

*We showed*

SHOW THE WORLD HOW STRONG WE ARE

~~VOTE~~

VOTE EVERY  
WEEK!  
MON-THURS

*Is The*

MARION

STRONGESTTOWN.COM

MARCH 3 - APRIL 14 2025





# Marion County Regional Planning Commission

## Topics

- What is **Strong Towns** and the **Strongest Town Contest**?
- “**Is this the bottom yet?**” – Building relationships to rebuild a community.
  - Ken Lengieza, AICP, Director of Special Projects/We’ve-Seen-This-Before Detector.
- “**Ok, what do we have to work with?**” – Identifying and leveraging local resources and partners.
  - Evelyn Warr-Omness, Planning Director/Knower of All Things.
- “**Look at all we’ve done!**” – From survival to Strongest Town: Applying for and winning the 2025 Strongest Town Contest.
  - James Walker, Planning Aide/Personality Hire.

Serving the planning needs of:  
City of Marion

Villages of Caledonia, Green Camp, LaRue, Morral, New Bloomington, Prospect, Waldo,

Townships of Big Island, Bowling Green, Claridon, Grand, Grand Prairie, Green Camp, Marion, Montgomery, Pleasant, Prospect, Richland, Salt Rock, Scott, Tully, Waldo





# Marion County Regional Planning Commission

## What is **STRONG TOWNS** ?

**STRONG TOWNS**

Articles Podcasts Videos Programs Learn Events About [Become a Member](#)

**Your community needs you to be an effective advocate for change. We can help you get there.**

**Our Mission**

We seek to replace America's post-war pattern of development, the [Suburban Experiment](#), with a pattern of development that is financially strong and resilient. We advocate for cities of all sizes to be safe, livable, and inviting. We work to elevate local government to be the highest level of collaboration for people working together in a place, not merely the lowest level in a hierarchy of governments.

Strong Towns is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit media advocacy organization. We produce content that analyzes the failures of the post-war North American development pattern while giving citizens the knowledge and tools to start making our places better today.

We seek to have the Strong Towns Approach be the default way that every city, town, and neighborhood pursues growth, development, and prosperity.

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# Marion County Regional Planning Commission

## STRONG TOWNS

### What Strong Towns Does

- Media
- Education
- Resources
- Events
- Neighborhood Groups
- Community Action Lab

### Strong Towns' Campaigns

- End Highway Expansion
- Transparent Local Accounting
- Incremental Housing
- Safe & Productive Streets
- End Parking Mandates & Subsidies.

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# Marion County Regional Planning Commission

## **STRONG TOWNS**

### **A “Strong Town”...**

- relies on small, incremental investments (little bets) instead of large, transformative projects.
- emphasizes resiliency of result over efficiency of execution.
- is designed to adapt to feedback.
- is inspired by bottom-up action (“chaotic but smart”) and not top-down systems (“orderly but dumb”).
- seeks to conduct as much of life as possible at a personal scale.
- is obsessive about accounting for its revenues, expenses, assets, and long-term liabilities (“do the math”).

### **4-Step Process for Change**

1. Humbly observe where people in the community struggle.
2. Ask the question: What is the next smallest thing we can do right now to address that struggle?
3. Do that thing. Do it right now.
4. Go back to Step 1 and begin the process again.

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**Ken**Lengieza, AICP

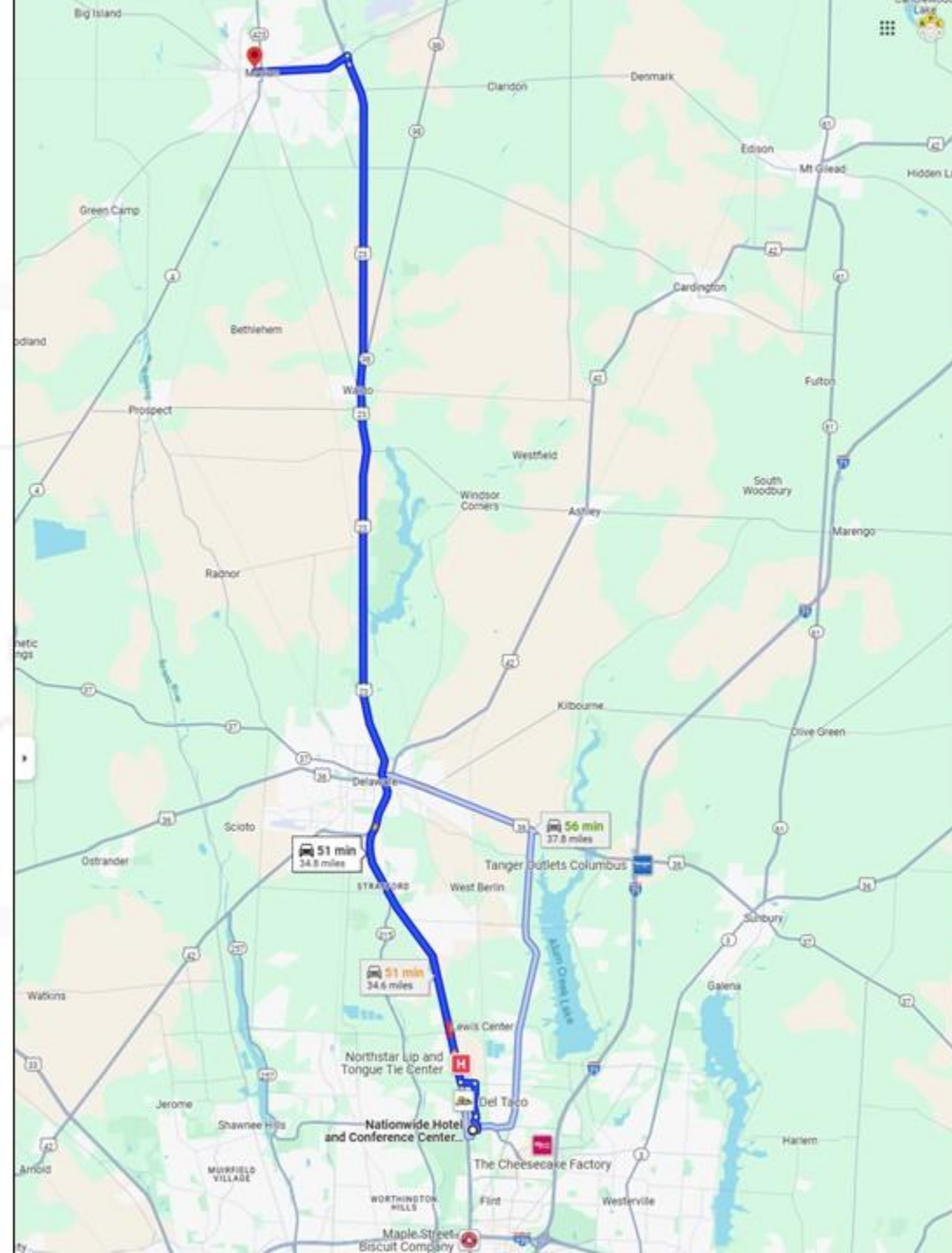
Special Projects Director. We've-Seen-This-Before Detector.

