



Economic Vitality

Economic vitality in Worthington is not primarily a story of growth. It is a story of reinvestment. As a fully built-out community, Worthington cannot expand its way to a stronger tax base. Instead, the City's long-term fiscal health depends on the quality and productivity of the employment that already exists here, on its ability to attract businesses aligned with its opportunity sites and regional advantages, and on the strength of the places where people choose to work, shop, and spend time.

This chapter establishes the economic development strategy for Worthington's next planning horizon. It reflects a core theme from Vision Worthington and the planning process: that economic vitality is inseparable from quality of place. The environments where people want to work, shop, and spend time are the same environments that attract employers competing for talent.

The chapter is organized around four strategic priorities:

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 4. Support great places and spaces that people want to live, work, shop, and eat

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 5. Target industries that support Central Ohio's development focus and the context of Worthington's opportunity areas

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 6. Ensure Worthington proactively strengthens its economic development capacity

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 7. Establish clear policies and procedures for the use of incentives and other economic development tools

These priorities and the actions that follow are designed to work alongside the Land Use and Character chapter, which addresses the physical development standards and opportunity area frameworks that make Worthington's economic vision achievable.

CHAPTER ORGANIZATION

- Context
- Fiscal Impact of Land Use
- STRATEGIC PRIORITY 4
- STRATEGIC PRIORITY 5
- Target Industries
- STRATEGIC PRIORITY 6
- STRATEGIC PRIORITY 7

Context

THEMES FROM PUBLIC INPUT

During the first round of public input, participants were asked to identify on a map where they saw opportunities for Housing, Transportation, Commercial Centers and Corridors, or Placemaking and Quality of Life. Economic vitality was not a standalone category, but strong economic themes emerged through the Commercial Centers and Corridors responses. The most common themes were:

- Redeveloping aging and underutilized office buildings and commercial corridors, particularly along High Street, Wilson Bridge Road, and Huntley Road, where participants identified significant opportunity for reinvestment
- Attracting destination-quality restaurants, entertainment, and gathering places, with many participants noting that residents currently leave Worthington to find these experiences in Dublin, Hilliard, and other communities
- Supporting mixed-use development that layers retail, dining, office, and housing on key sites, rather than continuing patterns of single-use commercial development with surface parking and deep setbacks
- Improving the walkability and pedestrian experience along commercial corridors, including bringing buildings closer to the street, reducing parking minimums, and creating connections between destinations
- Activating major underutilized sites including the 1033 High Street property, the 6700 N High Street, Worthington Mall, and the Wilson Bridge corridor, which participants consistently identified as missed opportunities for the community

KEY CONDITIONS AND TRENDS

The Economic Vitality chapter is informed by primary research conducted in early 2025, including interviews with economic development partners and real estate experts, an Economic Development Speaker Series, and analysis of secondary data including existing market reports and fiscal studies.

Worthington must grow its income tax base across payroll withholdings, business income, and work-from-home residents.

Worthington's income tax collections have grown steadily, rising from \$23.5 million in 2014 to \$35.1 million in 2024. In nominal terms that trajectory looks healthy, but when adjusted for inflation the picture is considerably more sobering. Real revenue growth over the decade has been modest at best. The City's operations are heavily reliant on income tax revenue, and sustaining (let alone growing) revenue base requires expanding employers located within the City, business income, and residents who work from home and pay tax where they live.

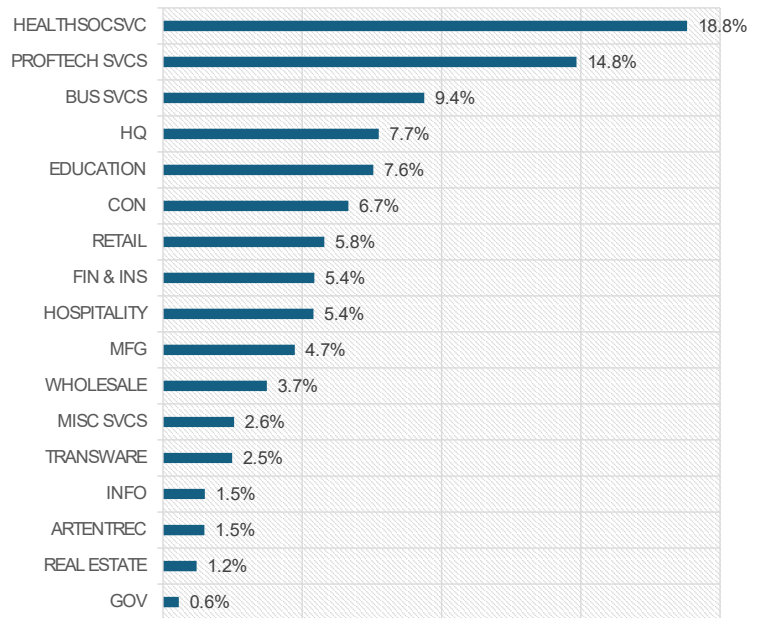
Worthington's employment mix is shifting, with implications for the type of space the City needs to attract and retain.

Healthcare is Worthington's largest employment sector at nearly 19 percent of jobs, but faces potential headwinds from reductions in federal spending. Professional and technical services, which carry among the highest average wages in the region at over \$95,000, are growing both locally and across the Columbus MSA. However, many of these firms serve local clients rather than regional or national markets, which affects the scale and type of office space they require. Headquarters and high-value employers, which carry an average MSA wage of over \$129,000, represent a smaller but disproportionately important segment of the employment base.

Worthington competes for a specific slice of the regional economy, and positioning matters.

