

Your Voice **Ohio:** **Vibrant** **Stow**

**Exploring how to make
Stow a thriving community
for all**

October 2, 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.

Stow, Ohio, is part of the Akron metropolitan area and often feels lost in its shadow, as we heard from residents. While Akron continues to add new jobs and invest in business projects, Stow is experiencing an increase in poverty. Low job prospects and economic blight are drawing less young people and families to the area. The town is also close to Kent State University, but residents don't have the local business district Kent does. To help residents navigate these challenges and start identifying solutions, local journalists sat down face to face with community members.

On Tuesday, October 2, 2018, at the Stow Heritage Barn, residents met with members of the media to explore what Stow 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.

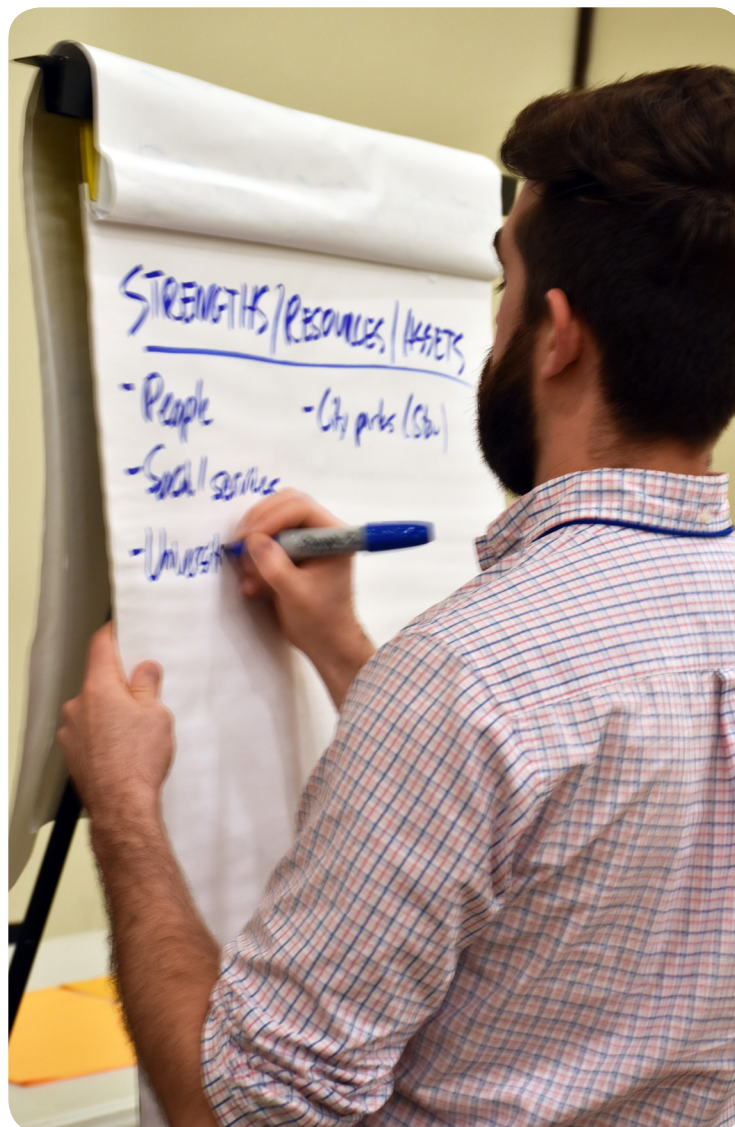
EVENT SUMMARY

On October 2, 2018, community members gathered at the Stow Heritage Barn, 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 Stow look like if it was thriving for everyone in the community?**
2. **What's one thing you would improve or change in Stow to make it more vibrant?**
3. **What assets, resources, and strengths exist in Stow?**
4. **What actions might we take to make Stow 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 STOW LOOK LIKE IF IT WAS THRIVING FOR EVERYONE IN THE COMMUNITY?

- » People satisfied with life, achieving dreams
- » Know what good health is
- » Access to quality education
- » Access to healthcare
- » Engaged with others
- » Employment, healthcare, community connections, housing, transportation, and food and clothing for all residents
- » Better connection between Kent (+ surrounding areas) and the university
- » There were quality services for all regardless of income. I'm particularly concerned with the lack of quality recreation and facilities in the central city (Akron)
- » No homes falling apart
- » Well attended community functions and use of public spaces
- » No "bad neighborhoods" - support and resources for trailer parks as well as homeowners
- » Upward mobility - people can move into the community to raise kids
- » Regionally connected and diverse
- » Younger
- » Little poverty
- » Full employment at good wages
- » Fewer potholes
- » More parks
- » Fewer school levies
- » Safe, healthy, and wellness for all
- » Stimulating environment
- » Lifelong learning (birth → death)
- » People-centered leadership

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

Individuals wrote...