**"Is this the bottom yet?"**  
Building relationships to rebuild a community.

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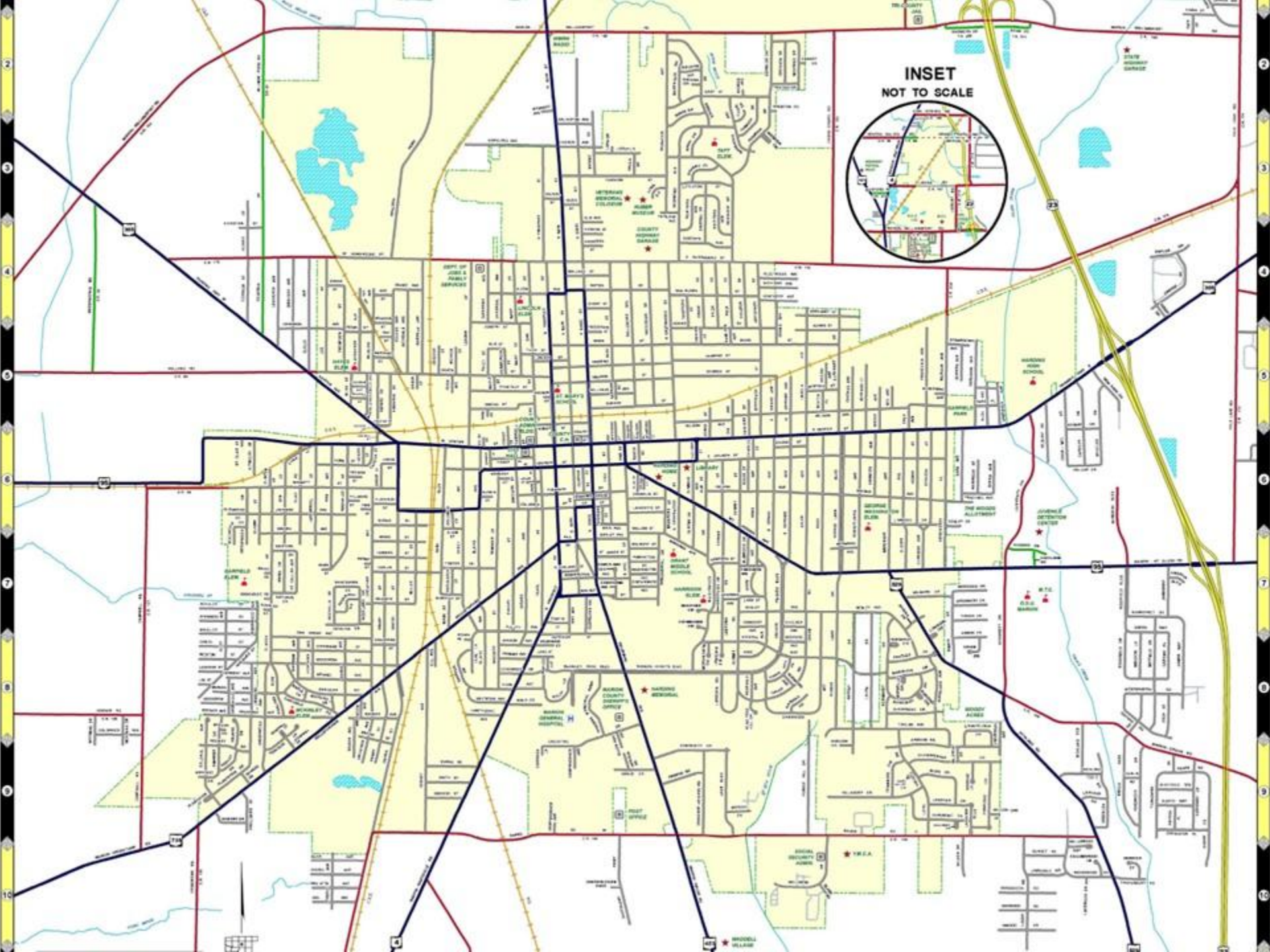




LAST ONE OUT  
TURN OFF  
THE LIGHTS

**Be useful to your elected officials.**









# Marion County Regional Planning Commission



Serving the planning needs of:  
City of Marion



**Community development will continue to happen, regardless of how it happens.**



# Marion County Regional Planning Commission



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# Marion County Regional Planning Commission

## Evelyn Warr-Omness

Planning Director. Knower of all things.

**“Ok, what do we have to work with?”**

Identifying and leveraging local resources and partners.