One Columbus targets eight industry sectors for the Columbus MSA, ranging from semiconductors and logistics to life sciences and headquarters operations. Not all are a fit for Worthington. Sectors requiring large land areas, freight access, or industrial infrastructure are better suited to other parts of the region. Worthington's competitive advantages, like its position along I-270, a highly skilled resident workforce, and a high quality of place, align with sectors that value walkable environments and proximity to talent: headquarters and operations centers, professional and technical services, ambulatory medical, biopharma, software and AI, and creative and design firms. The Forge Fields area adds additional capacity for sectors oriented toward R&D, advanced manufacturing, and supply chain functions in growth industries.

KEY INDUSTRIES IN WORTHINGTON, % OF JOBS (2022)



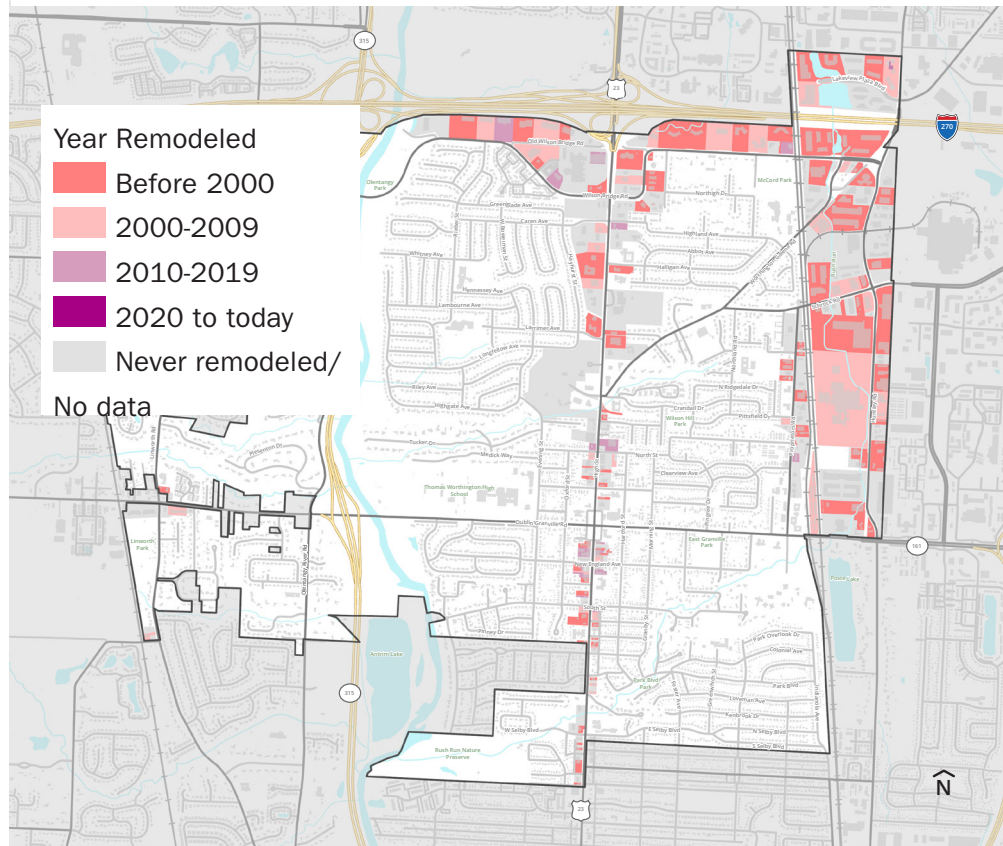
Source: Ninigret Partners analysis of ontheMap.gov data (2022 most recent available)

Note: This data uses primary jobs

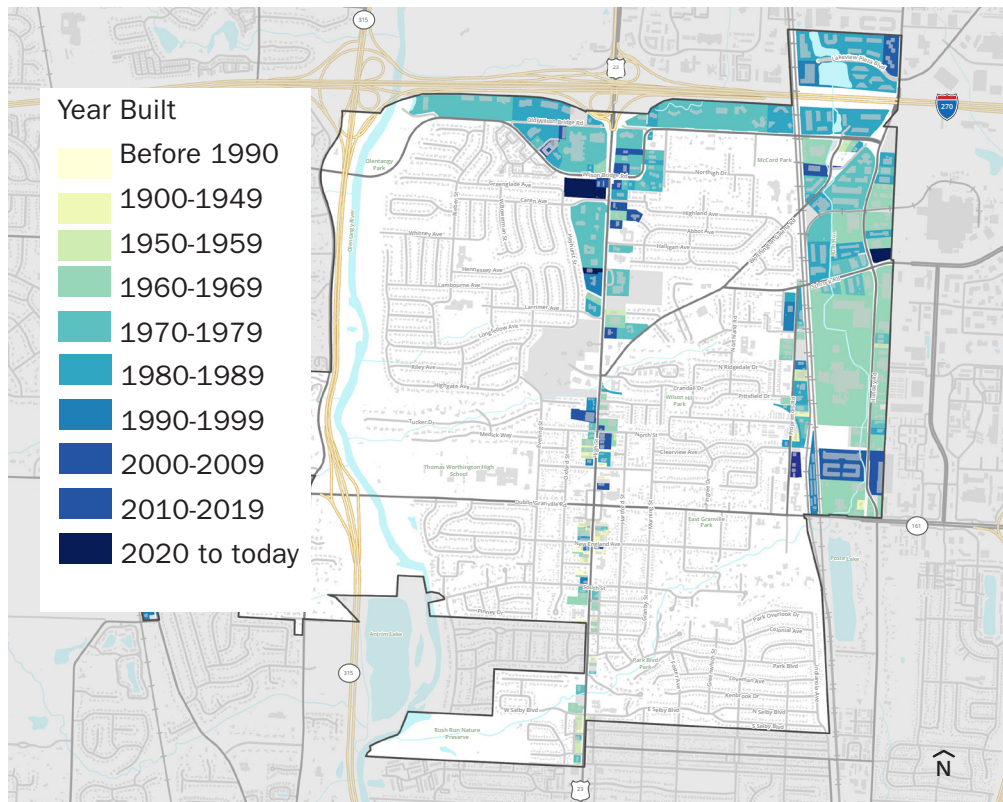
Worthington's existing office stock is aging and largely Class C, making redevelopment and modernization a fiscal priority.

