

Gates Mills Comprehensive Plan

Meeting #8 (5/16/23)

Recommended Final Edits to Plan Goals, Objectives, Strategies

Distributed 6/6/23



Handouts for Meeting #8

- Edits to plan text based on discussion from Meeting #7
- Priority ranking of the goals and objectives from Town Hall Meeting #2 (4/18/23) and the Advisory Committee's individual responses (received 5/4/23 through 5/11/23)

Advisory Committee Members in Attendance

Mitch Bass	Jennifer Pinto
Sharon Bodker	Mary Schmidt
Rob Galloway	Kelly Seimborski
Will Krauss	Erin Shank
Deej Lincoln	Nat Smith
Rick Maribito	Lindsay Steinbrink
Sean O'Brien	Cindy Zins
Sean O'Hagan	Ann Zoller
Linda Oleyko	

Other Attendees

Jay "Chip" AuWerter, Village Council
Kristin Hopkins, FAICP, CT Consultants

Meeting Summary

The committee reviewed and discussed each of the text edits agreed to at meeting #7 and provided final edits to the draft text.

The text edits agreed to at the meeting are attached.

The committee also reviewed and discussed the priority ranking of the Plan's goals and objectives from residents who attended the second Town Hall meeting held on April 19, 2023, as well as the results of the Advisory Committee's ranking exercise. The committee agreed to include the rankings from both the Advisory Committee and the residents in the final plan document.

2032 Vision Statement

Continue to be a highly desirable community that preserves and enhances the natural environment and other attributes that make the Village truly special, fosters a deep appreciation among residents, attracts **and welcomes a diverse community of** residents, and retains existing residents who are committed to the Village's continued success as a community with an overall high quality of life.

Attributes that make Gates Mills special include:

- o Visual character that creates the Village's unique identity
- o Outstanding serene rural natural environment
- o Historic houses, architecture, and character
- o Small town neighborly feel
- o Easy access to nearby amenities
- o Desirable neighborhoods and housing stock

2032 Goals

- A. **RURAL VILLAGE CHARACTER.** Preserve/retain the history-steeped rural character of Gates Mills, including its extensive wooded hillsides, the beautiful Chagrin River, vast expanses of natural green space and the Village's numerous homesteads and well-tended historic estates.
- B. **HARMONY WITH NATURE.** Aspire to be a leading sustainable municipality in the Chagrin River Valley committed to reducing environmental damage, addressing climate change, and encouraging low-impact/green infrastructure strategies to improve Gates Mills' resilience.
- C. **DESIRABLE HOUSING & NEIGHBORHOODS.** Promote and preserve the variety and value of existing housing and neighborhoods, while carefully managing the limited allowance for new housing that preserves the Village's character and quality in order to attract new residents and provide options for existing residents.
- D. **COMMUNITY PRIDE & ENGAGEMENT.** Promote/foster a sense of community pride and increase engagement among residents, with a focus on Village Center.
- E. **ACCESS & CONNECTIONS.** Promote a safe and convenient transportation system that facilitates local travel, promotes walking and biking, and fosters physical well-being.
- F. **QUALITY AMENITIES & SERVICES.** Continue to maintain and enhance community amenities/services that support a high quality of life with the right balance of community services for taxes paid, while respecting residents' desire to protect and enhance the natural environment.

2032 Goals and Objectives

The following draft goals and related objectives support the above overall vision.

Goal A. RURAL VILLAGE CHARACTER

Preserve/retain the history-steeped rural character of Gates Mills, including its extensive wooded hillsides, the beautiful Chagrin River, vast expanses of natural green space and the Village's numerous homesteads¹ and well-tended historic estates. Objectives & strategies include:

Objective A.1. Preserve, protect, and enhance the natural environment and habitat of the Chagrin River valley.