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# Marion County Regional Planning Commission

## Be a Regulation & Red-Tape Sherpa.

- Citizen Participation Process
- Environmental Review/ Section 106
- Flood Plain & Wetlands
- Section 3 & work recruiting requirements
- Public Bidding
- Prevailing Wage Rates
- Income verification
- Reporting



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# Marion County Regional Planning Commission







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## Be a Financial Juggler

- Coordinate and account for multiple sources & uses in a project.
- Determine the capital stack needed
- Create a milestone chart that identifies steps
- Determine cashflow of project
- Maintain auditable files

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# 243 W PLEASANT STREET

4-unit apartment south of the First Church of Nazarene Downtown Campus.

Complicated liens and tax foreclosure and asbestos prevented it from being addressed for years.

Church partnered with County Land Bank. If the land bank would take ownership and demolish, Naz would partner with Buckeye Ridge Habitat for Humanity to build a single family home.



United Way Coalitions:  
**UNITED FOR IMPACT**

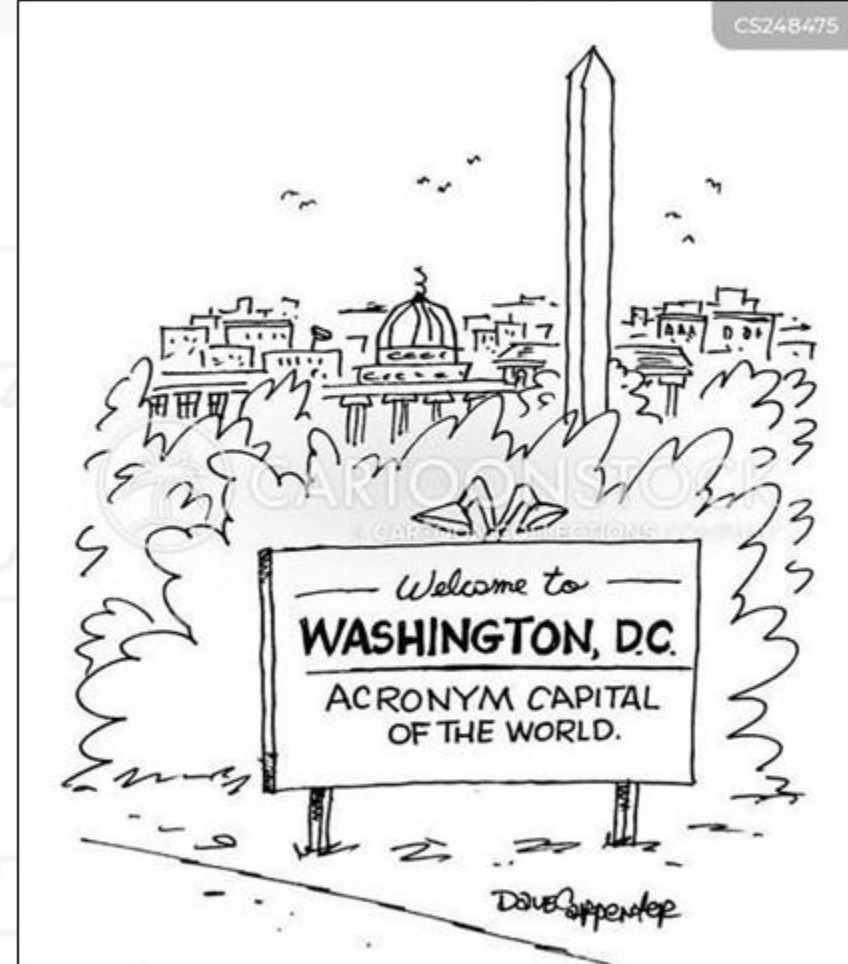




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## Be a Bureaucratic Translator.

Explain the programs and eligibility requirements in layman's terms.







# LaRue Alliance Park Project

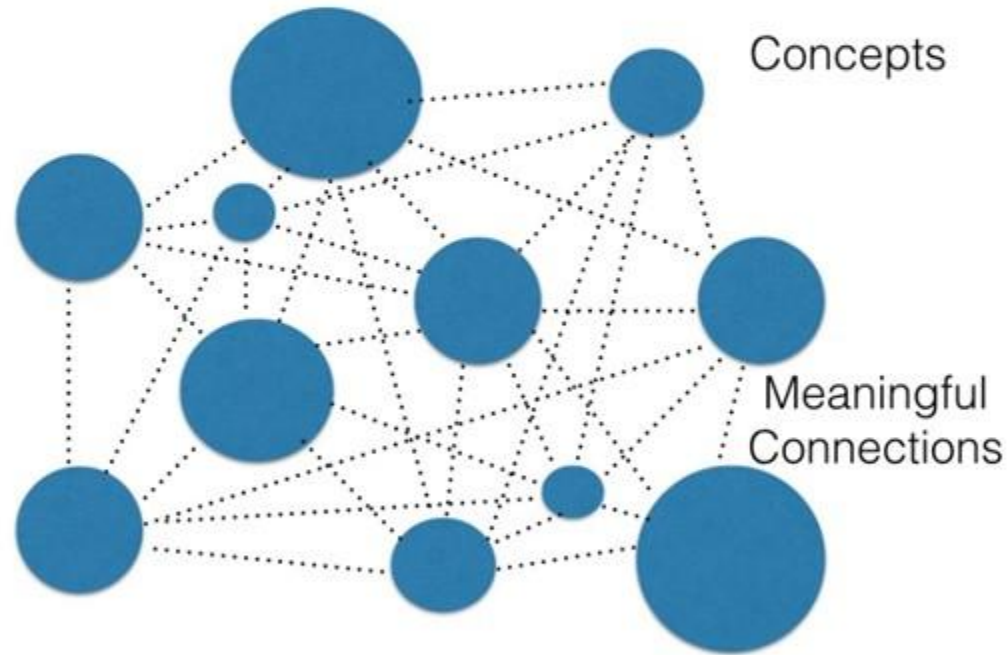






# Marion County Regional Planning Commission

## Expert



## Connect the Dots: Ideas, People, Programs, & Funding.

We work with passionate individuals, neighborhood & citizens groups, government employees and elected officials, local non-profits and charitable organizations like trusts and foundations.