Nearly 2.5 million square feet of office space exists in the City, but the majority is Class C, less than 11 percent is Class A, and less than 1 percent was built after 2000. The commercial parcel maps tell the same story spatially: most of the City's employment areas were built before 1979, and recent remodeling activity has been limited and scattered. The current vacancy rate of 21.7 percent, while below the Greater Columbus average of 23.9 percent, reflects a stock that is increasingly difficult to lease without investment. Occupied office buildings are a direct contributor to the City's tax base.

COMMERCIAL AND INDUSTRIAL PARCELS YEAR OF BUILDING REMODEL



COMMERCIAL AND INDUSTRIAL PARCELS YEAR BUILT



Source: Planning NEXT analysis of Franklin County Auditor property records

TOPICAL DEFINITIONS

This section provides definitions for planning and economic development terms used throughout the chapter. These definitions are written generically so that the remainder of the chapter can focus on Worthington-specific conditions and recommendations.

Community Improvement Corporation (CIC)

Established under Ohio's nonprofit corporation law (ORC Chapter 1702), a CIC may be created on a stand-alone basis or in partnership with a municipality, township, or county. CICs have broad authority to borrow money, make loans, acquire and dispose of real property, and enter into contracts with local jurisdictions. They can acquire or sell land owned or conveyed by the local jurisdiction, and they operate without advertising or bidding requirements. CICs are designed to promote public welfare, stabilize the economy, provide employment, and assist in community development. They are reliant upon a strategic framework like this Comprehensive Plan to guide their efforts.

Tax Increment Financing (TIF)

Authorized under ORC Chapter 5709, a TIF exempts an agreed upon percentage of the increased property value resulting from a development project from taxation. Instead, the property owner makes payments in lieu of taxes (PILOTs) equal to what would have been paid on the exempted value. Taxes on the pre-existing property value continue to be collected. The PILOTs are directed into a TIF fund managed by the local jurisdiction to pay for public infrastructure improvements that serve the development. Generally, a TIF exemption cannot exceed 75 percent over a 10-year period, though a higher percentage or longer term may be permitted with school district consent. The widespread use of TIF across Central Ohio has effectively created an environment in which non-TIF areas grow more slowly than their TIF-supported counterparts.

New Community Authority (NCA)

Established under ORC Chapter 349, NCAs were created to finance the construction and ongoing maintenance of infrastructure (roads, utilities, schools) and community assets (swimming pools, recreation centers, plazas). An NCA can acquire, hold, or dispose of property; collect charges to cover costs; apply for grants and loans; and issue bonds. NCAs are initiated by a developer and approved by the corresponding local jurisdiction. They typically involve a millage charge against property value within a defined area to fund specified costs, and they carry an expiration date, established in the creating ordinance, of up to 30 years.

Public-Private Partnership (PPP)

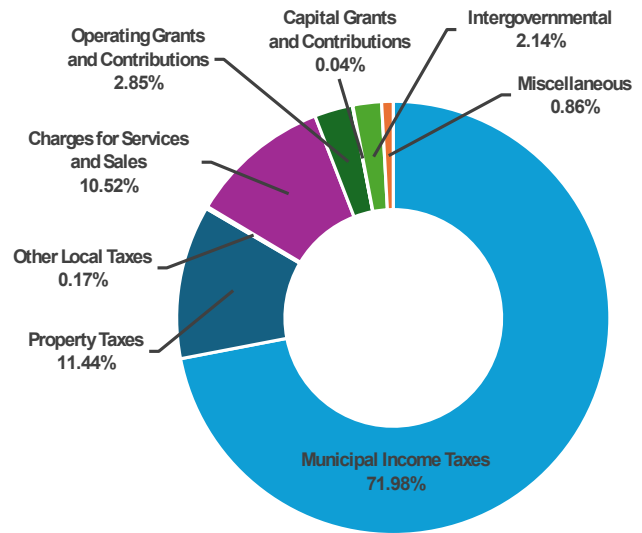
A contractual arrangement or contract between a local jurisdiction and a private entity to oversee negotiations with landowners and guide development according to an adopted plan. A PPP involves a formal legal agreement, investment of City staff time for contract management, and public communication. The private entity typically negotiates with property owners, conducts real property transactions, and manages debt issuance for development costs and public infrastructure construction. The local jurisdiction defines contract terms, monitors compliance, and communicates with the public. Under the Ohio Revised Code, the powers associated with a PPP may also be administered through a CIC or an NCA.

Fiscal impact of land use in Worthington

The City's long-term revenues and costs are substantially shaped by how land is used. To understand those relationships, the City commissioned a cost-of-land-use study with TischlerBise to analyze the fiscal impact of various land use types. The central question was: what type of development pays for itself? Key takeaways include:

- The City is heavily reliant on income tax to fund operations. This reliance creates a strong need for quality nonresidential land uses that generate employment within Worthington's boundaries.
- Residential areas currently do not pay their own way, because income tax is assessed in the jurisdiction where a person is employed, and 93 percent of Worthington residents work outside the City.
- Remote and hybrid work presents a fiscal opportunity. As more residents work from home, the City captures a greater share of income tax that would otherwise flow to outside jurisdictions. This reinforces the importance of quality of place. Residents who choose to live in Worthington because of its neighborhoods, amenities, and walkable environments are also potential contributors to the City's tax base.
- Mixed-use development can generate positive fiscal impacts when the mix of uses is calibrated to do so. These projects can deliver community amenities while supporting the City's revenue base.
- Fiscal outcomes must be balanced against non-fiscal priorities, including environmental stewardship, housing affordability, quality of life, and a range of services. The goal is an appropriate mix of land uses, not fiscal optimization alone.