- » Improved access to recreation and recreational facilities
- » More focus on neighborhoods and Akron families, not just downtown
- » Ways to employ youth with younger children (baseball, swimming, tennis, etc.)
- » Invest in ways to boost/strengthen community engagement: transparency in government, online access to services, community generated idea forums
- » Pilot local programs to increase home ownership / college or other educational attainment: financial empowerment, startup loans, scholarships/job fairs
- » Recreational services - would give all people places to relax/recharge, connect community to university, allow for jobs, improve overall quality of life, give kids a place to go to stay out of trouble, make services accessible to all people, regardless of status, age, identity. How do we improve? Make adjustments, then spread the word. Advertise on social media, flyers, at common gathering places, etc.
- » Awareness of existing resources and services to help residents better navigate them. Is 211/United Way Summit County's comprehensive referral agency or is there duplication of effort by others? Or a need to add services?
- » Student debt is a burden on the entire economy. How do we create K-16 free, meaningful education and address student debt that is out there?
- » Deal with divisiveness - build understanding of diversity and grow respect for each other
- » Get the people thinking about a new way of life
- » Transportation
- » Sidewalks
- » Town-planning/town-centered planning
- » More restaurants
- » Better links regionally/info + services
- » Active seniors - physically + mentally - keeping people engaged with the community (not just online) even if their kids have moved away, etc.
- » What does a business district look like in Tallmadge or Stow? How do we create places (at scale) where people want to spend time and money? Encourages local jobs.
- » Involve citizens better in local planning / local voting (again - offline participation)
- » Development of jobs beyond service sector. Attract more younger people.
- » Rural areas - fix school funding.
- » Improve public debates/knowledge. Productive public discourse.
- » Address rural vs. metro areas.
- » Affordable healthcare
- » Educational opportunities for all (finance, structure, etc.)

- » Affordable healthcare for all (includes prevention and wellness)
- » Housing

Large group responses...

- » Active seniors, engaged, volunteering
- » Business districts – small business in small, local communities competing with big stores/Walmart
- » Getting people informed, engaged, better public knowledge, discussion, civility
- » Creating community connections, outreach, awareness of resources, or lack of resources
- » Better use of public spaces -- parks, recreation programming for connections, make affordable, accessible for youth and seniors, vehicles to connect communities



WHAT ASSETS, RESOURCES, AND STRENGTHS EXIST IN STOW?

Individuals wrote...

- » Heritage
- » Power structure
- » Nonprofit services
- » Church
- » Natural resources: land, water, sun, wind
- » Healthcare
- » Schools, university
- » Business community
- » Access to interstates
- » Kent - key investors
- » Trails/parks
- » Arts and entertainment
- » Strong base of higher education
- » Medical resources
- » Vibrant sectors
- » Affordable (vs. east coast)
- » Universities
- » Forward-thinking people
- » Northeast Ohio loves sports - therefore, camaraderie, bars, restaurants
- » Parks, hike + bike, places community can gather, events
- » Good media
- » Seniors
- » Churches
- » Arts and entertainment
- » History
- » Variety of social services / 211 referrals
- » City park system in Stow
- » Universities
- » Hospitals
- » Police/fire
- » PARTA/METRO

- » Shopping districts
- » Employers
- » Arts and entertainment
- » Libraries
- » Summit Metro/CUNP
- » Community rec centers
- » Its people
- » Churches
- » Natural resources: parks, bike trails
- » History
- » People - friendly
- » Higher education
- » Compactness
- » Ease of mobility (if you have a car)
- » A fair amount of local business and enough wealth to sustain it
- » Blimp
- » Water
- » Boats
- » Strickland's
- » Swanson's
- » Old people
- » Millennials who do good work
- » People: caring, creative, resourceful
- » Small-town feel
- » Good media
- » Longevity - a lot of people who have been here a long time - parents, businesses
- » In the suburbs, good housing stock that is pretty affordable
- » Access to parks/outdoors
- » Health industry
- » Culture and arts and entertainment
- » Food!
- » We have city parks dispersed around the city
- » The sites of the existing park and rec facility as well as empty land, ie Rubber Bowl, could be used

- » We have a population who can contribute to a discussion
- » We have many leaders who can be called on.
- » The Akron (Summit County) Zoo is an example of civic involvement from foundations
- » Universities
- » Cheap
- » National Park
- » Sports
- » Cooperative media
- » Churches (Hudson to Tallmadge)
- » Seniors (engaged, organized)
- » Housing stock (cheap, abundant, esp. In Akron)
- » No catastrophic weather
- » Metro Park trail connections
- » Cheap
- » Sports - professional and high school - brings lots of people together

Large group responses:

- » People – esp lots of old people
- » Social services
- » Universities
- » Hospitals
- » County and national parks, city parks
- » Churches
- » History
- » Affordability vs other regions
- » Sports love – sports bring people together
- » Centrally located – close to US population, accessible (if you have a car)
- » Libraries
- » Community recreation centers
- » Police and fire
- » Shopping district
- » Local media is collaborative

WHAT ACTIONS MIGHT WE TAKE TO MAKE STOW MORE VIBRANT?