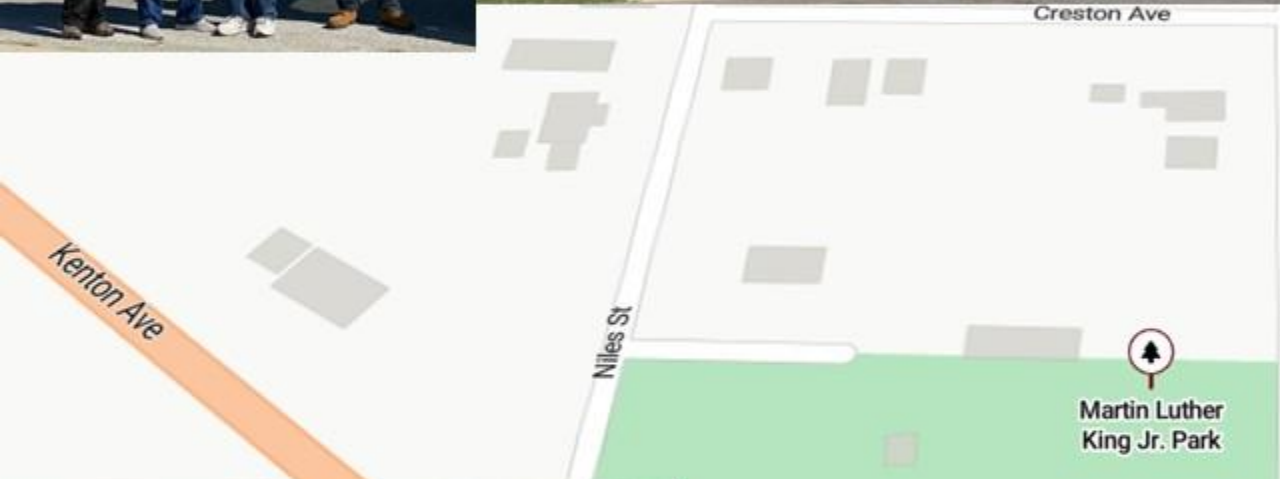
Collaborating with like-minded coalitions on common goals.

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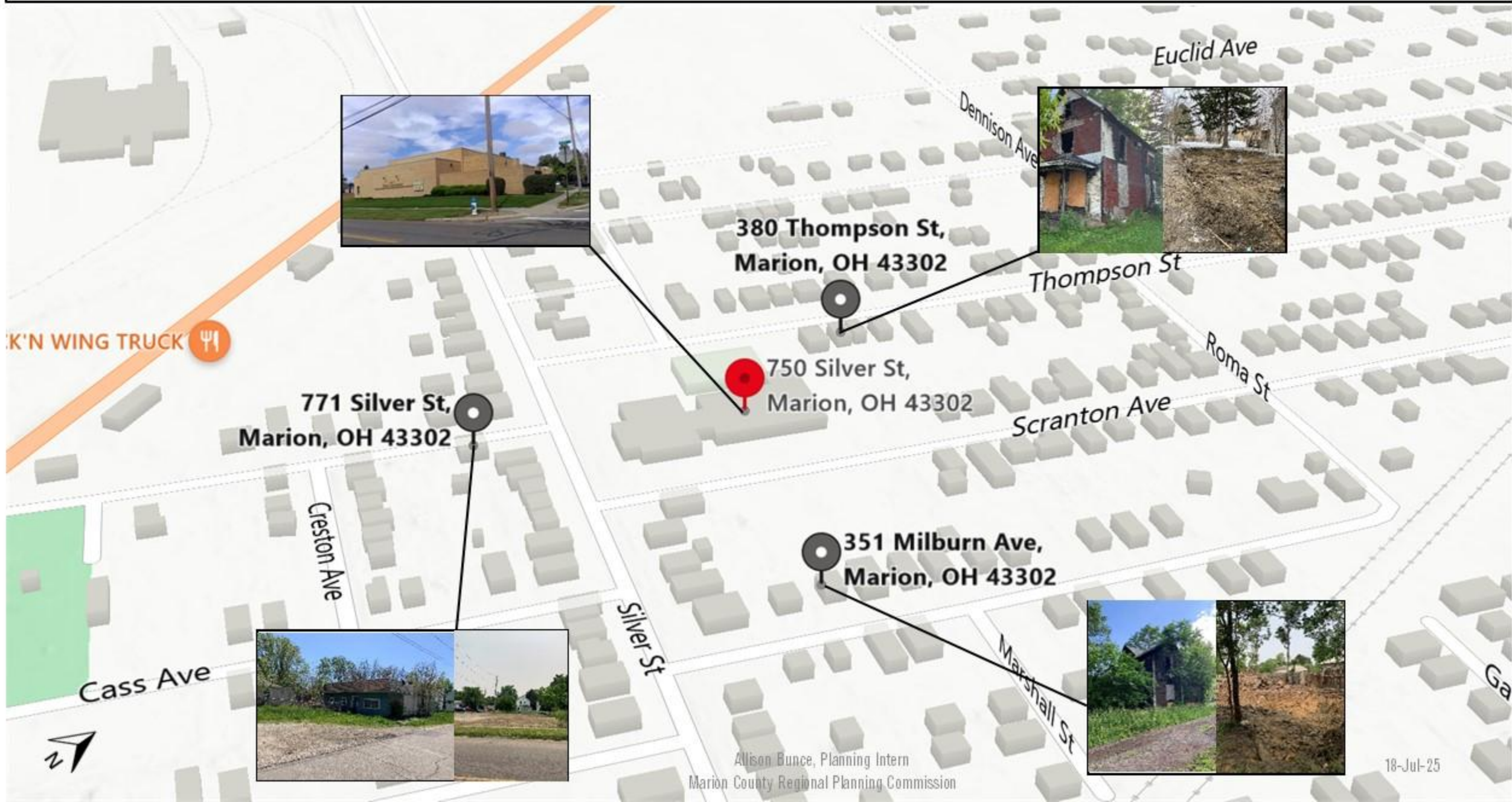
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# Improved Area Around Hayes Elementary School in City of Marion, OH