SOURCES OF FUNDS (2024)



Source: City of Worthington Annual Comprehensive Financial Report 2024 pg. 9

Note: excludes \$2,380,019 in investment earnings

WORKING FROM HOME: A FISCAL OPPORTUNITY

Ohio municipalities collect income tax based on where a person works, not where they live. When a Worthington resident works at an office in another jurisdiction, that income tax goes elsewhere. When they work from home, Worthington collects it.

This makes quality of place: great neighborhoods, walkable amenities, parks, and housing variety. These are direct fiscal assets. Residents who choose Worthington for its livability and who work remotely are among the City's highest-value taxpayers, contributing income tax revenue that would otherwise flow to Columbus, Dublin, or other employment centers.

Investments that make Worthington an attractive place to live and work from home are also investments in the City's long-term revenue base.

Impact of development on Worthington schools

School districts in Ohio are primarily funded by property taxes, making land uses that generate high property values per acre especially important to school revenue. Costs, as they relate to land use, are largely driven by the number of students generated. But most costs are not linear and would only be significantly impacted by large changes to student yields in a certain area.

Regional development patterns indicate that single-family neighborhoods and older multi-family developments have a significantly larger share of units with three or more bedrooms than new multi-family developments, which are typically marketed to young professionals and move-down empty-nesters. As a result, single-family neighborhoods generate more students per unit and per acre than new multi-family developments.

- The Worthington City School District serves an area of approximately 20 square miles, extending well beyond the City's jurisdiction to include portions of the City of Columbus, the Village of Riverlea, and two adjacent townships. The district has approximately 10,700 students and is the 14th-largest in the State. The district is currently in the second phase of a three-phase capital improvement program, with construction underway at both high schools, the natatorium, and athletic fields.
- The Worthington City School District's strong academic reputation makes the area attractive to young families. However, the 2026 Enrollment Projections Report indicates that enrollment is expected to decline slightly over the next ten years across all modeled scenarios. Given the variable nature of enrollment projections, close coordination between the school district and adjoining jurisdictions regarding future development is critical to ensure proper planning for facilities and services.

WORTHINGTON SCHOOL DISTRICT MAP

ESTIMATED ANNUAL FISCAL IMPACT OF FUTURE LAND USE TYPES IN WORTHINGTON

Each land use type plays an important role in creating a complete community, but not all land uses have the same financial impact on the City. While fiscal impact is important, other issues such as the environment, housing affordability, jobs/housing balance and quality of life must also be considered. The following pages apply the assumptions and findings of Worthington’s Cost of Land Use analysis prepared in 2025 by TischlerBise to this plan’s Future Land Use and Character Types. The mixed-use character types on the follow page have a highly variable fiscal impact that depends on the mix of uses, the number of jobs, and wages of those jobs. Per unit and per acre impacts are rounded. **These figures should be interpreted as “order of magnitude” annual impacts to the City of Worthington.**

Residential

Residential areas are essential for a complete community. Due to the way cities in Ohio are funded, however, they generate less income tax revenue than the cost to serve them. This analysis reflects the fiscal impact of existing residential development. It is backward-looking and should not be interpreted for opposition to new housing. Because most service costs are fixed, adding residential units to an already-served community would spread costs over more units, improving per-unit fiscal performance. Higher-density residential has a meaningfully better per-unit fiscal impact than lower-density development.

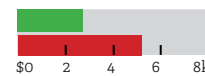


Residential, Suburban



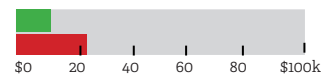
Conventional single family detached subdivision. Assumes 4 DU/acre, the same density as modeled in the analysis.

Per Unit



NET: **-\$3,200**

Per Acre



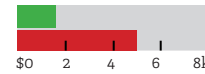
NET: **-\$12,900**

Residential, Small lot and Attached



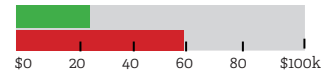
Assumes a single-family attached at an average density of 12 DU/acre, the same density as modeled in the analysis.

Per Unit



NET: **-\$3,000**

Per Acre



NET: **-\$36,700**

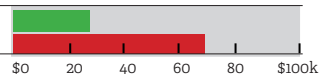
Multi-family (24-41 units per acre)

Per Unit



NET: **-\$2,100**

Per Acre



NET: **-\$50,600**

Commercial & Employment

		Per 1,000 sf	Per Acre at current patterns (0.25 FAR)
Class A Office	NET: \$4,900		NET: \$54,000
Class B & C Office	NET: \$4,650		NET: \$50,000
Retail (shopping center with anchor)	NET: -\$1,600		NET: -\$17,000
Retail (pad, strip, or outlot)	NET: -\$2,500		NET: -\$28,000
Light Industrial (flex)	NET: \$2,000		NET: \$21,000

Mixed Use

The future mixed use land use types yield different fiscal outcomes depending on various assumptions. To ensure that these areas have an overall net benefit, a target is described below. Target case includes an allowance for residential and retail, which increases costs and decreases revenue, but still likely yields a net benefit.

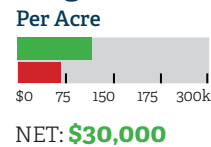
FAR = Floor Area Ratio, a measure of non-residential density.

Corridor Transition

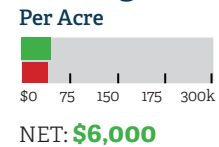


Existing conditions assume: 45% Class B&C Office, 20% Residential Attached, 35% Retail at FAR 0.25. Target assumes a district-wide FAR of 0.60, an average residential density: 12-24 DU/acre, a district-wide minimum of 45% Class B & C office use by gross floor area with a mix of retail and residential.

