

To cultivate, promote and advocate for a prosperous business, educational and agricultural climate, strengthen the local economy, enhance strategic partnerships and improve the quality of life, making Hardin County a great place to live, work and prosper.

## Values

The Hardin County Chamber and Business Alliance is a member-driven organization that serves the community based upon its core values:

### CORE VALUES

- Generating Community **PRIDE**
- Cultivating Prosperous **OPPORTUNITIES**
- Building **RELATIONSHIPS** and Forging **PARTNERSHIPS**
- Preserving **TRADITIONS** and **HERITAGE**
- Challenging **PERCEPTIONS**
- Becoming **INNOVATIVE, CREATIVE** and **PROACTIVE**
- Driving **ACTION** and Demanding **RESULTS**

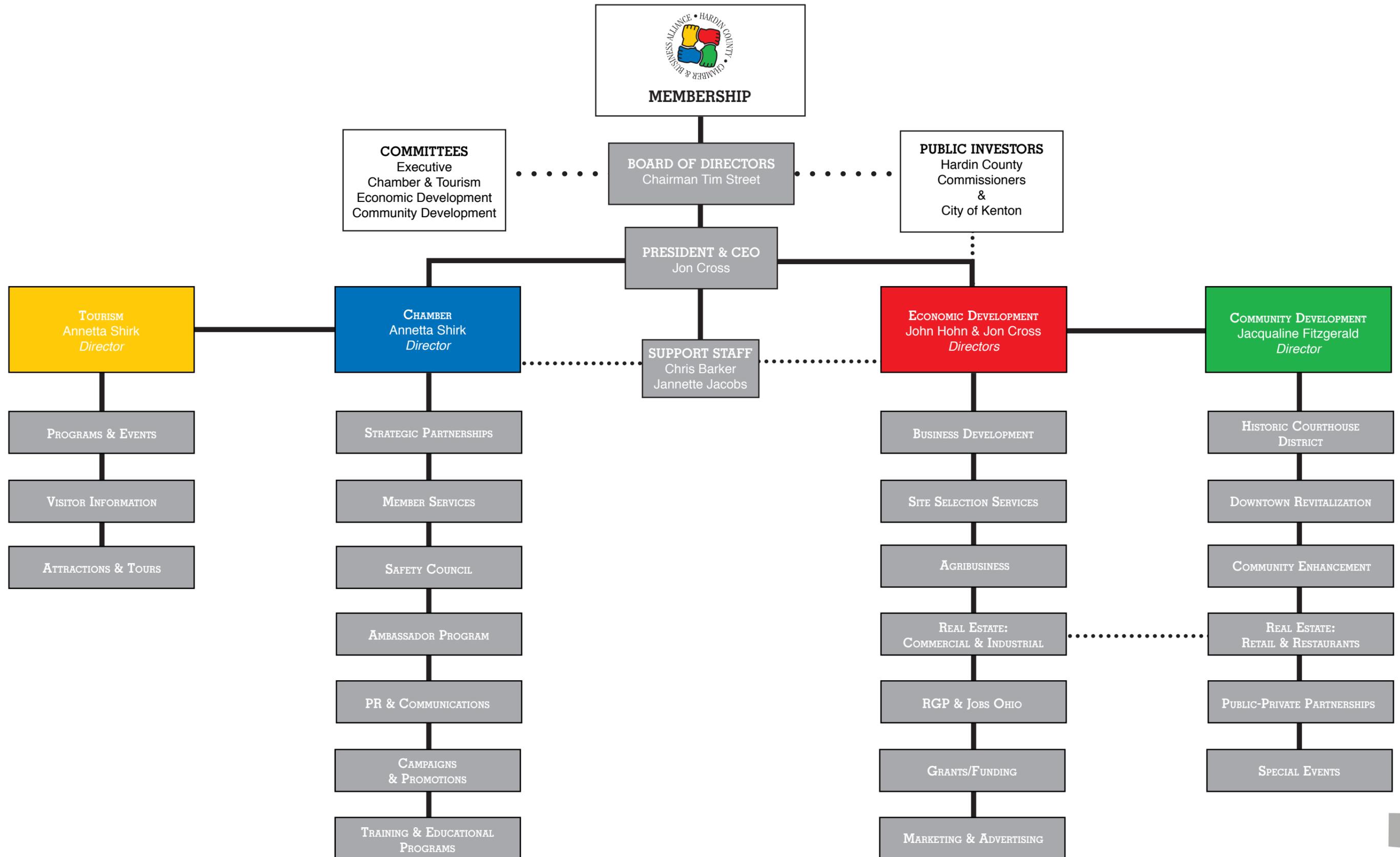
## Chamber & Tourism:

To foster community engagement, commerce and public-private partnerships by promoting, networking and advocating for our local businesses, educational institutions, agricultural heritage and historical communities through year-round tourism, community events, marketing and policy initiatives, educational and training programs and member services.