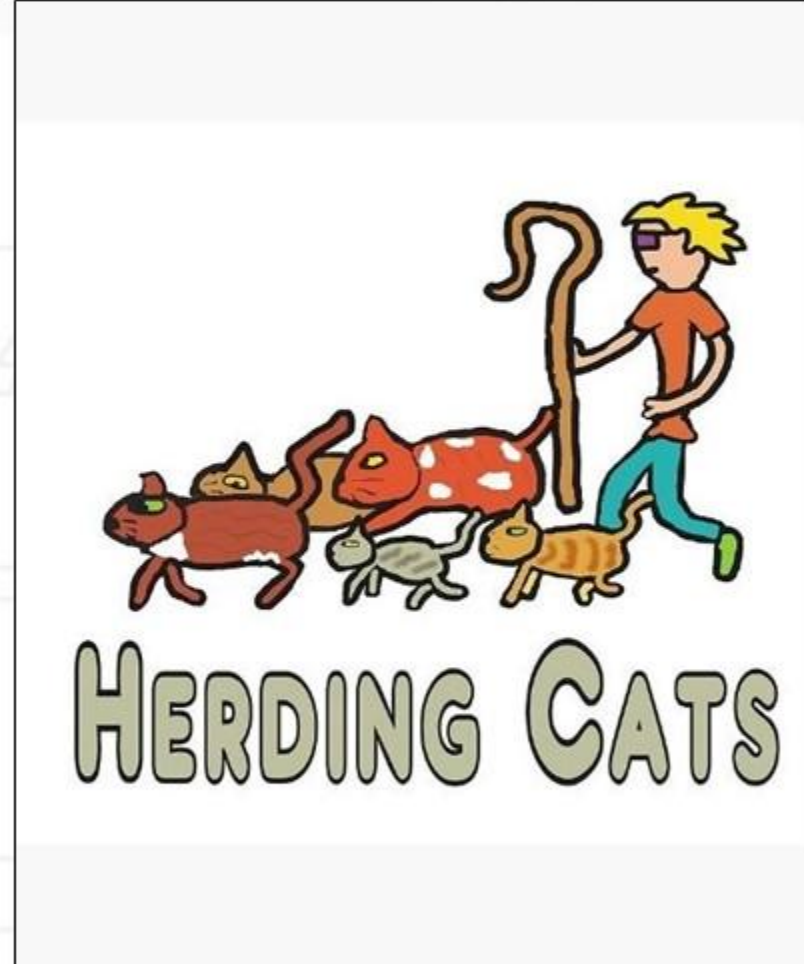




# Marion County Regional Planning Commission

## Get the Project Across the Finish Line.

- Herding the cats
- Being or mentoring the Contract Manager
- Being or mentoring the Project Manager



**“A little less talk and a lot more action.”**

**-Toby Keith**





# Marion County Regional Planning Commission



## Be the Project Therapist

It often fails before it succeeds.

Use your years of experience seeing projects and funding go up and down to model resilience

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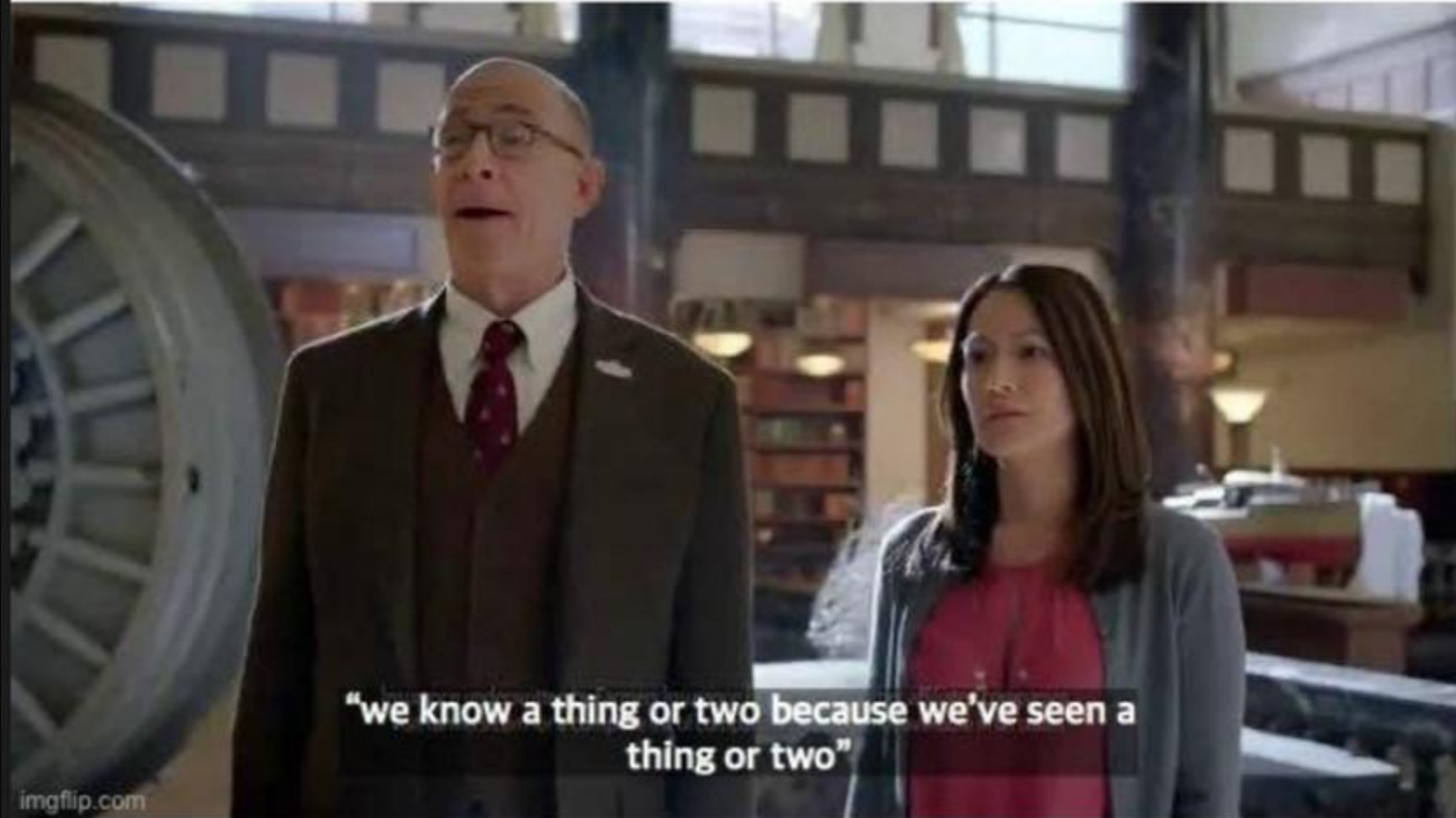