Target Case



Existing Conditions

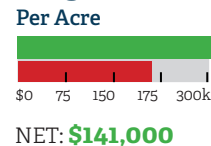


Wilson Bridge, Mixed Use

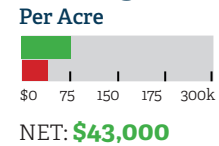


Existing conditions assume: 90% Class B&C Office and 10% Retail at FAR 0.25. Target assumes a district-wide FAR of 2.0 with an average residential density of ≤25 DU/acre, 60% minimum office employment by floor area (Class A) with remaining space as retail and residential.

Target Case



Existing Conditions

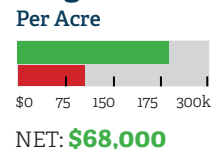


Corridor, Mixed Use

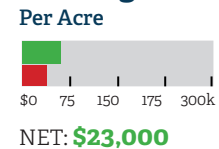


Existing conditions assume: 65% Class B&C Office and 35% Retail at FAR 0.25. Target assumes a district-wide FAR of 1.0, an average residential density: 12-24 DU/acre (about 25%), 55% office use by floor area and 20% retail.

Target Case



Existing Conditions

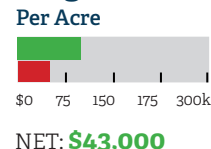


Forge Fields, Mixed Use

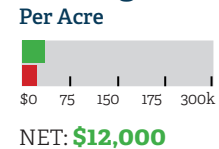


Existing conditions assume: 80% Flex/Light Industrial and 20% Class B&C Office. Target assumes a district-wide FAR of 0.75, with 30% residential at 12 DU/acre 30% Class B & C office, and 30% Flex/Light Industrial use by gross floor area.

Target Case



Existing Conditions

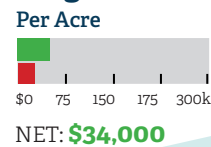


Forge Fields, Flex

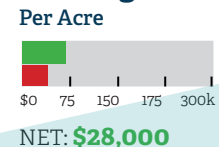


Existing conditions assume: 80% Flex/Light Industrial and 20% Class B&C Office. Target assumes a district-wide FAR of 0.5 and 100% Flex/Light Industrial — no residential or retail.

Target Case



Existing Conditions



STRATEGIC PRIORITY 4:

SUPPORT GREAT PLACES AND SPACES THAT PEOPLE WANT TO LIVE, WORK, SHOP, AND EAT

Why This Matters

Worthington's ability to attract and retain employers depends on more than available land and incentives; it depends on the quality of place. Companies competing for talent increasingly make location decisions based on the walkability, amenity mix, and character of the communities where they locate. Old Worthington's authentic, pedestrian-scaled environment, the City's trail network, and the potential for world-class mixed-use development on key opportunity sites are genuine competitive assets in the regional market for jobs and investment.

The strategic directions under this priority set the economic rationale for place-based investment. The physical implementation, through land use, regulations, and opportunity area plans, is addressed through Strategic Priorities 2 and 3 in the Land Use and Character chapter and within each Opportunity Area section. This priority should be read alongside those chapters as an integrated whole.

IMPLEMENTS THESE GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Principles 2, 9, and 10.

Alignment with Vision Worthington

This Strategic Priority advances several Vision Worthington commitments:



Worthington's economy is balanced and resilient. High-quality places attract high-quality employers, strengthening the tax base and reducing fiscal dependence on any single sector or land use type.



Worthington offers a high quality of life. Walkable, mixed-use environments and a healthy Old Worthington enhance daily experience for residents, workers, and visitors alike.



Strategic Directions

Unlike the Implementation Actions in Strategic Priorities 5–8, which describe specific administrative steps the City will take, the directions below describe economic development outcomes that depend on physical place-making addressed in other chapters of this plan. Each is accompanied by a cross-reference to the relevant Strategic Priority or Opportunity Area section where implementation is addressed.

4.1. **Promote “Trophy” Mixed-Use Development on key opportunity sites.** Central Ohio competes with peer metropolitan areas, including Raleigh-Durham, Dallas-Fort Worth, Indianapolis, and Austin, for talent, jobs, and investment. Each of these markets has suburbs with walkable centers, a mix of housing options, and “Trophy” developments: Class A++ office space with flexible floor plates and rich amenities, located in mixed-use environments that attract headquarters, product development, and similar high-value employers. Examples in Central Ohio include Grandview Yard in Grandview Heights and Bridge Park in Dublin. Worthington has an opportunity to develop comparable, world-class destinations on sites with assembled acreage, direct highway access, high visibility, and proximity to existing trail and park networks. A key consideration is structured parking and how that infrastructure is funded. See Strategic Priorities 2 and 3 (Land Use and Character) and the relevant Opportunity Area sections for the physical development framework.

See examples of “Trophy” mixed use development outside of Central Ohio on the following pages.

4.2. **Keep Old Worthington healthy and vibrant.** Old Worthington represents the heart of the community and provides a high-quality, authentic, walkable experience that is a genuine economic asset. The Worthington Partnership notes that more than half of visitors to events are non-Worthington residents, and significant growth in Farmer’s Market attendance underscores the district’s regional draw. As activity continues to grow, it will be important to monitor the density of people, parking demand, and car usage to ensure that growth enhances rather than degrades the quality of the experience.

