

2024 ANNUAL REPORT

Crawford Inspired's Report Card



Crawford County
Planning



WELCOME

From the Chair of the Crawford County Planning Commission

I love being on the Crawford County Planning Commission. Our members are not afraid to set bold goals, swing for the fences, and hold ourselves to the highest standards to ensure positive progress in Crawford County. Our work, with the support and expertise of the Planning Office, is all dedicated to creating a place we want to live, work, and enjoy being a part of for decades to come. Last year challenged us in new ways and notched some exciting wins.

This report makes evident how Crawford Inspired, the County's new comprehensive plan, was a focal point of our efforts. Between engaging citizens, combing through data, and finalizing the vision, priorities, bold moves, and outcomes of the plan, Crawford County Planning worked tirelessly to create a roadmap to our future.

As a result of our hard work, established and new programs across the county are already producing tangible results. Our Act 13 program continues to facilitate improvements in multiple communities, the Blight Revitalization Program helped local leaders clean up problem properties, and the partnerships we formed while developing the plan are bearing fruit.

The George M. Hummer County Forest, located in Oil Creek and Steuben Townships in Eastern Crawford County, provides hundreds of acres of recreational opportunities for county residents and visitors. Almost fifty people, including members of the Hummer family from across the country, joined us as we unveiled signage, cut the ribbon on a new trail, and announced additional actions underway. Our work at the forest exemplifies how we plan to realize the vision of Crawford Inspired.

Though we are faced with challenges of aging and declining population, blighted properties, public health and safety concerns and more, they are challenges we are ready to tackle with bold moves. Over the past year we have asked questions and listened to our community members' answers. We have a roadmap for the future. Now, we need to implement it. With a strong Planning Office, Commission, and leadership from the Commissioners, we can realize the inspired future our citizens want. We're ready to move the needle together.

Jessica Hilburn,
2024 Commission Chair

DEFINING OUR VISION

“We’ve crafted a vision for our county that requires bold moves to realize the future our citizens said they want and the types of places they want to call home.”

- Austin Rock, Planning Commissioner

BACKGROUND

We believe strongly that our communities need to have a roadmap for the future. Just like a family going on vacation to the beach, how will our communities get to the places they want to be if we don’t have a roadmap to get there? At the same time, if you don’t know your destination then a roadmap is useless.

Therefore, Crawford County Planning, through the public outreach process for Crawford Inspired, our comprehensive plan, created a collective vision for Crawford County; one that is built on the feedback from business owners and citizens. It paints a picture of the type of community we want to be, not only today, but for years to come. Ultimately it is a vision for everyone who calls Crawford County home. The resulting vision was adopted as part of Crawford Inspired.

RESULTING VISION

We aspire to be a place that appeals to and retains people!