Planning Peeps

June 28 at 9:13 AM · 🌐



“Why do you know so much?”  
City planner:



imgflip.com



You and 105 others

5 comments 10 shares

MarionMade! ❤️



**Everything fails before it succeeds.**



# Marion County Regional Planning Commission



18 July 2025

MarionMade!



**Do you call those with the right training,  
or do you train those with the right calling?**



# Marion County Regional Planning Commission

## James Walker

Planning Aide. Personality Hire.

**“Look at all we’ve done!”**

From survival to Strongest Town: Applying for and winning the 2025 Strongest Town Contest.

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Sweet Sixteen

Bellingham, WA

Sacramento, CA

Alameda, CA

Bend, OR

Richfield, MN

Marion, OH

Warrenville, IL

Decorah, IA

Elite Eight

Sacramento, CA

Bend, OR

Marion, OH

Decorah, IA

Final Four

Bend, OR

Marion, OH



# STRONGEST TOWN CONTEST 2025

Championship

Marion, OH

Harrisonburg, VA



[strongesttown.com](http://strongesttown.com)

Final Four

Harrisonburg, VA

Greenfield, MA

Elite Eight

Calgary, AB

Harrisonburg, VA

Greenfield, MA

Silverton, OR

Sweet Sixteen

Albuquerque, NM

Calgary, AB

Elizabethtown, KY

Harrisonburg, VA

Manchester, NH

Greenfield, MA

Aliquippa, PA

Silverton, OR

# The Strong Towns Approach

A “strong town” is any town, big or small, that prioritizes making progress in transportation, housing, and fiscal resiliency for the long-term benefit of its people. It is not a “perfect” town, nor does every strong town look the same. This is because strong towns incrementally adapt to the conditions and challenges of their specific place from the bottom up.





Gabe Barrow, City Council President

Patrick Burtch, City Administrator







# Marion County Regional Planning Commission

## 2024 ANNUAL REPORT

### LOVE YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD

Streets Dept, Parks Dept and Volunteers help make our city proud

The City of Marion developed a program called "Love Your Neighborhood" and the primary goal of this effort was to help clean up areas around town and create a sense of pride. This program has reached far and wide within our community.

#### YEAR CLEAN UP TOTALS

Trash <b>481.1 tons</b>	Tires <b>3,136 tires</b>
Yard Waste <b>77.7 tons</b>	Cars <b>35 removed</b>
Recycling <b>1,740 lbs</b>	<b>17 brought to compliance</b>



BEFORE



AFTER



## 2024 ANNUAL REPORT

### DOWNTOWN MARION

#### Beautification at our Core

Our local Downtown Marion Inc. has spent the past few years making downtown the premier spot for new businesses, events and beautification efforts. The City will continue to partner with Downtown Marion Inc. and we have a plan in place to make downtown a focus of fresh updates, flower installation, planter updates and daily waterings. We will be connecting with the local businesses to encourage the communication and efforts by all to watch our downtown shine.



## 2024 ANNUAL REPORT

### MARION TRANSIT

#### Night Service for All

In partnership with the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT), the city embarked on a journey to start a night service bus called "Night Moves". The new shuttle endeavor focused on tourism and the night life our city has to offer. Not only was it used for night rides, but we also focused on a rental service that was very successful throughout the latter part of 2024.

Live Your City buses were also introduced with a bold new branding concept for the city to modernize itself and become more attractive to all the citizens and visitors to our wonderful city.



## 2024 ANNUAL REPORT

### PARK IMPROVEMENTS

#### Quarry Park

##### Mountain Bike Trails

The City of Marion partnered with a group of citizens that have a passion for mountain biking and a desire to improve one of our city parks - Quarry Park. Walt Mullins is one of those people. The City of Marion decided to officially name a trail located in Quarry Park after Walt and called it "Wicked Walt's Mountain Bike Trail". The City curated signage for the park and helped with marketing materials to encourage others to visit this great park and trail. The end goal for the group is to host mountain bike tournaments and increase tourism to our city. The enthusiasm and effort this group puts in for our Quarry Park is exactly what "Love Your City" is all about.



## 2024 ANNUAL REPORT

### IMPROVING BLIGHT

#### 359 Blaine Avenue

This house was in possession of the Land Bank and was slated for demolition. We took a look part all the garbage and saw a house that could possibly be saved. Carl Stever, a proven rehabber with the Land Bank, was contacted and agreed that the house could be saved and he would be willing to take on the rehab. After transferring the house utilizing the new Fast Track Program, in a few weeks the house and property were cleaned out and renovation began. After just 6 months, this is the finished product, a great house ready for a new family. Thank you Carl!



BEFORE

AFTER

## 2024 ANNUAL REPORT

### THE REC CENTER

#### Community Partnerships

The City of Marion is excited about the partnership with the YMCA and Marion City Schools to reopen the Rec Center, providing a resource for youth seeking recreation, education, and tutoring throughout the school year and summer months. The YMCA will manage the staffing and program development for the recreational activities, while Marion City Schools and The Ohio State University Marion will provide education programming, tutoring, and counseling services. Additional community organizations will also support The Rec. The City of Marion is funding the utilities and providing youth scholarships through Opiate Settlement funds to ensure all Marion youth have access to these opportunities.



