

Green Acres Site Analysis and Reuse Alternatives



FINAL REPORT
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NORTHSTAR
planning + design

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Introduction

The City of Oberlin has acquired a parcel of land located on Oberlin Road extending between East Lorain Street and East College Street. The now vacant parcel was the site of a children's care facility known as Green Acres.

The parcel's size, location, and other characteristics create potential for several different reuses - and possibly multiple uses. Redevelopment of the site will impact surrounding existing uses and may give direction to future redevelopment of some undeveloped or underdeveloped abutting properties in the area.

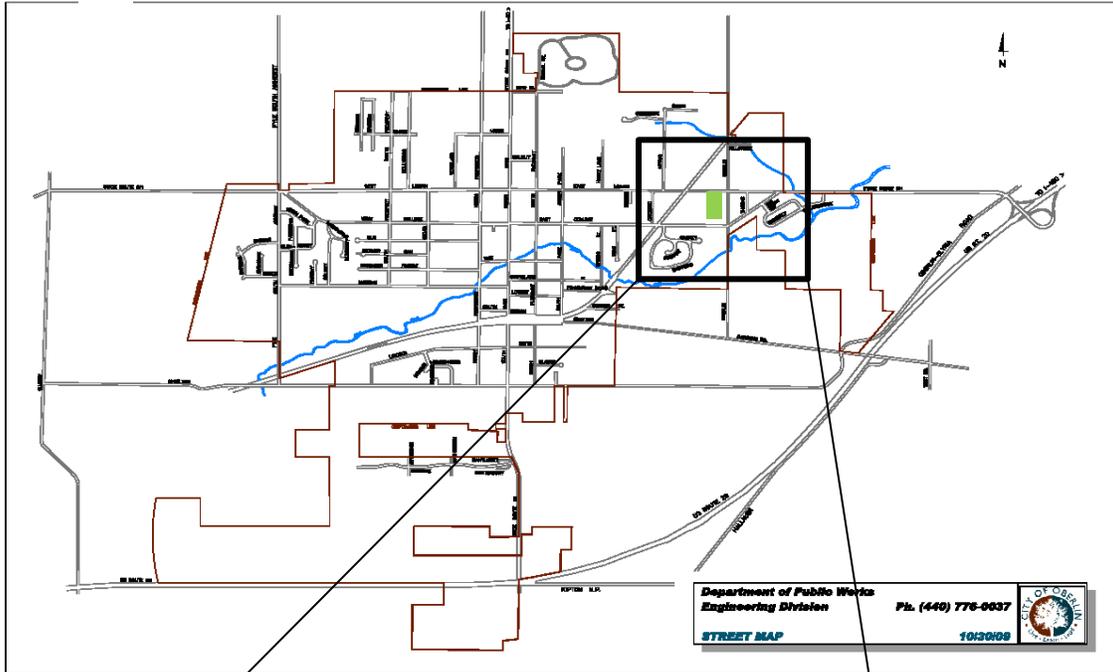
The purpose of this report is to provide a general evaluation of the site and surrounds and to illustrate several alternative redevelopment schemes. It is intended that these illustrated alternatives will assist the City, nearby property owners, and potential site developers to understand the potential of the site, to understand the potential impacts of alternative uses, and to ultimately make decisions and take action for the future of this property.

This report has been prepared utilizing the information referenced herein. It does not include detailed evaluations of engineering, environmental hazards, appraisal, or market factors.