Much of the Village's rural character is due to the hundreds of acres of "unspoiled" natural beauty of wooded areas and open spaces in and surrounding the Chagrin River valley. More than 25% of land in the Village is publicly preserved/conserved open space, including over 700 acres owned or conserved by the Gates Mills Land Conservancy (GMLC), over 400 acres owned by the Cleveland Metroparks, and nearly 200 acres owned by the Village of Gates Mills. In addition, the low housing density throughout most of the Village, which is a result of the lack of central sewers and the large lot zoning requirements in over 90% of the Village, also contributes to the Village's natural, rural character. Large expanses of preserved/conserved natural areas also provide important environmental benefits such as reducing damage from flooding and erosion thereby protecting the Chagrin River and its watershed.

The following strategies provide ways to balance the long-term fiscal and ecological health of the Village and residents' quality of life via a combination of preserved publicly-held land and preserved privately-owned property.

Strategy A.1.1. Continue to support land conservation efforts through partnership with the Gates Mills Land Conservancy (GMLC) and strategic collaboration with the Cleveland Metroparks while also recognizing the need to maintain a stable tax base.

As noted in the Chagrin River Watershed Balanced Growth Plan (2009), the best way to protect priority conservation areas is by publicly acquiring designated areas for permanent open space. Since 1991, Gates Mills residents have continually supported the acquisition and protection of land as permanent open space via their approval and continual renewal of a 1-mill, 5-year conservancy tax levy. Much of the 700 acres owned or conserved by the Gates Mills Land Conservancy (GMLC) has been made possible through levy proceeds via a revenue-sharing agreement with the Village.

- a. Continue the Village's revenue-sharing partnership with GMLC regarding the Conservation Levy proceeds, consistent with the levy language.²

¹ "Homestead" needs to be defined to ensure compliance with the existing Village ordinances and zoning regulations, and to distinguish it from the state of Ohio's real estate tax provision called the homestead exemption.

² The initial operating (revenue sharing) agreement between the Village and the Gates Mills Land Conservancy allocated 95% of the collected funds to GMLC and 5% to the Village. With GMLC's increased emphasis on land stewardship while continuing its efforts on land acquisition and conservation easements, the Village and GMLC agreed to revise the operating agreement to a 50%/50% split. GMLC's use of the Levy Funds is restricted; the funds can be used only for purchase of land, expenses associated

- b. Utilize some or all of the Village's share of the Conservation Levy proceeds to fund enhancement activities such as replenishment and expansion of the tree canopy, removal of invasive plants and necessary erosion control plantings on Village-owned and GMLC-owned properties in accordance with the Land Conservation and Open Space Fund requirements and limitations.³
- c. Promote the benefits of conservation easements on home sites to encourage residents to explore possible conservation options in coordination with the Village and GMLC. For example, donating a qualified easement is a charitable deduction which can result in income tax and property tax reductions.
- d. Explore creative options to incentivize conservation easements and/or lower the density of development on available properties based on the Village's determined optimal balance of tax-exempt preserved land vs. privately held conserved land.
- e. Investigate additional funding opportunities to support land conservation efforts.

Strategy A.1.2. Evaluate changes that might increase for the few situations that qualify, encourage the use of the Village's Conservation Development District (Chapter 1160) for the few situations that qualify, with the goal of preserving the Village's natural environment through permanent conservation easements on private land without using tax dollars to purchase the easements and without increasing the number of dwelling units currently permitted as determined by the existing requirements for a yield plan.

As noted above in Strategy A.1.1, land preservation/conservation in the Village has occurred primarily through the Gates Mills Land Conservancy's land acquisitions and purchase of conservation easements funded by property tax revenue. Another mechanism to encourage land preservation is the Village's Conservation Development District, which requires a minimum of 50% or more of the total development site to be designated as restricted open space and preserved via a perpetual conservation easement, while permitting the same number of house lots that are otherwise permitted by zoning, as confirmed by a yield plan. A major community benefit to encouraging this method of preserving land is that it does not reduce the taxable value of the private property on which the conservation easement is applied. In contrast, land that is purchased fee simple by the Gates Mills Land Conservancy as permanent open space becomes tax exempt.