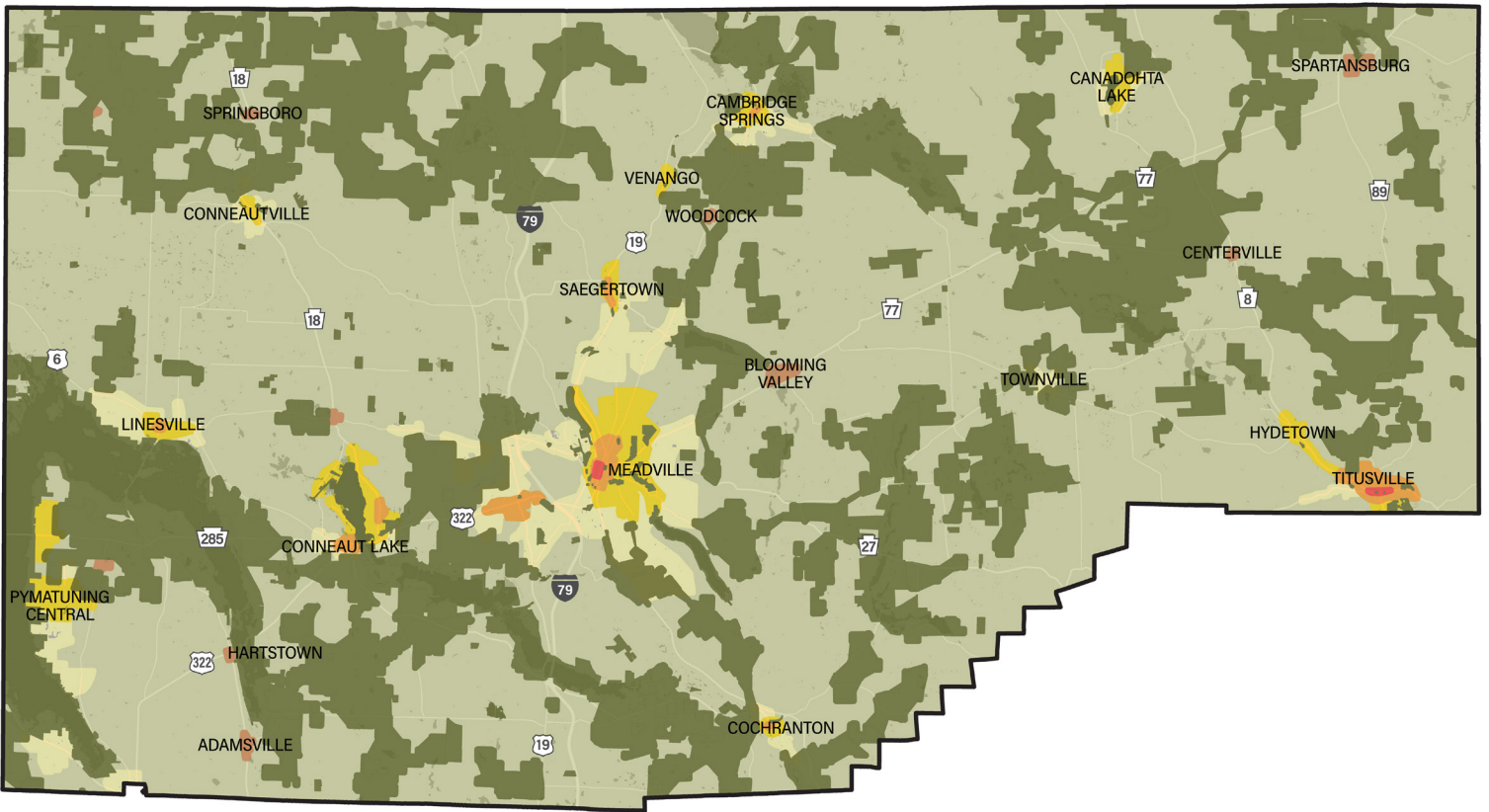
By enhancing the character and identity of what makes us special, our communities will inspire current and future generations to call the attractive, resilient, and welcoming places in this county home.

MAPPING

Creation and analysis of data through mapping is a key element for successful planning. Prepared for Crawford Inspired, the Character Area Map is the County's approach to managing future development.

Rather than focusing on traditional land use, we're focused on the character of development which impacts elements such as design, utilities, mobility, and much more to create the types of places our citizens wish to call home. All of our work moving forward will be centered around and build upon this tool.

MAP 1 | CHARACTER AREAS



- Natural Resources
- Rural Residential
- Rural Village/Corner
- Suburban Residential
- Residential Neighborhood
- Mixed Use Neighborhood
- Downtown/Main Street

SEEKING SUPPORT

“We’re focused on making Crawford Inspired a living plan. One that people buy into, which means it can’t sit on the shelf and collect dust.”

- Ron Mattocks, Planning Commissioner

COALITIONS

To achieve our vision, Crawford County Planning must build coalitions and partnerships. Our Planning Commission is restructuring their standing committees around the comprehensive plan and will focus on bringing outside expertise to expand our reach as we work to implement Crawford Inspired.

To support the concept of an implementable comprehensive plan, Planning Office staff started early to engage and build coalitions around Crawford Inspired. Our efforts resulted in partnerships with Crawford Tech and Allegheny College on workforce development, non-profit organizations supporting housing, and private companies investing in community development. Long-term coalitions under development by the Planning Commission will focus on:

Resident Attraction & Workforce Development Coalition



Countywide Systems & Services Coalition



Community Development + Housing Coalition



Parks, Recreation, & Natural Resources Coalition



Data + Policy Making Coalition




Planning Office staff are taking the lead on presenting Crawford Inspired to community groups, non-profit organizations, municipal governments, and other entities who have a vested interest in Crawford County.

FUNDING

None of the work undertaken can be done without financial support. In 2024 Crawford County budgeted an investment of \$445,432 for planning agency operations and initiatives.

