

Your Voice Ohio: Vibrant Lima

Exploring how to make
Lima a thriving community
for all

September 27, 2018



A lot has changed about Ohio's economy over the last 20 years. There are nearly 152,000 fewer jobs, there's a lower average household income and higher student debt, and the state is falling behind in education. For the first time in at least a half century, Ohio did not recover from one recession before it entered the next recession. Complicating matters, the correlation between economic struggle and the addiction crisis, which is claiming lives and sucking financial vibrancy from families, communities and the state, has become clear.

But many people don't need to read these statements to tell them what's going on. We see it in our neighborhoods, from vacant blocks to payday lenders to shuttered factories.

In Allen County and Lima, Ohio many residents are experiencing an economic upswing. There's shrinking employment, signs of construction, and an increase in local investment and high-end shops and restaurants.

For many workers in the area however, wages are stagnant, and individuals don't have the necessary skills to find new opportunities to get hired. This increases stress on people who may already be struggling to pay for rent, food, and other bills, highlighting diverging economic futures for the community. To talk with community members directly and see what they think could be the causes and solutions to this divide, local journalists teamed up and hosted Your Voice Ohio: Vibrant Lima.

On Thursday, September 27, 2018, at the University of Northwestern Ohio, residents met with members of the media to explore what Lima would like it if it was thriving for everyone in the community.

The word "economy" can be intimidating to many because it means different things, including jobs, the overall economy, debt, poverty, income inequality, trade, and perhaps even the cost of health care. This can make it difficult for community members to easily find and provide information about what they're experiencing.

Our goal, through these community conversations, is to put people at the center of local reporting. Our collaborative aims to supply people with the information and resources they need to create smart, shared, and sustainable solutions to the struggles facing folks across Ohio.

EVENT SUMMARY

On September 27, 2018, community members gathered at the University of Northwestern Ohio, and over the course of 2 hours, discussed their experiences and identified local economic solutions.

We asked these four questions to prompt the discussion:

- 1. What would Lima look like if it was thriving for everyone in the community?**
- 2. What's one thing you would improve or change in Lima to make it more vibrant?**
- 3. What assets, resources, and strengths exist in Lima?**
- 4. What actions might we take to make Lima more vibrant?**

The conversation generated important questions for the local media to explore. In the following pages, you'll find stories and ideas shared by participants during the event.