The Worthington Parking Needs and Garage Feasibility Study found that people have trouble locating available parking spaces, long-term parkers tend to limit access to parking, and that expected growth may impact the existing parking situation. Appropriate wayfinding and

TROPHY MIXED USE EXAMPLES

Trophy Mixed-Use development combines Class A++ office space alongside retail, dining, residential, and hospitality in a walkable, destination-quality environment. These places attract headquarters, product development, and high-value employers by offering workers and residents a live-work-play experience that suburban office parks cannot match. Central Ohio competes with Raleigh-Durham, Dallas-Fort Worth, Indianapolis, and Austin for talent and investment, markets where this development type is already well established. Closer examples exist in the region, but the examples on the following pages represent the broader competitive set Worthington aspires to.

North Hills — Raleigh, NC

Since its Main District opened in 2004 on the site of a demolished regional mall, North Hills has become the defining presence of Midtown Raleigh, distinctive in character, with office towers, hotels, residential, and street-level retail organized around parks and gathering spaces that give the district a genuine sense of place. It is perhaps the strongest analog to Worthington's situation: a first-ring suburban location that chose reinvestment over sprawl and kept raising the bar.

Michael Hsu Office of Architecture

ELEMENTS

- **Class A++ office space:** flexible floor plates, advanced systems, and a level of finish that attracts headquarters and high-value employers
- **A regional destination:** restaurants, retail, hospitality, and entertainment that draw visitors from across the area
- **Exceptional public space:** plazas, parks, and streetscapes that are central to the design
- **Walkable and human-scaled:** organized around people on foot, with ground-floor activation and connections to trails and transit
- **Elevated design quality that earns its context:** architecture and materials held to a higher standard, distinctive without being out of place
- **True live-work-play mix:** residential, hospitality, dining, and office woven together so the district functions around the clock



Visitnorthhills.com



Economic Vitality

RO River Oaks District — Houston, TX

Situated on 18 acres in Houston's Uptown corridor, River Oaks District is compact and intensely curated: a pedestrian-oriented street grid of luxury retail, dining, boutique offices, and residential above, framed by wide sidewalks, shade trees, and a level of finish that makes the experience feel more like a great urban neighborhood than a development. It demonstrates that Trophy Mixed-Use is defined by quality and distinctiveness, not acreage.



The Domain — Austin, TX

Redeveloped from a former industrial campus, The Domain has grown into a vertically integrated mixed-use development that Austin now calls its "second downtown." Major tech employers anchor Class A office space woven together with retail, residential, hotel, and a dining and entertainment district with a strong local identity, active from early morning until late night.

Yard at Fishers District — Fishers, IN

Spread across 123 acres, Fishers District anchors the downtown of one of Indianapolis's fastest-growing suburbs. It weaves together apartments, office, hotel, retail, dining, and entertainment into a walkable district organized around pedestrian paths and activated public spaces.



Yardatfishersdistrict.com

River Park — Austin, TX

At 109 acres, River Park is reimagining a fully built-out urban infill site from the ground up in southeast Austin. Still under construction, it integrates housing, employment, over 30 acres of green space and trails, and a major entertainment venue into a transit-connected neighborhood, an example of the ambition possible when a large opportunity site is approached comprehensively.



Austin Business Journal

Legacy Town Center — Plano, TX

The first development in the U.S. to create a mixed-use town center within an existing suburban office park, Legacy Town Center transformed a corporate campus environment into a walkable district of offices, retail, restaurants, housing, and hospitality, complete with parks, plazas, and a street grid designed for people, not cars. It demonstrated that employment-anchored suburban locations could become true urban destinations.

Crocker Park — Westlake, OH

Spanning 120 acres in Cleveland's western suburbs, Crocker Park was conceived to fill the downtown void left by suburban office migration and succeeded by committing to authentic urban design: a real street grid, varied architecture, short blocks, and ground-floor retail alongside residences and Class A office. It has drawn nearly 20 million annual visitors and anchored the identity of the entire region.



navigation to underutilized parking options will be critical. See the Old Worthington Opportunity Area section for the physical development framework.

4.3. **Promote infill redevelopment of selected commercial and industrial properties.** Worthington is essentially built out, with limited opportunities for greenfield development. Several properties have been identified as opportunity areas where land is underutilized, with surface parking, buildings that no longer meet contemporary employment needs, or changing ownership, making them candidates for reinvestment. Market uncertainty makes speculative office development unlikely in the near term. However, patience in the identified Opportunity Areas and allowing infrastructure investments to build investment potential will maximize future vibrancy. Supporting infill redevelopment through mixed-use development can build the City's tax base and population, helping sustain a vibrant retail and employment sector. See Strategic Priorities 2 and 3 (Land Use and Character), as well as the individual Opportunity Area sections, for the physical development framework.

4.4. **Support modernization and diversification of employment space options.** Business models and work environments are evolving rapidly. Worthington's zoning and development standards should support flex space, hybrid smaller office suites, innovation space, and co-working environments that reflect changes in how and where people work. This is particularly important for the City's industrial areas, such as Forge Fields at Rush Run, where updated standards can accommodate light industrial, maker, and supply-chain tenants. See Strategic Priority 1 (Zoning Code Reform) and the Forge Fields Opportunity Area section for the physical development framework.

· Add sidebar/graphic

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 5:

TARGET INDUSTRIES THAT SUPPORT CENTRAL OHIO’S DEVELOPMENT FOCUS AND THE CONTEXT OF WORTHINGTON’S OPPORTUNITY AREAS

Why This Matters

Worthington has limited opportunity for the type of mega-site development occurring in other parts of suburban Columbus. But within its commercial corridors and opportunity areas, the City has real competitive advantages: its geographic position along I-270, a highly skilled resident workforce, and a high-quality place. Focusing recruitment on industries that match these assets and on sectors consistent with One Columbus regional targets ensures that the City pursues opportunities it can actually win, rather than competing on every front.