There are other benefits to conservation development as well. Conservation development is promoted in the Chagrin River Watershed Balanced Growth Plan as a way of (1) providing links between existing open spaces, (2) preserving the character of the Village, (3) buffering/obscuring views of development, (4) providing habitat corridors along streams, (5) reducing and filtering storm water runoff from development, and (6) ensuring the long-term survival of wetlands, rural views, and historic features. The Plan further notes that "while the development of areas at a low density through large lot zoning may allow for preservation of rural character and natural resources, it often does not." In contrast, conservation development regulations "protect the

with acquisition of deed restrictions or conservation easements, and stewardship expenses associated with such land and conservation easements. Source: <https://www.gatesmillslandconservancy.org/funding>

³ By ordinance, the Village's share of the levy funds are segregated into a special Village "Land Conservation and Open Space Fund" for the "public purpose of conserving, retaining, protecting and preserving land, water, forest, open, natural or wetland areas in [Gates Mills] predominantly in their natural, scenic, open or wooded condition or as suitable habitat for fish, plants or wildlife, including the acquisition of such real property or interests therein as may be necessary to carry out that purpose. (G.M.C.O. Section VIII-5 Levy for Land Conservation and Open Space Fund)

valuable resources while still allowing property owners to realize the development potential of a property” permitted by the Village’s zoning code.⁴

Consistent with the Growth Management Plan’s recommendation for establishing “open space subdivision design standards,” the Village adopted Chapter 1160 Conservation Development District. **These current** regulations provide a density-neutral development option for large properties (25 acres and larger) **that but with provides** more flexibility in the arrangement of houses, **including allowing up to three units to be attached side-by-side**, in exchange for the permanent preservation of 50% or more of the project site through conservation easements. In order to develop according to the Conservation Development District, the property must be rezoned. Despite the Conservation Development District being adopted by the Village in 2007, new house lots have been created only via lot splits along existing streets, which provides no assurance that large areas of contiguous natural area will be preserved.

There are only a few large parcels (25 acres and larger) in private ownership remaining in the Village. To make the regulations more viable for property owners and preserve private property rights, while still providing important community benefits, **one possible consideration is to making** Conservation Development **for detached single-family houses an option in the U1-A1 District** (while retaining all the other zoning requirements for Conservation Development), rather than a separate zoning district that requires rezoning. **The option, approved via a ‘Special Use Permit’, would require review by the Planning Commission as well as review and consent by Village Council, and require the same public notifications and public hearings to allow residents to comment on the proposal.**

This option is suggested because there are extensive requirements already articulated in the Zoning Code. For example, the current regulations in Chapter 1160 ensure that a Conservation Development is limited to the same number of house lots that are possible under the existing zoning regulations. The property owner is required to prepare a “yield plan” to determine the number of house lots that could be created in compliance with the 5-acre minimum lot area and minimum 200 feet of lot frontage. Once the number of lots is determined, the property owner can then rearrange the lots according to the spacing requirements for Conservation Developments, which will result in a smaller area of the 25+ acre site being disturbed because of the requirement that at least 50% of the contiguous area of the site be placed in a conservation easement. **In essence, use of the Conservation Development District is a win-win for the Village and the property owner.**



⁴ Chagrin River Watershed Balanced Growth Plan, Chagrin River Watershed Partners, Inc., 2009. Pg 80.

Goal B. HARMONY WITH NATURE

Aspire to be a leading sustainable municipality in the Chagrin River Valley committed to reducing environmental damage, addressing climate change, and encouraging low-impact/green infrastructure strategies to improve Gates Mills' resilience. Objectives & strategies include:

Objective B.1. Encourage/facilitate the use of alternative and clean energy systems.

Strategy B.1.1. Consider revising the zoning regulations to **permit-encourage additional alternative and clean energy generation options, such as ground-mounted solar panels, and undertake energy efficiency upgrades, with appropriate requirements and limitations, to encourage use of alternative energy options while ensuring there are minimal negative impacts on adjacent property.**

The current regulations permit solar panels on the roof of a residential structure provided the panel does not extend above the ridge line, nor is visible from the street. Solar panels may also be attached to an accessory structure in the rear yard. Ground-mounted solar panels are not permitted. The current regulations also do not permit wind turbines anywhere in the Village.