## Economic & Community Development:

To develop a prosperous, pro-business climate by expanding employment growth, cultivating entrepreneurship opportunities, advancing local innovation, and revitalizing our historical downtown communities to increase new growth, jobs and investment opportunities to advance Hardin County's economy.





## Goal #1 Foster Economic Vitality

*Position for New Growth, Jobs and Investment Opportunities*

### OBJECTIVES:

#### A. Attract new diversified business and investment opportunities.

##### ACTION ITEMS:

1. Seek new industries, suppliers, retail and service industry businesses for community needs, employment diversity and local supply-chain connectivity.
2. Promote development of current and future available land sites, industrial parks and commercial and retail properties.
3. Submit grants for future funding of assessment and remediation of Brownfields.
4. Work to identify, plan and develop new shovel-ready sites for commercial and residential use.

#### B. Provide resources and assistance for business retention and expansion.

1. Broaden Buy Local campaign to educate and increase community involvement and track economic impacts.
2. Provide access to specialized training and forums on small business topics, such as market development, business and strategic planning, financing and human resources.
3. Recommend and improve economic incentives, tax credits, enterprise and foreign trade zones to become more competitive.

#### C. Continue as the business leader of legislative and regulatory advocacy.

1. Advocate positive, efficient permitting and regulatory processes to enhance a pro-business climate.
2. Encourage local governments to streamline permitting process and enhance electronic access for registration, permits, tax remittance and account management
3. Develop annual Alliance Legislative Day to allow members to connect with local, state and federal elected officials.

#### D. Support consistent technology, utility and infrastructure improvements.

1. Encourage public-private partnerships to fund key infrastructure improvements to enhance readiness of potential commerce.
2. Coordinate with county regional planning to seek Issue 1 funds for priority utility and infrastructure improvement projects.
3. Improve countywide technology, such as high-speed internet connectivity and increased cellular coverage.

#### E. Develop a regional brand and expand market awareness on a regional, national and global scale.

1. Connect with national site-selection companies to expand market awareness with national and international businesses.
2. Conduct countywide visitations and market to regional commercial brokerage firms, JobsOhio, industry associations and trade groups.
3. Increase partnerships with JobsOhio, Ohio Northern University, OSU Extension and other sources to implement outreach efforts that target investment from international companies.

### KEY OUTCOMES:

1. 200,000 sf of new industrial space for manufacturing and warehouse.
2. \$250,000 of new public dollars for economic development incentives.
3. Two additional tier 1 and/or tier 2 manufacturing suppliers.
4. One new company with 150 employees at start-up.
5. Two additional zoned and marketable industrial sites.
6. Two new major economic development initiatives or job tax credits.
7. 10% annual retailer participant growth of the Buy Local campaign.

## Goal #2 Revitalize Our Communities

*Improve Countywide Image and Appearance & Enhance the Quality of Life*

### OBJECTIVES:

#### A. Revitalize and beautify downtown business districts, neighborhoods and villages.

##### ACTION ITEMS:

1. Craft a phased redevelopment strategy for Kenton's Historic Courthouse District (HCD).
2. Seek funding sources and community engagement for ongoing and year-round beautification and artistic enhancement of HCD, neighborhoods and villages.
3. Establish welcoming and attractive gateways into Hardin County via major highway routes.
4. Work with local officials to improve streetscape, sidewalks and alleyways for improved curb appeal.
5. Develop community taskforce to remove, fix and clean up older, non-maintained or adjudicated properties.
6. Advocate for stronger rules and regulations, as it pertains to commercial and residential property management.

#### B. Diversify and expand retail, restaurants, entertainment and tourism attractions.

1. Use surveys to seek input on community needs with regards to retail, restaurants, entertainment and local services.
2. Target regional businesses looking to expand into new markets regarding retail and restaurants.
3. Assist with the Wilson Football Museum project in Ada to develop a major tourism attraction to the region.
4. Assist with the economic impact in development of the "Warriors First" project.

#### C. Plan for new residential housing for current and future needs.

1. Seek developers to provide diverse housing options, such as master-planned subdivisions, apartments, multi-family and senior living options.
2. Work with local governments to identify, plan and zone future land sites for residential housing, including utility and infrastructure planning.
3. Continue to seek urban renewal development in and around communities in Hardin County.
4. Seek additional builders, contractors and tradecraft talent to provide additional support for housing needs.