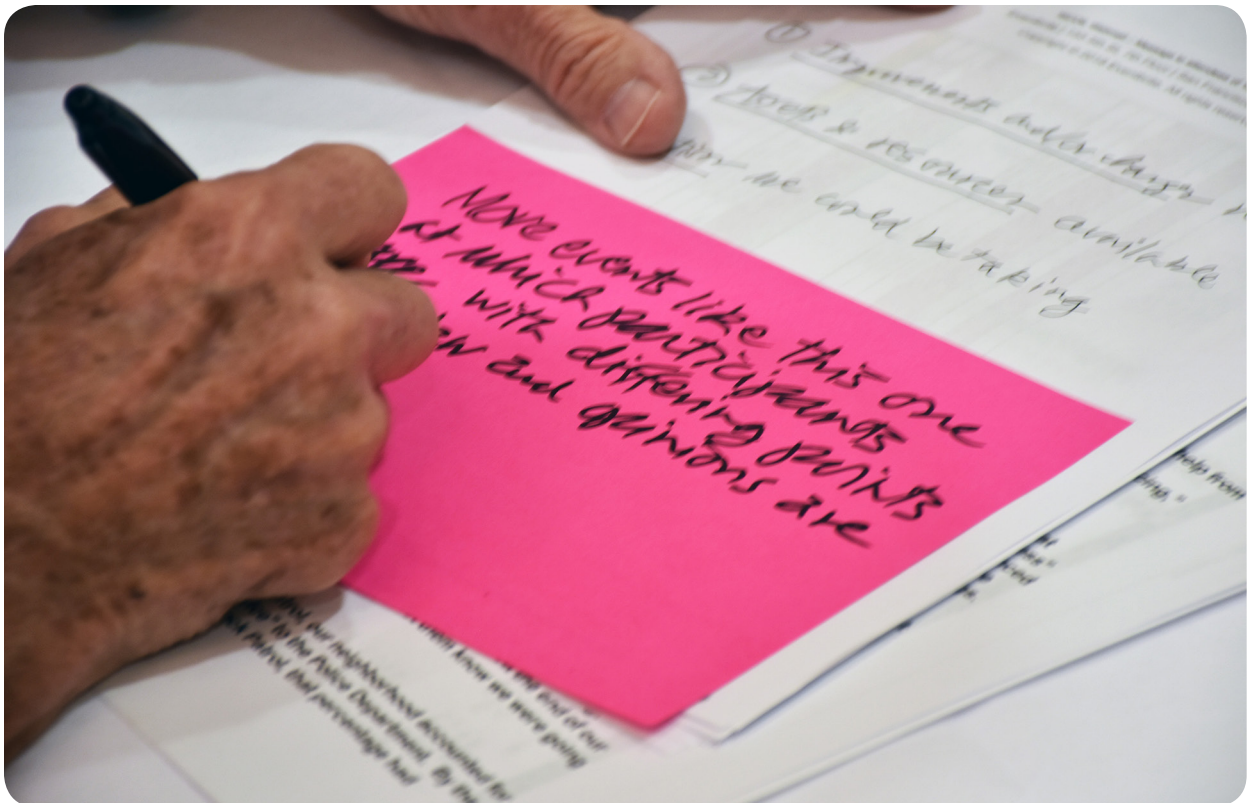


RESPONSES

WHAT WOULD LIMA LOOK LIKE IF IT WAS THRIVING FOR EVERYONE IN THE COMMUNITY?

- » Busy downtown.
- » Housing developments.
- » Growing retail market.
- » Strong industrial base.
- » Active religious community.
- » Active educational opportunities.
- » Good paying/highly skilled jobs.
- » Quality/affordable housing.
- » Excellent arts community.
- » Resurging downtown.
- » High quality of life/peace of mind among residents.
- » Open-minded people willing to step out of their comfort zones.
- » Welcoming to all.
- » Lots of “hustle and bustle” downtown.
- » Everyone knows and looks out for their neighbors.
- » Active people out and about, where you can see them, with money to spend; some crowds.
- » Profitable business environment and jobs.
- » Clean and safe neighborhoods.
- » No blighted homes and buildings.
- » Vibrant downtown with no vacant storefronts.
- » No homeless on street corners.
- » Private sector businesses and jobs growing and productive. Support systems, quality restaurants, boutiques, housing, parks and recreation were available and thriving. Downtown safe and active.
- » A downtown populated with small businesses, also large employers → goal full employment. Integrated school system → high quality adult education.
- » Safe neighborhoods, well-maintained housing.
- » Plenty of opportunities to reach full potential.
- » Vibrant downtown.
- » Jobs that support a family.

- » Involvement of ALL in community issues.
- » Varied cultural opportunities.
- » Updated homes. No slums.
- » Dozens of factories.
- » Lots of evening, 24/7 entertainment.
- » Giant churches.
- » Empty jails.
- » We used to celebrate the New Year with a “First Night” in downtown Lima. There were many events and venues for performances and activities and all the sidewalks were filled with people from Lima and the surrounding townships.



WHAT'S ONE THING YOU WOULD IMPROVE OR CHANGE IN LIMA TO MAKE IT MORE VIBRANT?

Individuals wrote...

