



# WAYNE COUNTY PRIORITY PROJECTS REPORT 2020-21

## **INTRODUCTION**

This report provides an overview of high priority projects for last year and this year where the Wayne County Commissioners have a major role.

Surprisingly, we were able to complete or make significant progress on most of these projects amidst the unplanned priority caused by the coronavirus outbreak. The county government had to adapt in order to maintain its services while contributing special assistance in multiple ways.

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Wayne County Commissioners**



**B**eginning in early in 2020, there were reports of a flu-like illness spreading globally. On January 20, the first patient in the U.S. was diagnosed with COVID-19, the condition caused by the novel coronavirus. By March 9, Ohio had its first reported cases of COVID-19, and on March 23, Gov. Mike DeWine issued a stay-at-home order to help slow the spread of the virus. The following day, Wayne County confirmed its first case of the disease.

Wayne County Health Commissioner Nick Cascarelli and Emergency Management Agency (EMA) Director Joe Villegas established a website, [wcjic.org](http://wcjic.org), to provide the public with the latest information, resources, and best practices to combat the virus. United Way of Wayne and Holmes Counties established a call center to answer questions regarding the outbreak.

Examples of special assistance provided by the county using CARES Act relief funds include:

- Small business grants to more than 100 businesses to cover a portion of their losses.
- Grants reimbursing local organizations for the cost of food distribution.
- Safety-related accommodations for the public, and employees, in order to maintain governmental services, ranging from the county nursing home to building permits and inspections.
- Providing personal protective equipment for first responders, health care workers, and others.
- Information coordination and sharing among safety, service, and health care organizations, and the public.



Moving into **PLANNED** priority projects, we see them falling into two categories: Strengthening our criminal justice system and assisting with developing and preserving our countywide community assets.

They are listed in no particular priority order.

# CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

**JUSTICE SYSTEM STRATEGIC ACTION PLANNING** – Developing a comprehensive assessment of our county criminal justice system is a high priority for 2021. The plan will incorporate a significant number of new facilities and programs that have come online in the community recently.

The commissioners have asked the county Community Corrections Advisory Board to lead in assessing and developing a strategic action plan. This board involves many stakeholders in the county criminal justice system. Guidance and expertise are being provided by the Ohio Office of Criminal Justice Services and the Ohio Supreme Court’s Stepping Up Initiative. We already know that the county jail is a significant deficiency in the system. Previous work and efforts will contribute much to this work. In late December of 2020, state officials appropriated \$50 million for local jail facilities statewide. This is a potential source for assistance, though the backlog of needs across the state is tremendous.

Two improvements were made in the jail this past year with the installation of a state-of-the-art body scanner and a new jail laundry facility. Our team at the jail is finding that many inmates simply hand over drug contraband at booking when informed that they will be going through a body scan.

**RELOCATE DISPATCH SERVICES** – Space on the first floor of the justice center was renovated in order to move countywide dispatch services out of the basement level. This move is a major upgrade and will be completed early this year.

**COMMUNICATIONS TOWER** – Much work occurred in 2020 toward establishing a Multi-Agency Radio Communication System (MARCS) tower to fill a gap in critical radio communications in the Fredericksburg area for public safety and service use. However, the project was delayed into 2021. Partial funding was provided by the state capital improvement budget passed in December of 2020. A search for remaining funding is underway.

**RELOCATE COMMON PLEAS COURT PROBATION DEPARTMENT** – Construction plans are nearly complete for relocating the probation department of the Court of Common Pleas from the lower level of the courthouse to the space currently occupied by the Law Library. Construction is scheduled for 2021, with completion

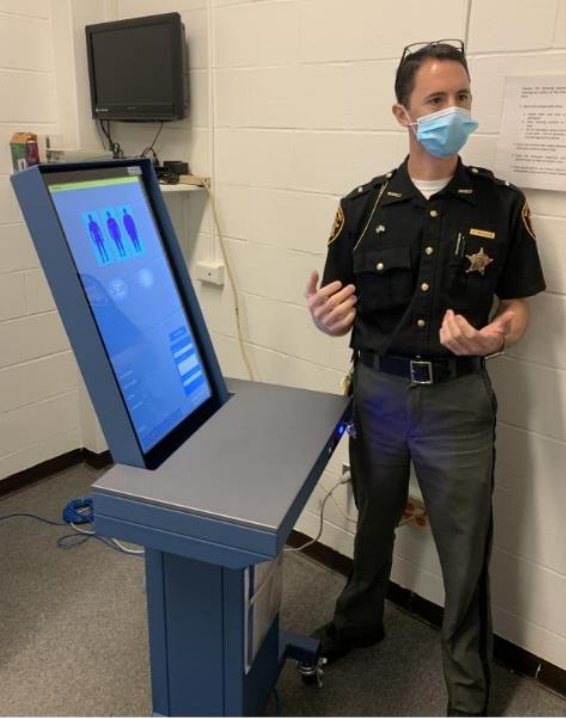


in early 2022. The Law Library will be relocated to the Municipal Court building as part of this project.

