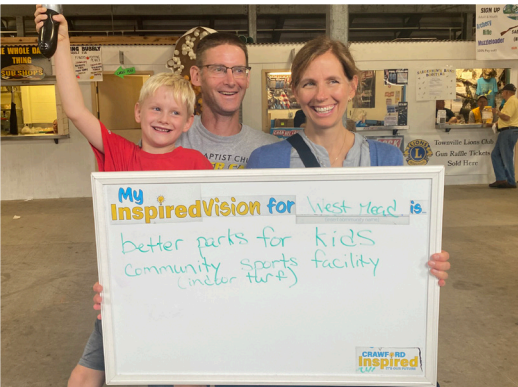
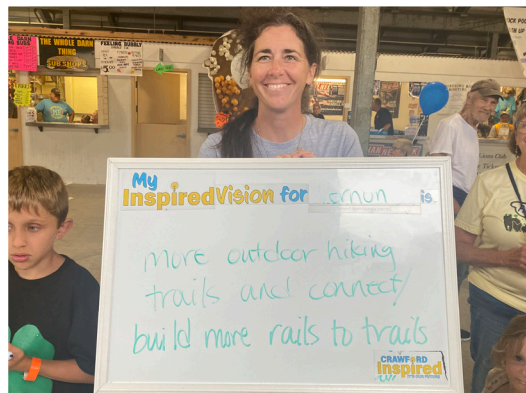


# ANNUAL 2023 REPORT

Crawford County Planning





## Cultivating a Future Together

Crawford County Planning, the Planning Commission and Office, submits the following as the annual report of community planning and development activities for 2022-2023. This report summarizes our agency's efforts to implement **Cultivating Crawford - Growing a Community**, the 2014 comprehensive plan and efforts to update the comprehensive plan. As we continue to experience and witness changes in our communities due to actions within and outside of our control, Crawford County Planning continues play an active role in enhancing our communities. We invite you to read about the progress we've made over the last year in moving us closer to our vision of the future.

### Housing:

As a result of the excellent planning efforts undertaken within the past 5 years, we have made real strides to take action on the goals within the housing section of our comprehensive plan. Within the past year, our agency has applied for and received \$1.3 million to address housing rehabilitation through the Commonwealth's Whole-Home Repair Program. These funds lead to the hiring of a Housing Coordinator, a partnership with Crawford Tech for workforce development in the construction industry, and creation of a housing rehabilitation program. Additionally, staff began crafting a blight revitalization policy which was generously funded by the Board of Commissioners. Looking forward, Crawford County Planning staff will be working tirelessly in 2024 to improve the housing stock of Crawford County and remove blight to enhance our communities.

## COMMISSION'S MESSAGE

### Commerce and Economic Development:

As the County continues to invest in infrastructure that drives commerce in our communities, we discover additional opportunities which will enhance the livability and economic competitiveness of our area. This year Crawford County Planning worked to expand broadband access to our citizenry through two methods: 1) investing in a Starlink pilot project which resulted in 100 households receiving high speed internet and 2) submission of three applications to deploy \$30+ million in fiber optic internet to the most remote areas of Crawford County.

Additionally, in partnership with the North and South Shenango Joint Municipal Authority, Crawford County Planning invested \$125,000 to expand public sewer services along First Street near Pymatuning Lake. The project resulted in water service access becoming available to under and undeveloped parcels, which are now ready for investment. These two strategic investments are examples of how Crawford County Planning is intentionally leveraging our resources to improve the economic climate of Crawford County.

## Agriculture:

Over the last year, Crawford County Planning prioritized implementation of the various other segments of the comprehensive plan. Projects like the deployment of broadband internet will likely benefit rural farmers.

## Recreation:

The Crawford County Forest Cleanup Day, which has become an annual tradition, was again organized by the Planning Commission. A total of over 60 participants joined the festivities which included presentations about trail development and maintenance on the newly constructed three mile segment of the East Branch Trail near Hydetown Borough. To aid in the expansion of that trail system, Crawford County Planning completed design drawings for a majority of the East Branch Trail using a consultant and completed construction on one portion, including creating a trailhead at the County Forest.