The result is a 487% return on investment. Meaning that for every \$1 the County invested into community planning and development in 2024, our area received \$4.87 in investment through projects and programs. Between August 1st, 2023 and August 1st, 2024, Crawford County Planning invested \$2,612,514 into our communities through grants and programs. Programs included Community Development Block Grant, Act 13 Marcellus Shale, Whole Home Repair, Appalachian Regional Commission, and American Rescue Plan Act allocations and competitive awards.



14%
increase in
investments into
Crawford County
communities.

EARLY WINS

Implementation of Crawford Inspired began prior to adoption. Success from building early coalitions resulted in:

- Applying for \$1.5 million of Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) funding for precision machining equipment at Crawford Tech and Allegheny College's ALIC @ Bessemer.
- Receiving a \$140,000 UPWP award from the Northwest Commission and regional Transportation Advisory Committee to develop a Safe Streets 4 All plan.
- Release of a mini-grant program targeting small-scale investments furthers the community priorities established in Crawford Inspired.
- Creation of bicycling programming, expansion of public safety trainings, investments into housing stock, and a more intentional decision making process which connects to community planning.

MOVING THE NEEDLE

“Now that we’ve got a vision of where we’re headed, community priorities to keep us on track, and bold moves to move the needle, it’s time to get to work.”

- Stephanie Thauer, Planning Commissioner

COMPLETED

Since August 1st, 2023, Crawford County Planning completed Crawford Inspired. We launched the Whole Home Repair Program which is anticipated to improve housing for over 30 households. To address blight in our communities we demolished three condemned buildings and completed a summer research project in partnership with Allegheny College to craft a strategy to identify, track, and monitor blighted structures.

Planning staff led the creation of a coalition of counties to tackle broadband prior to the federal BEAD program. We also deployed 30 more starlink units to rural households.

During this time, we’ve witnessed development pressure through 71 SALDO filings (9 land developments and 62 subdivisions). The majority of activity is occurring in the Central (43.7%) and Western (39.4%) regions.

IN PROGRESS

Planning Commissioners continue to revise and streamline their organizational structure to better connect with citizens, municipal leaders, and business owners. The restructuring includes new policies and approaches to expand Planning agency impact by building coalitions.

Planning staff continue to provide insight and information to local municipalities regarding the PA MPC in addition to tackling county-wide planning initiatives.

STILL TO COME

We are encouraging communities to plan together. The idea of “District Plans” allow community leaders to work together to plan the future. Two Districts are exploring this opportunity.

Moving Forward with Municipalities

Implementation of the County’s vision does not occur in a vacuum. It requires collaboration and engagement of local communities and organizations. Crawford County Planning welcomes partnerships with public, private, and non-profit entities to improve the lives of citizens across our 51 communities. This past year we invested resources and worked with folks in 33 of our communities.



TRACKING SUCCESS

“Success occurs when we focus on tangible outcomes. The actions of our agency and our partnerships need to be seen and felt on the ground in our communities.”

- Stacey Ross, Planning Commissioner

METRICS

Crawford Inspired created six outcome metrics that we are using to track success. While the plan was not yet adopted, our agency’s work made improvements impacting our community which align with Crawford Inspired.

The metrics established in Crawford Inspired include:

Where We’re Starting	Where We Want to Be
Residents age 25 to 54 = 28,498	Residents age 25 to 54 = 29,498
Workers trained or upskilled = 9	Workers trained or upskilled = 2,500
Value of properties = \$2.2 billion	Value of properties = \$2.3 billion
Households within 10-minutes of recreation = 31%	Households within 10-minutes of recreation = 90%
New investment & policy aligned with the plan = 0%	New investment & policy aligned with the plan = 70% - 80%
Health of our citizens is less than 50% of the United States and PA.	Health of our citizens is greater than 50% of the United States and PA.

STRATEGY

Planning staff will leverage technology to maintain a database of the metrics and benchmark the annual change of these categories to ensure our actions are achieving the vision we have set for the future.

RESULTS

Investments of 2.5 miles of new trails along with enhancements to 8 parks and elevating the County forest have made the metrics of Recreation for All and Healthy Homes and Hearts closer to being accomplished.

Initiating the Construction Industry Workforce Program in 2024, 4 of 7 graduating young adults have chosen to remain in Crawford County post-graduation. This furthers the 1,000 in 1 Decade and Ready to Work Labor Force metrics.

Demolition of blighted structures in Titusville and Conneautville has advanced the community prosperity metric by improving the surrounding neighborhood property values.