A focused target industry strategy also makes Business Retention & Expansion (BRE) outreach and incentive decisions more effective: staff know which businesses to prioritize, and Council has a clear basis for evaluating incentive requests. Technology and industry are constantly evolving, so the target list should be revisited every three to five years.

IMPLEMENTS THESE GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Principles 2, 9, and 10.

Alignment with Vision Worthington

This Strategic Priority advances several Vision Worthington commitments:



Worthington’s economy is balanced and resilient. A targeted, diversified employment base reduces fiscal vulnerability to economic cycles in any single sector.



Worthington’s leadership is open, forward-thinking, and collaborative. Aligning with One Columbus and regional partners on target industries reflects coordinated, strategic governance rather than ad hoc recruitment.

Implementation Actions

- 5.1. **Update and apply a target industry framework.** Periodically refine the City’s target industry list based on regional economic trends, the available building inventory, and Worthington’s competitive positioning, and use it to guide marketing, recruitment, and incentive decisions. The recommended target industries for 2026 are identified in the Target Industries section of this chapter. The list should be reviewed by the Economic Development Team every three to five years to assess continued relevance and identify emerging sectors.

5.2. **Maintain a structured Business Retention & Expansion (BRE) program.** Proactively engage Worthington’s existing employers through regular outreach to track emerging space and workforce needs, identify early signs of potential relocation or contraction, and respond with coordinated problem-solving across City departments. Key elements include: tracking interactions through a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system to replace the current informal spreadsheet-based approach; maintaining an up-to-date inventory of available commercial and industrial space to assist businesses that need to grow or transition within the City; and coordinating with regional partners, including One Columbus and JobsOhio, to draw on resources beyond the City’s own capacity. The target industries should guide BRE outreach priorities.

5.3. **Work with regional partners to analyze income tax filing patterns and ensure the City is fully capturing its tax base.** A recurring pattern observed across Ohio municipalities is a discrepancy between at-place employment figures reported in federal sources and the number of business income tax filers reported through RITA. The gap may reflect businesses that are present and operating in the City but not fully captured in the municipal tax base, whether due to filing complexity, lack of awareness of local tax obligations, or other factors. For a city as reliant on income tax revenue as Worthington, even a modest gap has meaningful fiscal implications. The City should work with trusted regional partners and peer municipalities to better understand the nature and scale of this discrepancy in Worthington relative to comparable communities. This collaborative approach can help identify whether the gap reflects a data alignment issue, a structural or characteristic of the local employment base, and what, if any, targeted outreach or administrative steps would be appropriate in response.

• Add sidebar about the City's current BRE activities

Target Industries

The Worthington Together planning process evaluated the economic profiles of both the community and the region. The assessment found that Worthington offers geographic advantages along I-270 and near I-71 and SR-315, and that its high quality of place makes it competitive for skilled workers as office demand shifts across the region. To build on these advantages and advance the City’s fiscal goals, the following industry sectors should be targeted. These industries are consistent with One Columbus targets and reflect the existing talent pool in the north Columbus metropolitan area.

Citywide Target Industries



Software Systems. Examples include cybersecurity, AI applications and orchestration, customer service support centers, software-as-a-service (SaaS) businesses, and modeling and simulation.



BioPharma Sector. Examples include research labs, product development, regulatory and clinical trials management, and administrative operations.



Creative / Design Sector. Examples include industrial design, architecture, engineering, advertising and marketing, and digital production.



Professional / Technical Services. Includes accounting, legal, and consulting firms not captured in other target industry categories.



Headquarters and Operations Centers. Includes corporate C-suite functions, regional leadership, and internal support functions such as accounting, human resources, and data processing.



Ambulatory Medical Services. Distinct from a standard medical office, this category includes ambulatory surgery centers, infusion services, medical labs, and radiology.

Forge Fields Area Target Industries

In addition to the citywide target industries, several sectors are well-suited to Worthington's Forge Fields area, given its strengths in R&D, advanced manufacturing, technology, start-ups, and eco-friendly characteristics.



Life Science Supply Chain. Businesses that provide equipment, services, and logistics supporting biotech, pharmaceutical, and research laboratory operations.



Aerial Autonomous Vehicle (AAV) Supply Chain. Component manufacturers, sensor and control systems suppliers, and logistics functions related to crewless aerial vehicles.



Electric Systems Supply Chain. Businesses that design, manufacture, distribute, or support equipment for electrical power and control systems in electric vehicles, battery storage, and the power grid.



"Cottage" Food & Beverage Manufacturing. Small-scale food production or beverage businesses requiring combined manufacturing, distribution, and management space.



Specialty Packaging Materials and Services. Businesses that design and/or manufacture packaging solutions for products ranging from electronics and biopharma to food.



Cold Chain Services. Businesses that provide specialized storage, handling, and transportation of temperature-sensitive products such as vaccines, biologics, or fresh food.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 6:

ENSURE WORTHINGTON PROACTIVELY STRENGTHENS ITS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CAPACITY

Why This Matters

Worthington has an economic development capacity profile similar to many communities in metro Columbus. But the City is likely to face an unusually large number of major development projects over the next several years, which will consume substantial staff time and compete directly with day-to-day business retention, small business support, and recruitment functions. At the same time, realizing the redevelopment potential of Worthington’s opportunity areas will require tools and organizational structures that the City does not yet fully have in place.

Investing in capacity now (in the CIC, in staffing, and in small business support tools) positions Worthington to respond to opportunities rather than react to them.

IMPLEMENTS THESE GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Principles 2, 9, and 10.

Alignment with Vision Worthington

This Strategic Priority advances several Vision Worthington commitments:



Worthington’s leadership is open, forward-thinking, and collaborative. Building organizational capacity reflects a proactive approach to governance, one that anticipates demands rather than scrambling to meet them.



Worthington’s economy is balanced and resilient. A well-resourced economic development operation ensures the City can both steward existing businesses and actively shape new investment.