Keeping local businesses thriving in small towns

Kent as an example:

- » Main street, marketing and organizing events
- » Stakeholders willing to invest and risk
- » Built an environment -- physical connections
- » Unique businesses that are locally owned and collaborate
- » City Council willing to take these risks too -- connections and cooperation, will support those stakeholders as they take risks
- » Customer base

Individuals

- » Patronize local businesses with discretionary dollars
- » If resources, invest in local development
- » Give input (hopefully it's heard) about what they want built in environs

Government

- » Support the risk takers (tax breaks, cooperation with private sector)
- » Built environment that feels cohesive, welcoming

Institutions

- » Chamber-like organizations that also plan events and market the district
- » Locally owned business supporting each other

All people connected, informed, engaged -- Public spaces, programming, recreation, affordable, accessible, available for all ages, community connections -- Informed and engaged citizens, better public knowledge and discussion, greater awareness of what's available and not available, civility, volunteering (young and old), outreach

- » Media needs to be engaged in community
- » Meet people where they are, parks churches, playgrounds, etc
- » Let people know we are listening and we are willing to take action, not just media but public figures and community members
- » Address, come to grips with latent racism, prejudices and or implicit bias
- » Be transparent

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:

- News media has a role in helping communities get better.
- Local media is committed to bettering community.
- The news media wants to engage the community, but it takes time and resources.
- We need to find ways to be better connected to our communities throughout region.
- Building relationships and bridges is extremely important (with all stakeholders)
- It matters that you (collectively) participate in creating/charting a vibrant community. No one can sit on the bench.
- We need to collaborate - across the region, among businesses, citizen-to-citizen & citizen-to-government & vice versa - in trust and good faith if we have a shot at revitalizing struggling communities.
- Let's continue our conversation on making our community vibrant and take individual actions to move us toward that goal.
- We all need to get more involved in our communities from our neighborhood to schools and city

PERSONAL ACTIONS

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

- I've been inspired by this meeting to plan conversations like these at Kent State. Student media should listen to KSU students/faculty.
- I will continue to reach out to individuals and organizations in my community and try not to become discouraged.
- Go to local council, school board meetings, etc. to learn more about involvement in my community.
- I am working with the Portage County Democratic Party attempting to make positive change at the county, state, and federal level.
- Get involved early to model community building/engagement for my son.
- I will patronize my local businesses and make sure my friends and family do, too. (Rescheduling a Starbucks coffee meeting to a local diner!)
- I want to shop locally to support the businesses in my community.
- Attend a public meeting I normally would not attend to become better educated.



PROJECT MEDIA PARTNERS

[Akron Beacon Journal/Ohio.com](http://AkronBeaconJournal.com)

AKRON BEACON JOURNAL
@OHIODOTCOM
BJNEWS@THEBEACONJOURNAL.COM

The Akron Beacon Journal is a morning newspaper in Akron, Ohio, and is distributed throughout Northeast Ohio.

CantonRep.com
CONNECTING STARK COUNTY

THE CANTON REPOSITORY
@CANTONREPDOTCOM
NEWS@CANTONREP.COM

The Repository is an American daily local newspaper serving the greater Canton, Stark County, Ohio, area.

CLEVELAND Jewish News

CLEVELAND JEWISH NEWS
@CLEVELANDJEWISHNEWS
ENEWS@CJN.ORG

The Cleveland Jewish News is a weekly Jewish newspaper covering local, national, and international news of Jewish interest.

THE PLAIN DEALER

 cleveland.com

CLEVELAND PLAIN DEALER
@THEPLAINDEALER
NEWS@CLEVELAND.COM

The Plain Dealer is the major daily newspaper of Cleveland, Ohio, United States.

THE DEVIL STRIP
AKRON MUSIC, ART & CULTURE

THE DEVIL STRIP
@AKRONDEVILSTRIP
ROSALIE@THEDEVILSTRIP.COM

The Devil Strip is an Akron news, arts, music and culture organization.

The Vindicator

THE YOUNGSTOWN VINDICATOR
@VINDICATOR
NEWS@VINDY.COM

The Youngstown Vindicator is a daily newspaper serving Youngstown, Ohio, United States and the Mahoning County region as well as southern Trumbull County and northern Columbiana County.

Tribune Chronicle

THE WARREN TRIBUNE CHRONICLE
@TRIBTODAY
CONTACT@TRIBTODAY.COM

The Tribune Chronicle is a daily morning newspaper serving Warren, Ohio and the Mahoning Valley area.



WKSU
@WKSU
NEWS@WKSU.ORG

WKSU is a non-commercial educational radio station licensed to Kent, Ohio, primarily serving the Akron metro area, and is a service of Kent State University.



WKYC 3 CLEVELAND
@WKYC
CHANNEL3@WKYC.COM

WKYC is an NBC-affiliated television station licensed to Cleveland, Ohio, United States.

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

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