In central Crawford County, French Creek Recreational Trails entered into an agreement with Crawford County to maintain a two-mile trail in development by PennDOT District 1. The trail is tentatively scheduled for construction in 2024/2025. The Economic Progress Alliance of Crawford County (EPACC) contracted with MBI to coordinate connecting the Ernst Trail into the City of Meadville. Further improvement to Ernst Trail including pavement of new segments using Act 13 funding.

## Land Use:

Crawford County Planning contracted with Michael Baker International (MBI) to undertake crafting a new comprehensive plan, titled **Crawford Inspired**. The MBI consulting team includes the subconsultant of Denny Puko, who previously worked with Crawford County Planning on our 2020 Strategic Plan. The professional contract includes examination of the County's role in the development review process as well as the potential creation of a new approach to attract investment to Crawford County. From late spring through early fall, an extensive public outreach campaign took place where Planning Commission members and staff connected with over 2,000 households seeking input about the future they'd like to see. As part of the outreach each library hosted a community mapping activity, juniors and seniors from four school districts completed a survey, the Commission attended nine festivals across the county, and over 800 households completed a mailed survey.

## Planning & Government Services:

In November 2022, Crawford County Planning implemented a policy shift to no longer review submissions of subdivision and land development plans. Instead, we record the filing of the submission for record keeping and provide a letter waiving our review. Additionally, Planning staff began to conduct more timely and extensive reviews of consistency requests to identify alignment with the County's comprehensive plan. These administrative changes required the creation of streamlined processes to ensure our approach to serving clients was timely.

## Transportation:

Similar to Agriculture, Crawford County Planning has had limited actions directed towards implementing the Transportation portion of our comprehensive plan. However, a number of our partner organizations have actively worked to further the movement of goods and people through our county and region. These include the introduction of CATA Go, a micro-mobility service piloted in the Titusville area, expansion of non-motorized vehicular resources through various trail developments, and coordination of the next long-range transportation plan by the Northwest Commission.

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It is an exciting time at Crawford County Planning between witnessing the success in implementing sections of **Cultivating Crawford** and developing **Crawford Inspired**. The number of people who have been willing to connect with staff, volunteers, and our consultants through the comprehensive planning process is overwhelming. We've spoken to or received written comments from over 2,000 citizens and we are only half way through the project. Crawford Inspired will truly be a plan prepared by the people and for the people.



Community Mapping - Benson Memorial Library

## COMPREHENSIVE PLAN REPORT CARD

### Implementing the Plan

Previous annual reports created by Crawford County Planning highlighted the status of accomplishing our vision. To continue that trend without acknowledging the shift in how we are viewing success would be a shortcoming of this report. Therefore, a portion of this year’s comprehensive plan report card will examine the status of the existing plan, **Cultivating Crawford**, while a portion of the report card will orient readers to the future metrics and benchmarking approach under exploration in the comprehensive plan update project, **Crawford Inspired**.

Prior planning initiatives focused on outputs. You may think of these as boxes you can check off to determine if a task is completed. The graphics within this section identify the County’s status in completing the outputs from **Cultivating Crawford**. To ensure success, it is critical to manage and track these outputs; however, simply completing an output may not mean the vision is achieved. Therefore, **Crawford Inspired** explores outcomes that can be measured as a barometer of success toward accomplishing our vision for the future. These outcomes cannot be “checked off” but rather are determined to be successful through indicators like perceptions of safety or economic wealth from our citizenry.

“**Outputs** are the actions we check off our to-do list. **Outcomes** are the metrics used to measure if what we’re doing improves our citizens’ lives.”