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**Victory goes to those who show up.**

## The Spotlight on Marion, Ohio



### Marion's Comeback: How This Rust Belt Town Is Rebuilding Itself From the Ground Up

Marion, Ohio's story is one of resilience and community. Devastated by economic disinvestment and the opioid epidemic, residents realized it was up to them to turn things around. Here's how they're doing it.

[Read More](#)

## Building Marion's Future With What We Have

"No one is coming to rescue us. It is us. Everyone who doesn't care about Marion has up and left. All that remains are those who have dedicated themselves to this place, who call it home, and who are hellbent on making tomorrow better than today. Other towns like to throw money at their problems. We ran out of that option decades ago. If problems in Marion are going to be addressed, it is going to be from everyone bringing what "fishes and loaves" they have to the table to see what they may assemble together. Our local governments, schools, nonprofits and community leaders have learned to band together and to dream of a better tomorrow." – James Walker, a planning commissioner in Marion, Ohio



SHOW THE WORLD HOW STRONG WE ARE

# **VOTE**

# **MARION**

## **STRONGESTTOWN.COM**

M A R C H 3 - A P R I L 3 2 0 2 5

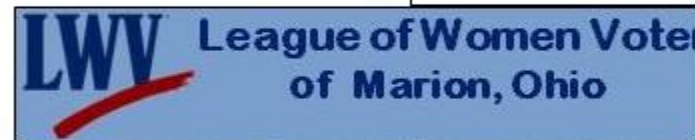




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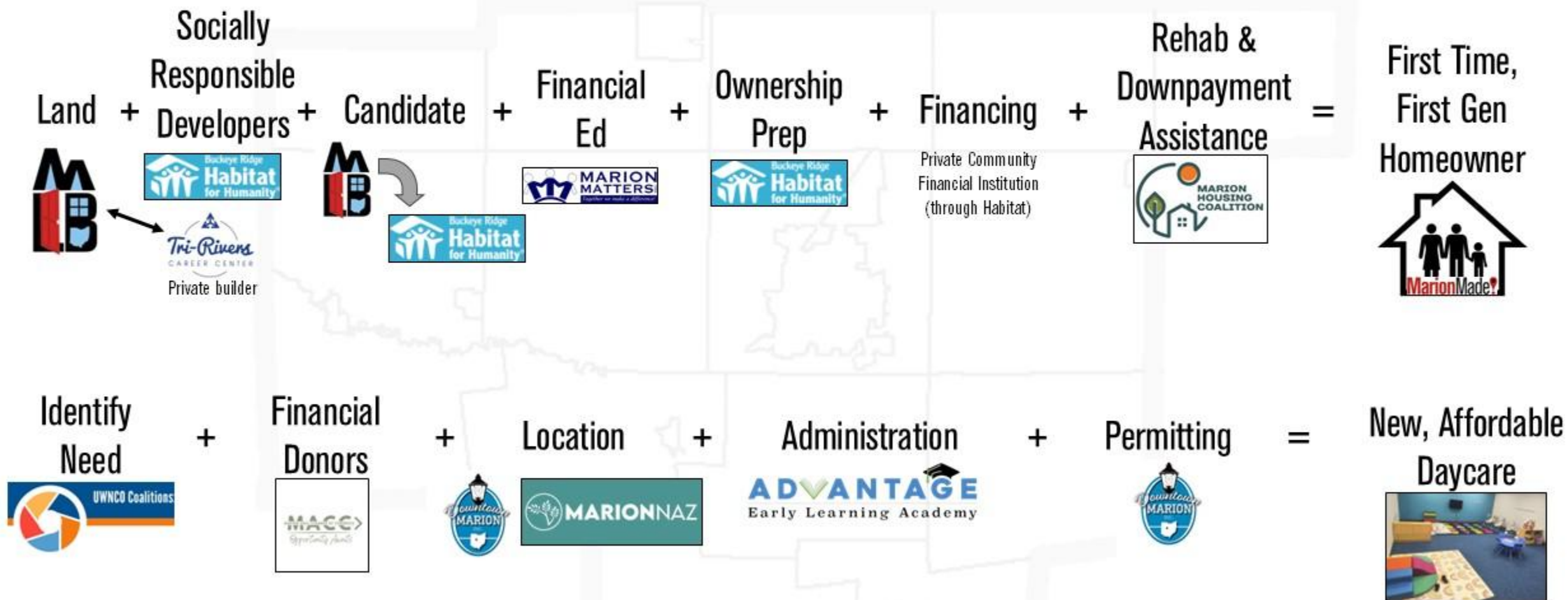


**“We have run out of money.  
It is time to start thinking.”**

-Sir Winston Churchill (attributed)