#### D. Develop and promote social and community activities and events to enhance area recreation and culture.

1. Cultivate community events that are seasonal, family friendly and drive tourism and other economic factors.
2. Advocate for ongoing improvements and updates with community parks and recreational facilities.
3. Seek charitable land contributions for future needs of green space, recreational parks and other community enhancements.
4. Improve centralized information regarding Alliance and countywide events and programs, via new website.

#### E. Celebrate the county's historical character and community heritage.

1. Promote centennial, sesquicentennial, and bicentennial celebrations in Hardin County.
2. Support all city and village traditional festivals and events.
3. Promote grand openings and major milestones of local businesses.

### KEY OUTCOMES:

1. One additional hotel chain or new hotel operator.
2. Two new zoned residential-housing sites prepared for development.
3. Two to five additional annual motor coach bus visits.
4. Five new cafés, restaurants or entertainment venues.
5. Five improved elements for green space and recreational facilities.
6. Phase One revitalization application initiated for the Kenton Historic Courthouse District.

## Goal #3 Invest In People

*Develop, Cultivate and Retain Workforce Talent and Entrepreneurship Opportunities*

### OBJECTIVES:

#### A. Recruit and retain skilled workforce and new emerging talent.

##### ACTION ITEMS:

1. Market to Hardin County alumni to return and/or relocate to reinvest and revitalize our community.
2. Market to regional prospective employees and employers and their families.
3. Promote internships and co-op programs to connect local employers with students and young professionals.

#### B. Promote workforce development, job training and leadership programs.

1. Identify re-training programs for unemployed or dislocated and under skilled workers.
2. Partner with Hardin County Leadership Program to promote and grow executive leadership development.
3. Cultivate more job training programs for people of all ages and skill sets.
4. Increase job training dollars for local businesses through Ohio Means Jobs workforce initiative.

#### C. Match assets and skills of workforce with needs of local employers.

1. Facilitate meetings to connect educators and training staff with local employers to discuss workforce needs.
2. Advocate for pro-growth employment issues on public-sector boards, public agencies and local governments.
3. Help overcome legal issues and other obstacles to improve school-to-work programs.

#### D. Enhance collaborations and partnerships to foster culture of entrepreneurship and innovation.

1. Host entrepreneur forums, inviting seasoned business and investment leaders as guest speakers, to discuss emerging topics and provide informational resources.
2. Connect business and entrepreneur leaders with business, engineering, law and pharmacy programs at ONU and surrounding colleges and technical schools.
3. Develop centralized information and resource guide to help start-ups with technical assistance, grant funding, business and financial planning.

#### E. Create platforms for local entrepreneurs to connect with investment opportunities.

1. Establish entrepreneurship foundation that generates local, long-term capital investment funds.
2. Connect start-up and current businesses with venture capital sources to seek additional funding opportunities.
3. Support and market existing economic gardening programs that help grow local start-ups.

### KEY OUTCOMES:

1. \$100,000 additional on-the-job training dollars for local businesses.
2. \$200,000 annual incumbent workforce dollars for local businesses.
3. Hardin County Leadership Program partnered with OSU Extension.
4. Two annual job fairs hosted in partnership with Ada Chamber, ONU, Ohio Means Jobs and OSU Extension.

## Goal #4 Promote Agricultural Connectivity

*Advancing Agricultural Innovation with Agribusiness Opportunities*

### OBJECTIVES:

#### A. Promote and market agricultural heritage and resources.

##### ACTION ITEMS:

- Promote and participate in the development of farmers markets countywide.
- Develop marketing platforms to promote Hardin County's farms and produce as a global commodity.
- Assist local growers to identify and market niche products and specialty crops.
- Seek state and regional agricultural conferences and one-day conventions to host in Hardin County.
- Highlight annual farming and crop data and statistics to increase market exposure of resources.

#### B. Support agricultural organizations and youth programs.

- Develop Agribusiness Committee to expand communications, planning and partnerships with Ag Council and local farmers.
- Participate in collaborative efforts with countywide organizations such as 4-H, FFA or Farm Bureau.
- Remain an ongoing major sponsor of the Hardin County Fair and promote its programs and events year round.

#### C. Develop innovative and niche markets for agribusiness opportunities.

- Enhance local food connectivity, encouraging area businesses, restaurants and schools to purchase locally grown foods and produce.
- Promote food processing industry and businesses that add value to local products grown in Hardin County.
- Seek new agribusiness industries, such as technology, packing, transportation, processing, and commercial and retail that support needs of local farmers.
- Seek new export opportunities to allow outbound distribution of locally grown products.