# Cultivating Crawford - 2023 Output Status Update

Category	Total Action Strategies	Forthcoming	In Progress	Ongoing	Complete
Housing	16	7	4	4	1
Economic Development	16	8	1	5	2
Agriculture	8	5	1	1	1
Transportation	6	1	2	2	1
Recreation	7	3	3	1	0
Land Use	2	1	1	0	0

## Partnering with Municipalities

Implementation of the County’s vision does not occur in a vacuum. It takes partnerships across the county and intentional investments of capacity and resources. Crawford County Planning is pleased to partner with public, private, and non-profit entities to improve the lives of our citizens across 34 communities. Between technical assistance given to citizens or municipalities and financial aid or project management, countless hours were spent by staff to invest in our communities and citizens.





Community Character Workshop - Crawford Inspired Initiative

## Good Planning Results in Wins

Our communities, commonwealth, country and world face challenging times. One of the many challenges ahead is accepting and addressing the changing world we live in. These changes impact our daily lives in a variety of ways. At times we forget that we control our futures and have the ability to build the world we want to see. With this in mind, our future should never look uninspiring.

Which is why I can't help but feel energized by what I've witnessed over the past year. Growing partnerships leading into intentional investments have resulted in "wins" for our businesses and residents. Across the county over 100 households now have access to broadband internet by deploying a satellite pilot project with more to come through fiber investments. Coordination between municipal governments and the County have brought a renewed life to the landscape of main streets with the removal of blighted structures and productive reuse of once dilapidated sites. Opportunities to more easily access the great outdoors have been accomplished by creating trails, parks, and preserved open space for our citizens.

I don't write this wearing rose-colored glasses and believing that all the hard work is behind us. We still need to expand internet access, inject resources into revitalizing our small towns, and continue to fight population loss. However, it feels as though we're in the fight together. We're rowing the boat in the same direction toward a shared inspired vision of the future. There are a lot of chances for the changes forthcoming in 2024 to benefit our communities, and I look forward to working with all individuals and entities willing to partner to make Crawford County a great place to create, invest, strive, and thrive for residents that call this place home, now and in the future.

Zachary Norwood  
Planning Director

## Director's MESSAGE

### Major Initiatives Scheduled for 2024

- Adoption of **Crawford Inspired**
- Initiate **Crawford Inspired** strategies
- Coordination of the development process + clarification of the County's role
- Launch of Whole-Home Repair Program + Blight Revitalization Program
- Broadband expansion initiatives
- Hosting two informational trainings and a community planning and development forum

### Budget

Expenditures	2021	2022	2023*
Personnel	\$316,196.14	\$302,780.94	\$ 240,514.97
Operations	\$55,855.67	\$ 26,818.97	\$ 21,149.53
Miscellaneous	\$824.80	\$-	\$-
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$372,876.61</b>	<b>\$329,599.91</b>	<b>\$261,664.50</b>

Revenues	2021	2022	2023*
Federal	\$ 65,212.70	\$ 55,021.41	\$ 125,295.87
State	\$-	\$-	\$ 24,078.58
Local	\$20,901.97	\$4,720.44	\$-
Review Fees	\$12,953.18	\$6,850.00	\$ 2,152.96
Miscellaneous	\$2,020.23	\$919.41	\$ 133.13
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$101,088.08</b>	<b>\$67,511.26</b>	<b>\$ 151,660.54</b>

\* Figures as of 11/09/2023.

# Crawford County Planning

## **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.

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**Web**  
[www.crawfordcountypa.net](http://www.crawfordcountypa.net)  
[www.crawfordcountypa.net/planning](http://www.crawfordcountypa.net/planning)

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## **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

Francis Weiderspahn Jr., Vice Chair

John Christopher Soff, Secretary

## **Crawford County Planning Office:**

Zachary Norwood, Planning Director

Samantha Travis, Deputy Director

Thomas Gilbertson, Assistant Director for  
Community Planning\*

Debra Frawley, ARPA Program Manager

Caleb Thayer, Housing Coordinator

Casey Dickson, Community Development  
Specialist

Ann Knott, Office Manager

\* Former

## **Crawford County Planning Commission:**

Scott Sjolander, Chair

Ron Mattocks, Vice Chair

Jessica Hilburn, Secretary

Austin Rock, Treasurer

Stacey Ross

Stephanie Thauer

Kristin Hauser