Given the **(i) large lot sizes and wooded nature of the community; (ii) the continued shift toward electricity as the energy source for vehicles and domestic needs such as cooking, heating and cooling; and (iii) other objectives in the Plan that identify the importance of maintaining the tree canopy (Obj.A.3) and improving electric service (Obj. F.5.), consider allowing more flexibility in the location of both roof-mounted and ground-mounted solar panels as the default. When necessary, the Architectural Board of Review should evaluate each proposal's suitability and impacts based on a comparison of projected energy needs, impacts to the tree canopy and characteristics of other structures that are permitted on the property, (i.e. solar panels on a storage shed in the rear yard).**

In addition, consider ways to streamline the project review and approval process so it is efficient and predictable, and develop sustainability guidelines for historic buildings/historic districts that allow solar devices in compatible locations on the site or on non-historic buildings where there will be minimal impact on the historic building and its site. This focus should be on (i) impacts to the historically significant architectural features of designated historic buildings (or buildings that contribute to a historic district); and (ii) nuanced aesthetic improvements without a default prejudice towards roof-mounted solar panels.

At the same time, the Village should monitor advances **in alternative energy, clean energy and energy-efficiency technology** and update the regulations as needed **to remove any unnecessary barriers.**

Strategy B.1.2. Adopt zoning regulations for Electric Vehicle Charging Stations (EVCS).

By proactively addressing EVCS in the zoning code, especially for nonresidential uses such as Gilmour Academy, the Village facilitates their installation because property owners know the rules when planning improvements.

feet from the street right-of-way (behind the sidewalk along Old Mill Road), but houses along Old Mills, Colvin and Glenwood are generally much closer (15 feet to 30 feet).⁹

In addition, the code requires houses to have two side yards, each at least 15 feet wide.¹⁰ That means that after accounting for 30 feet of side yards on a 50-foot-wide lot, the house can only be 20 feet wide, and houses next to each other must be separated by at least 30 feet. Yet, many houses in the U1-A4 district are much closer together, some as close as seven or eight feet, and others are located only a few feet from the front or side lot line.



Colvin Road

b. For the U1-A4 parcels that are north of the bridge and the concentration of commercial and government buildings, consider modifying the zoning to allow a limited number of housing units to be attached while maintaining the density that would otherwise be allowed. For such modification (which could be permitted via a conditional use permit), Village should ensure that the units are appropriately designed and sited to be compatible with the existing development.

e.b. Continue to require all new housing units built in this district to be designed in compliance with the Historic District design guidelines, as it is essential that all new housing units are built to enhance the Village Center's historic character. [See also D.1. for Village Center discussion.]

Strategy C.2.3. Clarify the regulations for small, nonconforming lots to clearly allow owners to rebuild in the event an existing house is destroyed or torn down, and regulations related to additions and accessory buildings on these lots.

The Zoning Map notes that in the U1-A1 District the minimum lot size required for lots established prior to 12/31/1998 is 2.5 acres (while lots created after are required to be 5 acres). There are some areas in the U1-A1 District where most of the pre-1999 lots are less than 2.5 acres, such as Riverview Road and Robinwood Lane. These lots may have a number of nonconforming lot conditions. The Planning and Zoning Code Section 1157.06 addresses nonconforming uses but not nonconforming lots and nonconforming buildings. This means it is unclear if a new house can be built on a pre-1999 nonconforming vacant lot (e.g., less than 2.5 acres).

Establish nonconforming lot and nonconforming building regulations that provide guidance for new home construction and home additions in all districts. There are several reasons beyond lot size that can cause a parcel to be nonconforming, including noncompliance with the minimum lot width (which was increased to 200 feet in the U1-A1 District) and minimum front, side, and rear yard setbacks.