#### D. Preserve land use for longevity of farming, sustainable development and innovative uses.

- Connect agriculture and renewable energy opportunities to develop innovative sources.
- Provide resources for the development of legacy and succession planning.

##### KEY OUTCOMES:

- One to two new food processing businesses.
- Annual agribusiness forum to partner business and agriculture leaders.
- One to two new renewable energy development projects.
- Five new businesses and events that promote farm-to-table products.



## Goal #5 Build Community Collaboration

*Foster Local Public-Private Partnerships with Community Stakeholders*

### OBJECTIVES:

#### A. Strengthen collaboration between towns and villages within Hardin County.

##### ACTION ITEMS:

1. Improve coordination efforts and communications between towns, villages and Community Improvement Corporations (CIC).
2. Increase workability with local elected officials to encourage communities to develop short-term and long-term planning that parallels the efforts of the Alliance.

#### B. Build community, business and educational partnerships.

1. Establish a framework to develop business, community and educational partnerships.
2. Enhance communications between the public and private sectors.

#### C. Encourage ongoing investments for PreK-12 and higher education.

1. Formalize partnership between Hardin County Public School Systems, educational organizations, universities and local business community to provide continued financial support.
2. Encourage more mentoring programs for all area students and local community, civic and business leaders.

#### D. Support growth of nationally recognized entities that operate within Hardin County.

1. Promote and market Hardin County businesses and institutions that have national presence within their specific marketplace.
2. Enhance partnerships between education, private business and public agencies to increase joint-venture opportunities.
3. Collaborate with ONU in assisting them with university development strategies to enhance positive outcomes county-wide.

##### KEY OUTCOMES:

1. Countywide community strategic plans developed and implemented.
2. Annual grant funding forum to educate civic and business leaders on funding opportunities.
3. Ada Chamber of Commerce and Hardin County Chamber & Alliance to partner on boards and committees.
4. Alliance establish satellite office and office hours in communities countywide.

## Goal #6 Strengthen the Alliance

*Remain A Professional and Resourceful Member-Driven Organization*

### OBJECTIVES:

#### A. Recruit and retain membership to advance mission and strategic priorities.

##### ACTION ITEMS:

1. Create new marketing and membership packets to outline membership services, benefits and organizational focus.
2. Develop member-sponsor programs to increase member participation with recruitment and expansion efforts.
3. Increase staff visitation to current and prospective member businesses and community organizations.

#### B. Develop and maintain quality member services and benefits.

1. Increase exposure and expand additional member cost saving benefits, services and programs.
2. Develop Member-2-Member discount programs, offering special discounts on goods and services to members only.

#### C. Expand the Alliance brand awareness and divisional resources.

1. Implement local media and marketing strategies to effectively communicate the Alliance's vision, mission, goals and resources, as well as notable events, programs and newsworthy information.
2. Provide research/data, white papers and editorials on Alliance projects, local developments and policy positions, as well as becoming an informational source for countywide and regional media outlets.
3. Design, launch and maintain a new website that informs, communicates and promotes all divisional resources.
4. Expand social media applications to increase audience viewership and expand market awareness.
5. Engage target marketing, via social media applications, to increase lead generations for membership and business growth.

#### D. Focus on talent development to engage quality leadership and member participation.

1. Recruit and retain highly qualified staff.
2. Recruit high quality and diverse members to take on leadership roles on board and committees.
3. Broaden Ambassadors program to engage new members that match our community and business profile.

#### E. Provide platform for members to promote and expand their networks.

1. Host high quality and informative events, such as networking socials, educational programs, training seminars, job fairs and other special programs.
2. Develop sponsorship packages to increase member exposure and generate support for Alliance events and programs.

#### F. Enhance the effectiveness of the Alliance and its Divisions.

1. Produce annual reports to track ongoing progress of strategic priorities, as well as countywide economic indicators.
2. Utilize online surveys to track community needs and members feedback on performance, service and resources.
3. Develop staff reports to track progress and performance of work, measured against yearly goals and strategic plans.
4. Provide quality financial reporting and adhere to annual budgets and spending.
5. Increase technology and communication applications to provide professional and reliable data and information sharing.

### KEY OUTCOMES:

1. 7% to 10% annual growth of Alliance membership, with a 350 to 400 membership total.
2. Ten new Hardin County Ambassadors between the ages of 25 - 45.
3. \$50,000 increase of annual membership funding for the Alliance.
4. Alliance budget to operate under the 80/20 principle.
5. Five to ten additional annual programs and networking events.
6. 2,500 new Alliance Facebook likes and followers.



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