OUR 2024 RESULTS

2.5 miles of new trails within ten minutes of **18,120** people

Over **\$3 million** of investments into playgrounds & parks



Insight leading to Crawford Inspired from **5,000** people



30,600 people reached on social media platforms



Technical assistance to **33** communities

Guidance to over **2,000** citizens & businesses

15+ new or expanded partnerships focused on **capital stacking** & **community investment**

NEXT STEPS FORWARD

“Our mission to prepare for the future of Crawford County can’t be realized if we solely focus on the present. Therefore, we must continue to think about what is next.”

- Kristin Hauser, Planning Commissioner

CONTINUING

Ongoing work includes the development of a Safe Streets 4 All Plan, creation of a County Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance or model ordinance, and continued advancement of housing repair and community development projects funded through grants.

One of our biggest challenges is constantly informing communities about the PA MPC and other legal requirements of federal and state legislation impacting planning, along with results of litigation of planning matters. We aim to expand the way we’re communicating on these matters in the next year.

NEXT UP

Major initiatives in the coming year include the creation of a Data Hub to store community planning and development information for public and institutional use, development of an inventory and tracking system of blighted structures across the County, and crafting the first in a series of advisory guidelines for Crawford Inspired.

The Planning agency proposes to host two informational training sessions and develop a series of informational guides and videos about the development process to create consistent government operations.

ON THE HORIZON

Looking beyond 2024-2025, the Planning agency has begun to seek additional grant funds to invest in workforce development, attraction and retention of young professionals, and recreational amenities. Aligning our transportation, recreation, and land use to improve health is a focal point moving forward.

CLOSING REMARKS

From the Director of Planning

Crawford County is an amazing place. The unique character of our communities is why 83,000 people choose to call Crawford home. While some places have seen better days and we've got real challenges ahead, our communities are great places. With Crawford Inspired formally adopted, our future is unbelievably brighter today.

For the first time in almost a decade, it feels like we are ready for change. Our business community, local leaders, and non-profit organizations are focused on core topics from the plan; our citizenry is motivated to make a difference; and these efforts align with state and federal programs which are releasing funds and technical resources.

Next month Crawford Inspired and our communities will be showcased to the policy makers, professionals, and citizen planners from across the Commonwealth at the Pennsylvania Chapter of the American Planning Association's statewide planning conference. I anticipate this opportunity will catapult our efforts through an injection of additional funding opportunities and interest from the private sector planning profession. The question will be, can our communities make the most of these opportunities with the capacity we currently have?

Charles Darwin once said "It is not the strongest of the species that survive, not the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change." The trajectory of where our County is trending isn't one that appeals to our citizens. We know because they've told us. Therefore, it is up to all of us now to be willing to change if we want to survive the ever evolving demographic and economic challenges impacting rural Pennsylvania communities.

I have faith that the work completed and major initiatives ahead will move the needle to improve the lives of our citizens. The Crawford County Planning Commission and Office are ready to respond to the changes we need to make. We encourage citizen planners, professional planners, and everyone that calls Crawford County home to join us in making the inspiring future we want a reality.

Zachary Norwood,
Director of Planning

Crawford County Planning

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Our Mission:

We are committed to providing solution oriented services through community development and planning to facilitate the growth of the local economy, enhance the quality of life, and preserve the natural environment for current and future generations.

Our Core Values:

We work to achieve our mission through our five core values.

Communication: We strive to reach as many people as possible by utilizing every possible media available to us to connect with residents, elected officials, appointed boards, and community groups.

Community: We promote places that have an identity and inspire a sense of belonging, which often stems from the physical character of a place as well as the people who live there.

Engagement: We aim to include everyone in the planning process since multiple perspectives lead to a more diverse conversation and successful result.

Integrity + Ethics: We are driven to conduct our business with the highest standards of professional behavior, which include transparency, honesty, and respect in all our interactions.

Sustainability: We encourage and support projects that maintain or improve the economy, environment, and equity of Crawford County.

Board of Commissioners:

Eric Henry, Chair
Scott Schell, Vice Chair
Christopher Seeley, Secretary

Crawford County Planning Office:

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Samantha Travis, Deputy Director
Debra Frawley, ARPA Program
Manager
Caleb Thayer, Housing Coordinator
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Stephanie Thauer
Kristin Hauser
Rebecca Dawson*
* Former