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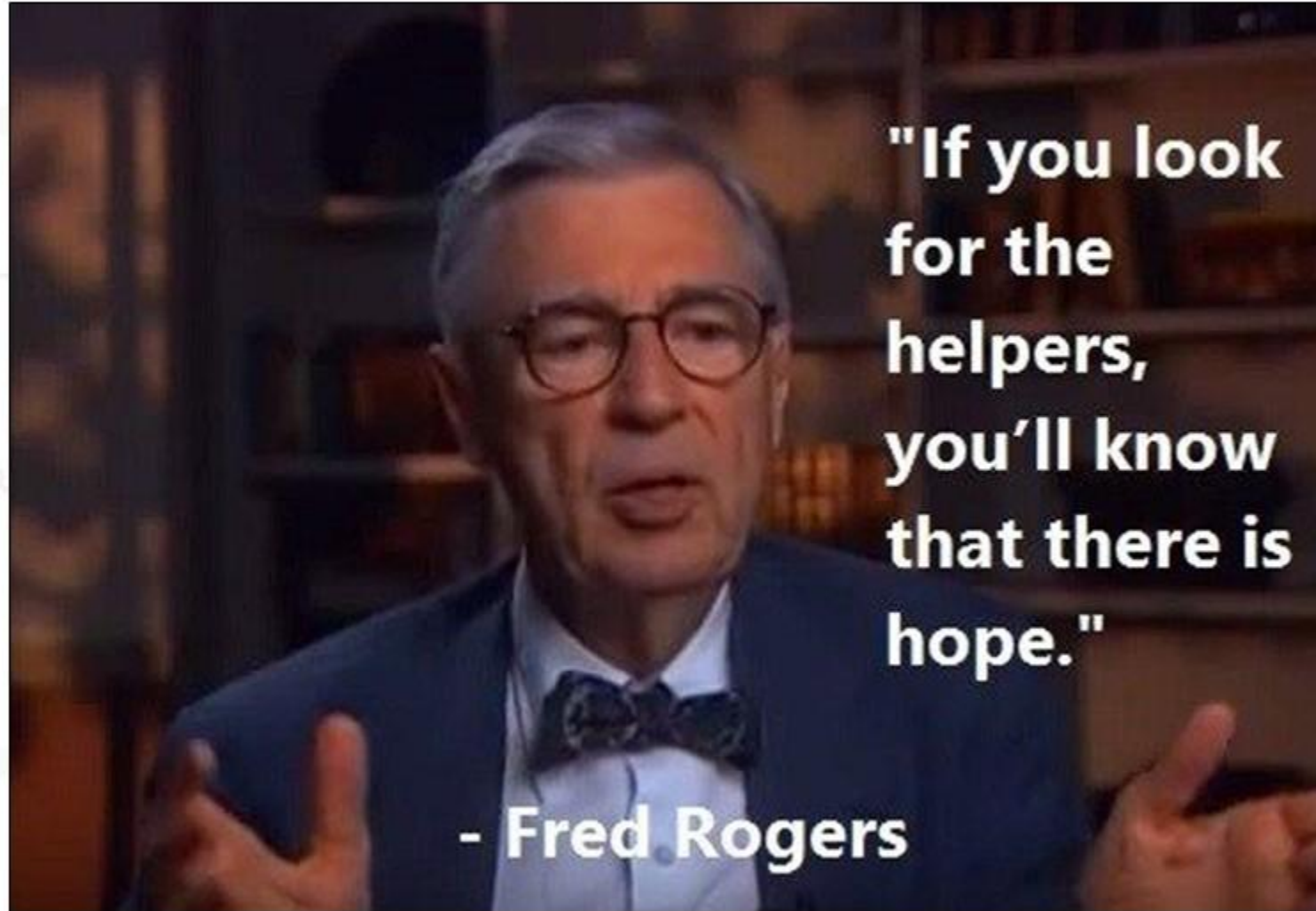
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# Marion County Regional Planning Commission





NEWS > LOCAL FIRST

## Hope is Marion's Economy

Tue, Mar 18, 2025



By Bradley  
Belcher.

March 18, 2025.

Marion, Ohio.

In early 2013, Marion, Ohio, faced an uncomfortable truth. With limited access to resources and few pathways to economic stability, the epidemic that the entire nation faced consumed the area. Families were torn apart, too many deaths,

crime rates rose, and the limited public services were overwhelmed. This wasn't just speculation; it was boldly declared on yard-signs posted across the city reading "Heroin Is Marion's Economy."

It forced the community to reckon with a reality that had been festering in the shadows. The crisis wasn't just a policing issue, a healthcare issue, or a personal failing of those struggling with addiction. It was a systemic issue, deeply connected to the trajectory of the city itself. For years, Marion had pursued the same economic development strategies that many other mid-sized cities in the Midwest followed: attracting large employers, building out infrastructure, and hoping for outside investment to drive growth. The traditional community fabric—tight-knit neighborhoods, local businesses, strong civic organizations—had weakened, leaving many without a safety net. Throw in stagnant policies and stigma — it was obvious to me and many others that something had to change.



# Marion Residents Discuss Heroin Issue Following Sign Campaign

It's the kind of marketing that no community wants, but a anti-drug campaign has leaders in Marion talking with residents.



Author: 10tv.com  
Published: 6:24 AM EST February 5, 2013  
Updated: 1:04 PM EST February 5, 2013

It's the kind of marketing no community wants: hundreds of signs claiming "Heroin Is Marion's Economy."

They are dotting streets and front yards.

There's one in Annette Johnson's yard.

"I thought, oh my God, that's great. Somebody is doing something," said Johnson.



## Hope is Marion's Economy

Tue, Mar 18, 2025



By Bradley Belcher.

March 18, 2025.

Marion, Ohio.

In early 2013, Marion, Ohio, faced an uncomfortable truth. With limited access to resources and few pathways to economic stability, the epidemic that the entire nation faced consumed the area. Families were torn apart, too many deaths, crime rates rose, and the limited public services were overwhelmed. This wasn't just speculation; it was boldly declared on yard-signs posted across the city reading "Heroin Is Marion's Economy."

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**HEROIN IS  
MARION'S  
ECONOMY**



**HOPE IS  
MARION'S  
ECONOMY**



**HOPE IS!  
MARION'S!  
ECONOMY!**







**Lets Show  
The World  
How Strong  
We Are Marion**

*"I come from a poor and struggling town where we expect our next generation to "get out" and go someplace more successful. So, it really impacted me when the Marion Boys and Girls Club filmed a bunch of kids talking about how their place gets back up and keeps going, that it's not a perfect place, but they are going to make it better....*

*\*Tears.\*"*

- Charles L. Marohn, Jr.  
Founder & President  
Strong Towns







# Marion County Regional Planning Commission

RegionalPlanning@co.marion.oh.us  
740.223.4140

- **Evelyn**Warr-Omness. Planning Director.
- **Ken**Lengieza, AICP. Special Projects Director.
- **James**Walker. Planning Aide.



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LOVE YOUR CITY  
MAYOR BILL COLLINS



**MARION  
COUNTY**  
*State of Ohio* *Est. 1820*



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