**DEPLOY JUVENILE ASSESSMENT/STABILIZATION PROGRAM** – The Juvenile Court is successfully utilizing more effective strategies as an alternative to detention in many cases. Also, the family drug court is helping to restore healthy family relationships.

Our county is experiencing cost savings as the five-county juvenile attention system is adjusting to lower utilization. Some of these savings will be used to support alternative pathways to stability for troubled teens and their families. Because much of this is sporadic and needed during night hours, this would be very costly to staff independently. There is an effort to identify compatible social services partners to make this programming more cost-effective.





**Lt. Michael Smucker demonstrates a body scanner that is used to prevent offenders from smuggling drugs or other contraband into the Wayne County Jail.**

## **GUIDING COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENTS**

**AIRPORT IMPROVEMENTS** – The county’s economic vitality is enhanced with the completion of a new \$5 million taxiway at the Wayne County Airport. Funding was primarily provided by the Federal Aviation Administration. This compliments one of the best small airport runways in Ohio and will especially facilitate larger planes that use the airport.

The airport team was awarded “2020 Airport of the Year” by the Ohio Aviation Association for its distinguished quality of service, competing against airports nominated from across the state. This year there is a focus on planning to add various types of hanger facilities and preparing engineering plans to reconstruct the terminal apron.

**LAND BANK ESTABLISHED** – A countywide land bank was established last year as a method to effectively return financially distressed properties to productive, taxpaying status. Several distressed residential properties have already been brought back into productive, taxpaying status.

**AMPLIFY CIC ACTIVITY** – Our county Community Improvement Corporation (CIC) is another partner helping strengthen our commercial, industrial, and residential sectors. We seek to ramp-up the CIC activity, building on recent partnering with the Wooster Growth Corporation to induce redevelopment of the former Horn Nursing Home property downtown and with Gojo to bring raw material into their plant by the railroad carload.

**HOUSEHOLD HAZARDOUS WASTE** – A new arrangement for residents to dispose of household hazardous waste was initiated at the Wayne County fairgrounds in cooperation with the County Health District, three-county Solid Waste District, and the Wayne County Fair Board of Directors. Monthly pickup dates are being set for April through October of 2021.

**COUNTY-WIDE WASTEWATER PLANNING AREAS AND POLICY** – Last year, a comprehensive update of wastewater treatment plan mapping was completed in cooperation with township, village and city governments, county planning commission, and the Northeast Ohio Four County Planning Organization. This plan impacts areas targeted for development growth and those more likely to remain agricultural lands.

**AGRICULTURAL SECURITY AREAS** – Preserving farmland was identified as a community priority in Wayne Onward, the updated county comprehensive plan. In 2020, more than 6000 farm acres were placed into Agricultural Security Areas. These districts are joined voluntarily by landowners, who receive benefits in exchange for a 10-year period of reserving their land for agricultural use rather than being developed.

**TARGETING RENOVATION, PRESERVATION, AND DEVELOPMENT** – We seek to introduce financing instruments, such as Community Reinvestment Areas, Tax Increment Financing, and other programs that will lower the cost of renovating or expanding existing enterprise or residential areas, as well as facilitating targeted new development. This effort is being led by our economic development partner, the Wayne Economic Development Corporation, and the county planning department team.

**IMPROVE RURAL DEVELOPMENT REGULATIONS** – Requirements for subdividing land for development are due for an overhaul. This is outlined in Wayne Onward

and will involve extensive stakeholder engagement. We will explore the creative use of subdivision regulations to preserve agriculture and open space land by the planned concentration of residential, commercial, and light industrial in unincorporated subdivisions. Modernizing roadway access standards will also be a part of this project in partnership with the Wayne County Engineer.

**REVISE WASTEWATER DEVELOPMENT POLICY** – The Commissioners have been looking at current requirements for financing the installation of wastewater collection and treatment systems as part of our comprehensive development policies. It may be possible to revise these in ways that continue to work as responses in specific situations where we are required to provide service by Ohio EPA mandate and in targeted development or redevelopment areas in conjunction with other mechanisms in the county toolkit.

## **CONCLUSION**

As we can see, despite the pandemic, the county government will be a busy place this year as we continue to work with partners toward economic development, redevelopment, and preservation, while focusing on multiple aspects of the criminal justice system.



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