- » Perception - Probably a bit unrealistic but work on the community (either as a whole or through engagement) on issues/barriers that have contributed to a (mostly) negative perception of the city.
- » Awareness - Work on making people more aware of opportunities, activities, etc.
- » Downtown area - retail, apartments, arts, work + play
- » Housing = more apartments (upscale, mid-size)
- » Higher disposable income -- better pay, lower health insurance costs -- is needed across the income distribution.
- » Better education and lower cost of education.
- » Fewer criminals and addicts.
- » Access to healthcare and education for all.
- » I would love to improve the perception that Lima and its schools are failing.
- » People need to realize all this community has to offer. That there really are lots of good, really good, things happening here.
- » Improve: urban communities/neighborhoods, infrastructure (side ways, bike and walking, paths), speed the renovation of old properties and demo, sense of urgency to improve neighborhoods, perception of the city.
- » Change: Entrances into Lima from I-75, more variety of income levels, too many low income homes/apts, pro-business vs. gov't lead.
- » Job opportunities/income.
- » Safety (perception)
- » Mid- to upper-income housing
- » Stronger collaboration
- » Less focus on government - more on private sector
- » Perception of city/region and its people
- » Hope from within.
- » Integration - different cultures and income levels
- » Nothing can be done at the local level.
- » More events like this one at which participants with differing points of view and opinions are encouraged to share them with each other, sometimes - I hope - finding common ground.
- » Recreate manufacturers. Council or an updated facsimile of it to encourage managers to serve as leaders and head up projects for betterment of community.

The large group prioritized...

- » Need managers to meet, discuss shared ideas, problems, solutions
- » Need people to meet, discuss shared ideas, problems, solutions
- » State and federal governments control everything
- » Let business lead, break down barriers
- » Need downtown to be more vibrant -- upscale housing for middle class, more small business
- » Change perceptions: about schools (not failing); ability to prosper (grow middle class); there are jobs (though people are unqualified or can't pass drug test)



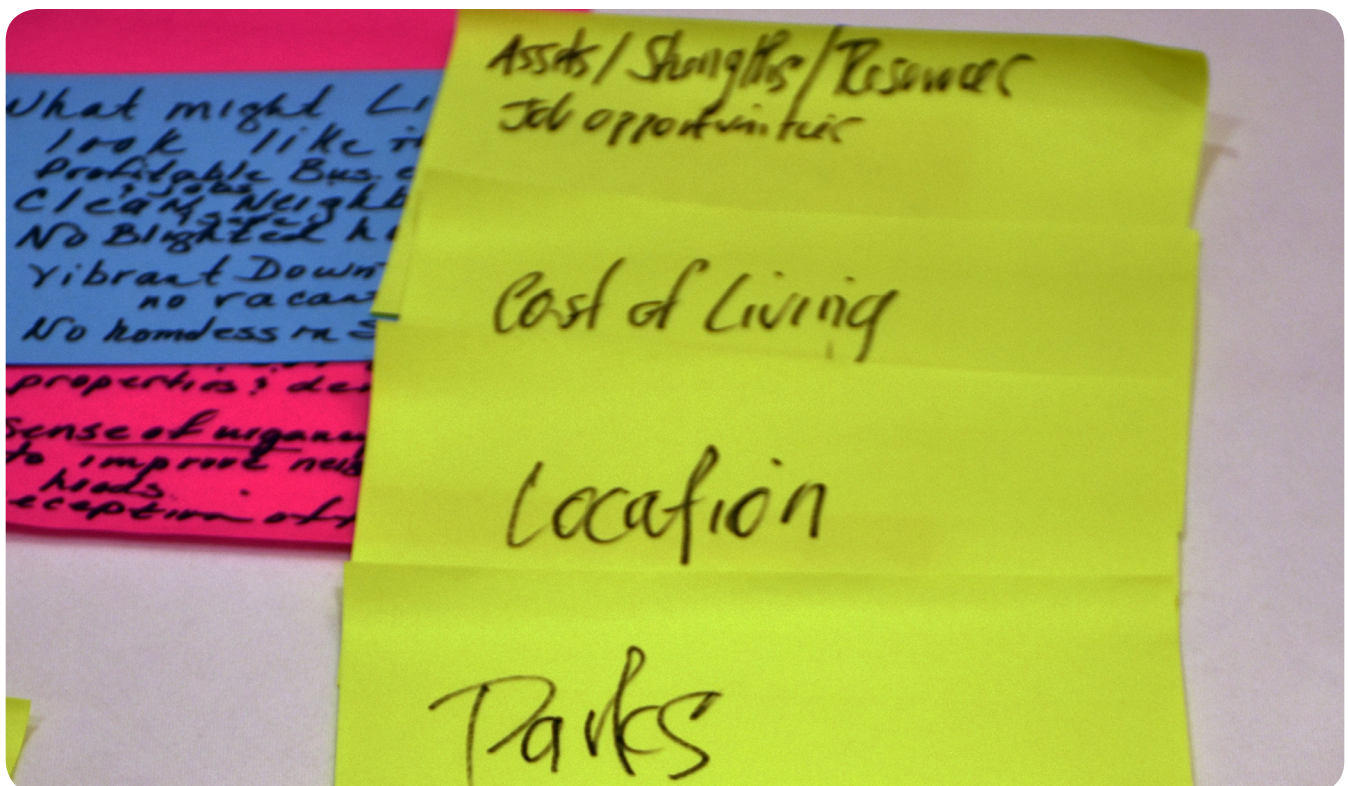
WHAT ASSETS, RESOURCES, AND STRENGTHS EXIST IN LIMA?