⁹ See Sections 1163.09(d) and 1163.18(d)

¹⁰ See Sections 1163.05(d) and 1163.14(c)

communities. They noted that many prospective buyers (and realtors) are unaware of the high quality of Village services and amenities available to residents. A marketing campaign could promote the variety of neighborhoods, community services, local amenities, and annual events. In tandem, explore ways to welcome new residents and help them assimilate in the Village after moving. *[See also F.1.1. for additional discussion on promoting the Village's excellent safety services.]*

Strategy D.2.4. Increase direct communication between Village government and residents.

- a. Continue to livestream, record, and post Village Council meetings to YouTube.
- b. Hold semi-annual "Mayor & Council Listening Nights."
- c. Continue to sponsor "Candidates Night" for Village elections (Mayor, Council, and Treasurer).

Goal F. QUALITY AMENITIES & SERVICES

Continue to maintain and enhance community amenities/services that support a high quality of life with the right balance of community services for taxes paid, while respecting residents' desire to protect and enhance the natural environment. Objectives & strategies include:

The community amenities and services provided by Gates Mills Village and other public entities greatly impact residents' quality of life and safety. They include public water, emergency services, schools, library, parkland, and related services. This goal encompasses recommendations for continuing to provide community amenities and services as effectively as possible. Gates Mills has an established tradition of volunteering and provides strong support for its community organizations. Many of the strategies for achieving this goal involve efforts of existing Village departments and community organizations, and in some cases identifies the potential for new community organizations.

Objective F.1. Continue to provide excellent safety services that foster a sense of security throughout the Village.

More than 95% of Gates Mills residents who responded to the 2022 Community Survey rated the overall quality of services provided by the Village police and fire departments as good to excellent. These services include police protection and public safety, fire protection and search & rescue, police and fire alarm monitoring, and vacation house security check. "Gates Mills best services today are the Police and Fire," so say residents. One resident noted that the Village's "services are top notch" and "contribute to the excellent quality of life;" another wrote that "the police are cordial, and residents 'feel very safe;' and another said: "the police and fire departments are excellent- they provide such personal service and respond so quickly." The high level of the safety services Gates Mills residents receive is well known and was noted by some as "one of the reasons we moved here." These sentiments underscore the importance of the Village continuing to provide high quality services as one way of attracting and retaining residents.

Strategy F.1.1. Consider a promotional campaign highlighting the Village's excellent safety services and targeted toward potential new residents.

High quality safety and security services are foundational to a growing and vibrant community. The Village's police, fire and service departments are exceptional and a hidden gem. This should be emphasized more in the Village's marketing and communication efforts. *[See also D.2.3. for additional discussion on promoting the Village's positive attributes to attract new home buyers.]*

Objective F.2. Ensure that adequate community amenities and services that increase residents' ability to age-in-place are available and widely known, including ways to stay engaged with neighbors and the wider community.

Gates Mills has a higher proportion of residents 65 or older than most other communities in Cuyahoga County, Ohio, and the country. A growing trend in community development is making a commitment to be more livable, especially for older residents, e.g., more age-friendly.

Strategy F.2.1. Identify and communicate to residents the community amenities and services that are currently available to residents.

characteristics that make a community family friendly – such as transportation, parks and other places for recreation, walkability, and safety.

Identify ways to engage younger residents to be involved in intergeneration services and activities. Suggestions include:

- a. Babysitting services (could be offered at the Community House).
- b. Neighborhood based volunteer opportunity for older children to check on older residents (potential to provide volunteer credit for college applications).

Objective F.4. Continue to work with the Mayfield City School District and communities within the District.

Gates Mills is in the Mayfield City School District, a political subdivision that is separate and independent from the Village, and heavily funded by local real estate taxes. The largest portion of residents' property taxes goes to the Mayfield City School District. While this is true for all municipalities in Ohio because it is the primary way public education is funded, Gates Mills residents also have many other educational options from which to choose. Families send their children to private schools for a variety of reasons; indeed, some families choose move to Gates Mills because of the proximity to one of these schools with the intent of enrolling their child(ren).

Strategy F.4.1. Explore ways to increase Village's interaction with the Mayfield School District.

The School District is embarking on a planning process, making it an opportune time to explore opportunities with the District.