Implementation Actions

- 6.1. **Invest in the City’s Community Improvement Corporation (CIC).** A Community Improvement Corporation is a state-authorized tool that gives a municipality the ability to act at the speed of the private market. A CIC can support land assembly and disposition, gap financing, and master developer roles, among other functions. Neighboring Hilliard has used its CIC, the Hilliard Development Corporation, to significant effect, including supporting the development of the Center Street Market. Worthington’s CIC should be capitalized with additional funding and aligned with the priority investment areas identified in this plan. As major

development projects move forward at Wilson Bridge, North High, and Forge Fields, the CIC can serve as the City's primary instrument for actively shaping outcomes rather than simply responding to private proposals. See the Topical Definitions section of this chapter for a full description of CIC authority under Ohio law.

- 6.2. **Ensure adequate staffing capacity for economic development functions.** Many peer inner-ring suburbs maintain two full-time economic development staff members. As the BRE program is expanded, the target industry framework is deployed, and major redevelopment projects advance at priority sites, the City should assess whether additional staff capacity, through direct hiring, contracted support, or a shared services arrangement, is needed to execute the full range of activities identified in this plan.
- 6.3. **Expand the small business development toolkit.** The City's existing facade program has had notable successes but should be broadened to serve a wider range of space-development needs for small businesses and smaller commercial property owners. An expanded toolkit should address facade and exterior improvements; ADA compliance and accessibility upgrades; selected tenant fit-out costs, including City- or County-required items such as fire suppression and grease traps. Assistance could be structured as a grant, a low- or no-interest loan, a forgivable loan, or a special assessment payback, with terms tied to the nature of the improvement. The City should also pursue technical assistance partnerships through small business support organizations to complement direct financial assistance.

Opportunistic Tools

The Opportunistic Tools are a menu of additional projects, policies, and programs that Worthington may consider for implementing the strategic priority. Where applicable, current strategies that the City should continue are described below.

- **Workforce development partnerships.** Coordination with Columbus State Community College, OhioMeansJobs, and area employers to align training programs with the target industry sectors and support business retention.
- **Facade improvement program.** Direct financial assistance for exterior improvements to commercial properties, as a component of the broader small business toolkit described in Action 6.3.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 7:

ESTABLISH CLEAR POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR THE USE OF INCENTIVES AND OTHER ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT TOOLS

Why This Matters

Worthington currently uses a range of economic development tools, including TIF, CRA agreements, NCA financing, the Venture Grant program, and negotiated incentive packages evaluated on a project-by-project basis. As redevelopment activity intensifies and the scale of individual projects grows, clear policies are important to avoid inconsistent outcomes and difficult negotiations with schools and other taxing entities. Establishing clear criteria for when and how tools are deployed protects both the City and its partners, signals to the development community that Worthington operates predictably and professionally, and ensures that public resources are directed toward projects that advance community goals.

IMPLEMENTS THESE GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Principles 2, 9, and 10.

Alignment with Vision Worthington

This Strategic Priority advances several Vision Worthington commitments:



Worthington's leadership is open, forward-thinking and collaborative. Transparent incentive policies reflect accountable governance and build trust with residents, businesses, and partner institutions.



Worthington's economy is balanced and resilient. Disciplined use of incentives ensures that public investment generates measurable fiscal and community returns.

Implementation Actions

- 7.1. **Formalize incentive policies and evaluation criteria.** The City should adopt a written set of guiding principles and evaluation criteria to govern when and how incentive tools are deployed, creating consistency and transparency. Key policy elements should include:
 - **“But for” determinations:** a finding that the project could not occur, or would not occur in the desired form, without the incentive.
 - **Hold-harmless guarantees on TIF projects:** ensuring TIF financing does not reduce existing school district revenue.

- **Gain-share provisions:** capturing a share of project revenues that exceed original projections and debt service requirements for public benefit.
- **Pre-negotiated CRA agreements for residential development:** establishing a standing agreement with Worthington City Schools so that housing CRA requests are evaluated against consistent, agreed-upon terms rather than negotiated individually for each project.
- **Consistency with the Comprehensive Plan:** affirming that incentive agreements advance the land use, economic vitality, and community character goals of this plan.

Opportunistic Tools

The Opportunistic Tools are a menu of additional projects, policies, and programs that Worthington may consider for implementing the strategic priority. Where applicable, current strategies that the City should continue are described below.

- **Targeted incentive agreements.** Negotiated agreements that tie public incentives to specific performance commitments, such as job creation, wage thresholds, or capital investment targets.
- **Public-private partnerships.** Formal arrangements to co-invest in major redevelopment projects, share risk, and align development outcomes with community goals.
- **Community Improvement Corporation (CIC).** A state-authorized entity that can conduct land assembly, provide gap financing, and take on master developer roles. See Action 6.1 and the Topical Definitions section for full details.
- **Periodic fiscal impact and employment-based analysis.** Regular updates to fiscal impact analysis and employment data to track progress against goals and inform future incentive and land use decisions.
- **New Community Authority (NCA).** Primarily used to fund infrastructure that supports development through a millage charge on property within a defined area. See the Topical Definitions section for full details.

DEVELOPMENT INCENTIVES IN WORTHINGTON

Worthington offers a comprehensive package of economic development incentives. The City's Economic Development Team evaluates each project on its own merits to determine whether incentives are appropriate. Key evaluation factors include the quality of jobs created, a business's growth prospects, community compatibility, the level of private investment, whether the project could not occur, or could not occur in the desired form, without the incentive, and commitment to remaining in Worthington. If incentives are warranted, the Economic Development Team negotiates a package tailored to each business's circumstances. The incentive policies established through Action 7.1 will provide a consistent framework within which this project-level evaluation occurs.