Individuals wrote...

- » Parks
- » Location
- » Wonderful arts community: lots of shows, exhibits, etc.
- » Cost of living
- » Small town living
- » Water
- » Educational opportunities
- » Job opportunities
- » Large employers
- » Education - 5 colleges
- » Health systems - hospital
- » Small manufacturing
- » Location
- » Business and industry
- » Schools
- » Infrastructure: highway, rail, water
- » Location
- » College, universities
- » Civic Center
- » Hospitals
- » Career Center
- » Available workforce
- » Post HS education
- » Proximity to transportation (I-75, RR, R30, etc.)
- » Highway
- » Rail
- » Water
- » Veterans Memorial Civic Center
- » Arts
- » Diversity
- » All of the groups in the Chamber building

The large group prioritized...

- » Infrastructure: Highways, railroads, water
- » Location (I-75)
- » Schools
- » Small and large, diverse businesses
- » Low cost of living
- » Job opportunities
- » Parks
- » Small-town life
- » Arts, shows, exhibits
- » Educational opportunities (colleges)



WHAT ACTIONS MIGHT WE TAKE TO MAKE LIMA MORE VIBRANT IN THE FOLLOWING AREAS?

Change perceptions about Lima

- » Don't live in the past, be more visionary
- » See and make note of the successes, celebrate
- » For government, get along, work together, break down barriers, get out of the way of business

Create a more vibrant downtown

- » Government: Break down hurdles, barriers; welcome investment
- » Facilitate business -- offer to help
- » Invite groups to existing places: restaurants, event spaces, the Met, Artspace, Veterans Memorial Civic and Convention Center



STATEMENT TO NEIGHBORS

At the end of the conversation, we asked participants to write down a statement they would want their neighbors to know about community vibrancy, to share with those that couldn't attend the event:

- Collaboration is important to break down walls and to work together to make a vibrant community.
- Don't give up! Be the change you want to see!
- I would not only ask but invite you to open your eyes, your heart, your mind to the many wonders and opportunity to this community.
- You can get a good job and your children can have a future right here.
- Get involved and be a part of the solution with urgency!
- I would love for you all to see Lima for the great place it is and can be.

PERSONAL ACTIONS

Using the discussion as a guide, here are the personal actions attendees will take to make Lima a more vibrant place for everyone in the community.

- Work closely with developers to encourage investment.
- Visit more downtown businesses and encourage others.
- Invite and encourage people to be aware of the many opportunities and options available to them.
- Speak more positively about community. Celebrate successes.
- Tell people there are some good people in Lima that want to be engaged in making it a better place.
- Talk more positively about Lima and the things happening. Get more involved in my community and encourage others to.
- I will speak positively about our community and share events that I hear about to hopefully bring more awareness.

LOCAL MEDIA PARTNERS



LIMA NEWS
@LIMANEWS
INFO@LIMANEWS.COM

The Lima News is a daily newspaper covering nine counties in northwest Ohio.

NEXT STEPS

Reporters across these organizations are dividing up the questions now and reporting answers back to the community.

For up-to-date information and reporting, visit:

[YOURVOICEOHIO.ORG](https://www.yourvoiceohio.org)

[@YOURVOICEOHIO](https://twitter.com/yourvoiceohio)