Summary of Conditions and Analysis

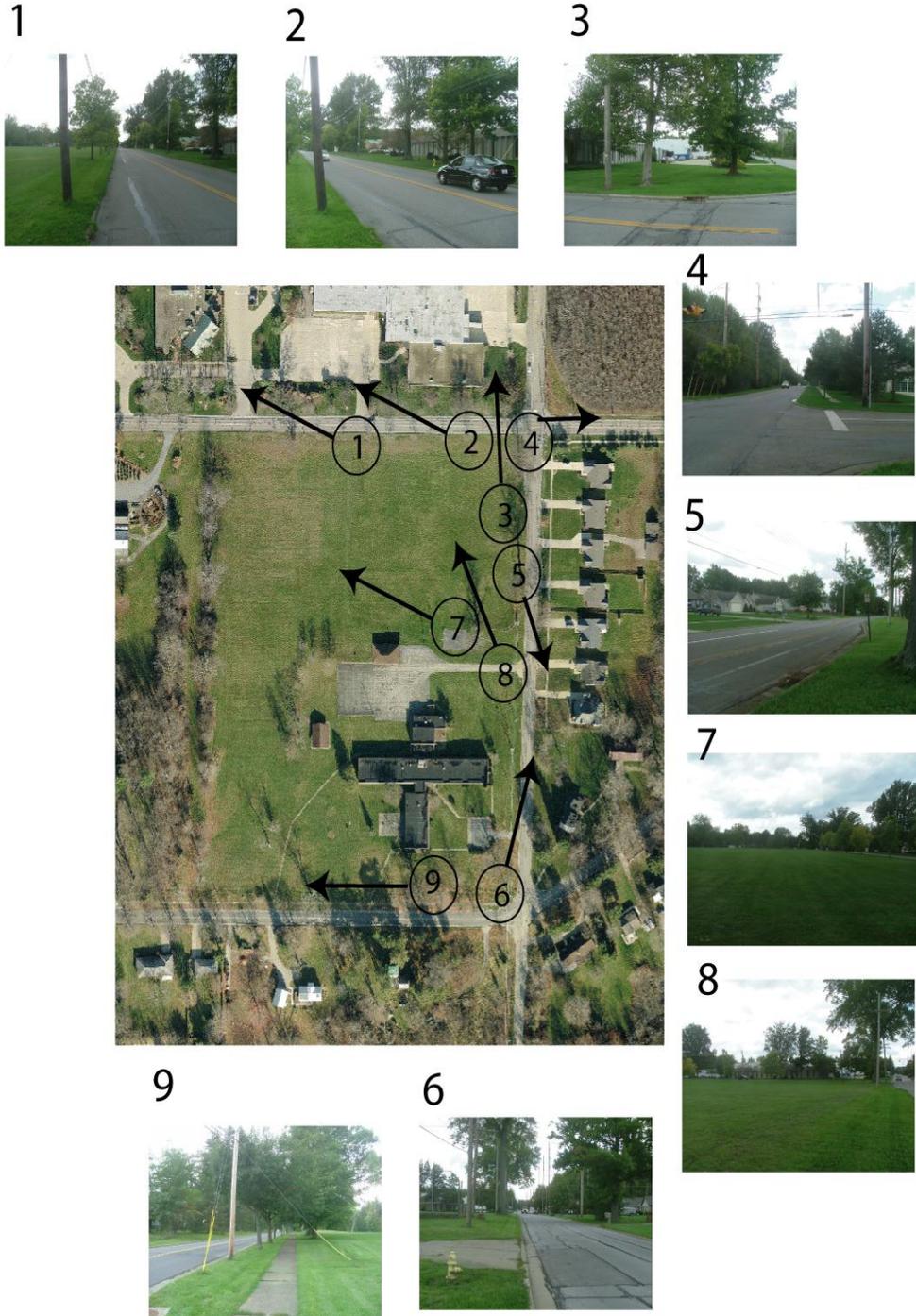
Location.

The site is in the northeast area of the City of Oberlin. It is bound by the rights-of-way of three major roads: Lorain Road on the north side, Oberlin Road on the east, and East College Street on the south.



Photographs

Photographs below document conditions of the site and surrounds as recorded in October 2011.



General Site Conditions.

Observed site conditions include the following:

- The site is generally level with no significant topographic features.
- Drainage appears to generally flow from the northwest to the southeast. No standing water was apparent during the site visit.
- Vegetation includes grassy, level fields and scattered trees. Several substantial mature trees may be worth professional evaluation, treatment, and preservation as site features.
- The appearances of the existing structures, which are in deteriorated condition, detract from the site and surrounds.
- The appearances of surrounding properties vary from fair to very good. On the north, the NACS office-industrial site presents attractive, well-maintained structures and extensive landscaping which screens the views of structures and parking. On the east, the newer homes on Oberlin Road are in excellent condition. A historic structure, in deteriorated condition, is located on the south side. Scattered vegetation on the west side wholly or partially obstructs the views of the abutting structures and uses.

Land Uses

Site Land Uses.

The site is vacant. Three (3) vacant, one-story structures remain on the site, including a school structure, garage/storage structure, and a picnic shelter. Exteriors of all structures exhibit deterioration from neglect and lack of use. Detailed exterior, interior, and structural examinations are not part of this study.

Surrounding Land Uses.

The existing land uses surrounding this site are an unusual and extensive mix. As will be noted in the discussion of re-use alternatives, this mix presents a variety of impacts and potentials.

North. To the north, across Lorain Road, the land uses are industrial and office. The National Association of College Stores facility includes extensive frontage landscaping, parking lots, offices, and distribution facilities.

The northeast quadrant of the Lorain Road/Oberlin Road intersection consists of vacant, wooded land owned by the City of Oberlin and zoned for future industrial use.

East. The frontage on the east side of Oberlin Road consists of relatively new single family homes on 75-foot wide sublots. Single family sublots and subdivisions extend eastward from this area.

South. Single family homes on large and deep lots are located immediately to the south of the site, across East College Street. A subdivision of single family homes is located to the southwest.

West. Large single family homes on large lots are located to the west of the southerly half of this site. The northerly half of the west boundary abuts the site of a garden center.

Existing Land Use



Utilities and Other Infrastructure

Local utilities have been installed in the three abutting public rights-of-way.