- a. Continue to invite the Mayfield School Superintendent to a Council meeting to present a "State of the Schools" report and answer questions from residents.
- b. Increase awareness of the role of the Mayfield School System Liaison Committee (Liaison Committee). The Village created the Liaison Committee to increase Village government officials' and residents' awareness of the Mayfield School Board and school activities.
- c. Explore ways to support and promote the school district's offerings, successes, and initiatives, and identify ways Village residents can be involved with the Mayfield City School District.

Strategy F.4.2. Work with the Mayfield City School District to ensure the Gates Mills Elementary School (GMES) remains a valued community resource.

The nine-acre property is owned and operated by the Mayfield City School District. Serving approximately 100 students, Gates Mills Elementary continues to provide just one class of each grade, Kindergarten through fifth. Built in 1927, GMES is vital as the Village's connection to the Mayfield Public School District and as an important community-engagement institution. It is also a diverse, high performing school that provides a vital and direct connection to the Mayfield School District. While the Village recognizes that it has no control over the School District's use of its facilities, the elementary school is in a prime location in the Village Center, conveniently located near a number of other community buildings and gathering spaces, and the Village has a vested interest in ensuring the building remains a vibrant contributor to the Village Center.

- a. Explore the possibility of offering publicly funded preschool services or expanded day-care/after-school care facility at either Gates Mills Elementary School or at the "Environmental Center" on County Line Road.

- b. Explore opportunities with the Mayfield School District to expand community use of the Gates Mills Elementary School. For example, the Nature Camp uses the school throughout the summer.

Objective F.5. Explore ways to improve electric service to residents.

The poor reliability of electric service in certain parts of Gates Mills is a major issue today, and it will become more so as energy systems take a radical turn away from fossil fuels over the next decade. According to responses to the 2022 Community Survey, the more heavily wooded areas of the Village have frequent power failures, which are often caused by trees knocked down during storms. Some survey respondents noted the frequent loss of electricity as something they value least about the Village. One person even suggested that to remain a “premier” community, the electrical grid needs major improvement.

Strategy F.5.1. In areas where overhead electric power lines are often damaged by existing trees, develop a plan in concert with the electric company to **reduce, if not** eliminate, power-outages, including the possibility of burying the power lines.

The Village has explored the idea of burying the electric lines. It is an expensive undertaking, but worth exploring in vulnerable areas of the Village that are more prone to outages than others such as heavily wooded area. In addition, burying the power and cable lines in the historic district of Gates Mills would also be a major enhancement to the rural appeal of the Village. Based on feedback from residents, burying the power lines may only be needed in certain areas. Work with First Energy to identify the areas with the most frequent power outages and that affect the most residents. Once the priority areas are identified, find ways and funding strategies to address the power outages, including evaluating burying the lines.

Strategy F.5.2. Identify areas that are most vulnerable to power failures and explore additional options for improving electric service.

Homeowners who experience frequent loss of electricity often end up purchasing a back-up power generator. One suggestion mentioned was for the Village to assist affected homeowners with the purchase of a generator.

Objective F.6. Improve cellular and internet service to ensure all areas of the Village are suitable for remote work-from-home.

Improved, reliable cellular and internet service is necessary to retain and attract residents who work from home. As the USA continues to wrestle with remote work arrangements, and as the tech industry promotes more ways to incorporate wireless devices in everyday life, reliable 24/7 service becomes essential. The 2022 Community Survey asked residents about their cellular and internet service needs. Overall, 66% of respondents said they were satisfied with their broadband access/service and the same percentage was satisfied with their cellular access/service. However, when looking more closely at responses from the 10 different ‘neighborhood’ areas, the majority (53%) of respondents from the southwest corner of the Village (‘neighborhood’ 7) were **dissatisfied** with their broadband service and 65% were **dissatisfied** with their cellular service. A resident noted that they “cannot even make a phone call from our house without being on Wi-Fi.” A lack of competitive high-speed internet service provider options was noted as one reason for the dissatisfaction.

Strategy F.6.1. Continue to explore opportunities to improve service.

The Village has been seeking ways to improve cellular and internet service. A new tower is being