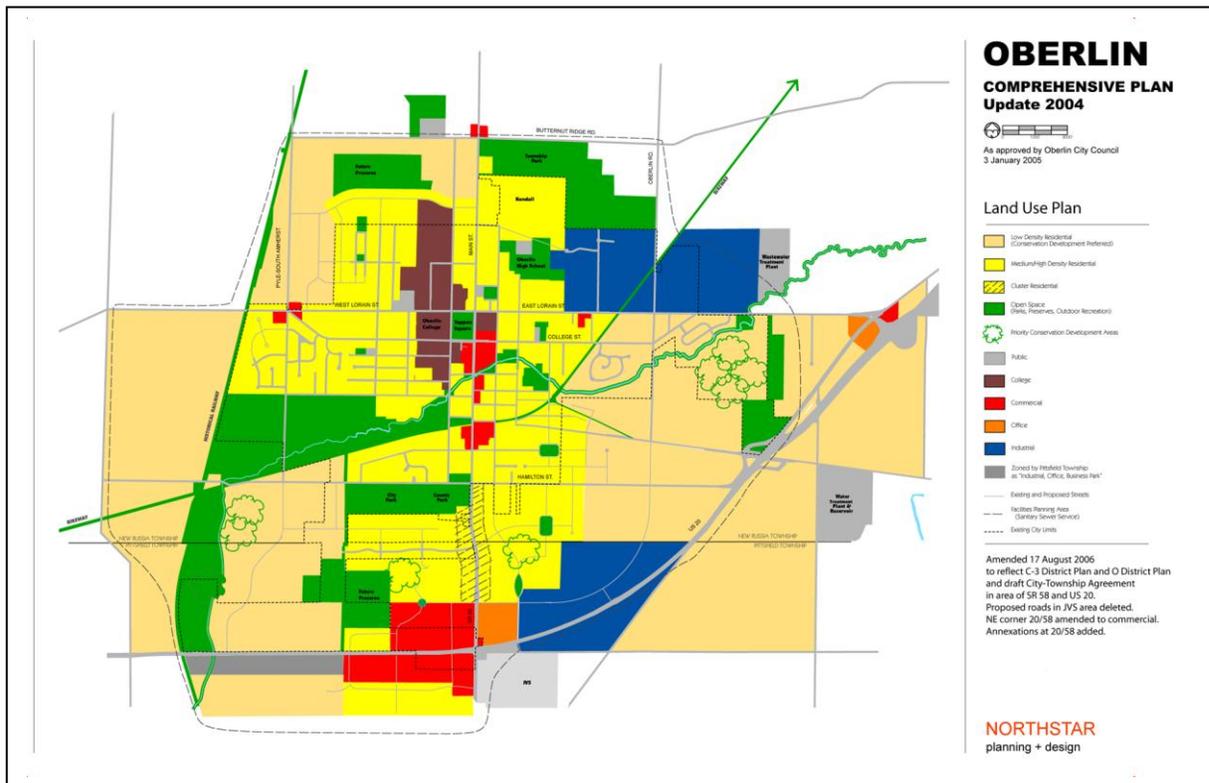
	East Lorain St.	Oberlin Rd.	East College St.
Natural Gas	3 inch	2 inch	4 inch
Water	14 inch	14 inch	
Electric			
Sanitary Sewer	24 inch	6 inch	8 inch
Storm Sewer			12 inch

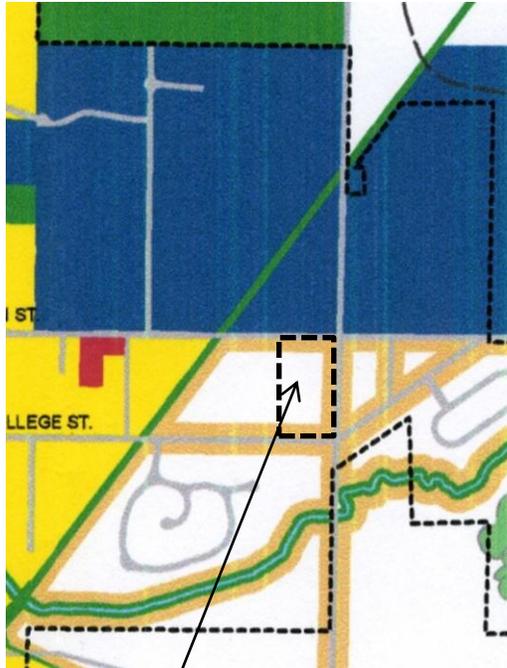
Relevant Regulations and Plans

Oberlin Comprehensive Plan

The City of Oberlin has prepared and recently updated the City of Oberlin Comprehensive Plan (Oberlin City Planning Commission, 2011). The Plan provides guidance for future land use, road patterns, utility service areas, and other future features of the community.

The Comprehensive Plan includes a Land Use Plan which illustrates a future land use pattern for this area. The proposed future land uses include industrial uses to the north of Lorain Road, and Low Density Residential (Conservation Development Preferred) on the subject site and surrounding properties. This land use pattern would be consistent with the existing land uses with the exception of the existing commercial zoning on the garden center site. In accordance with the Land Use Plan, the commercial zoning would be replaced with a residential zoning classification.





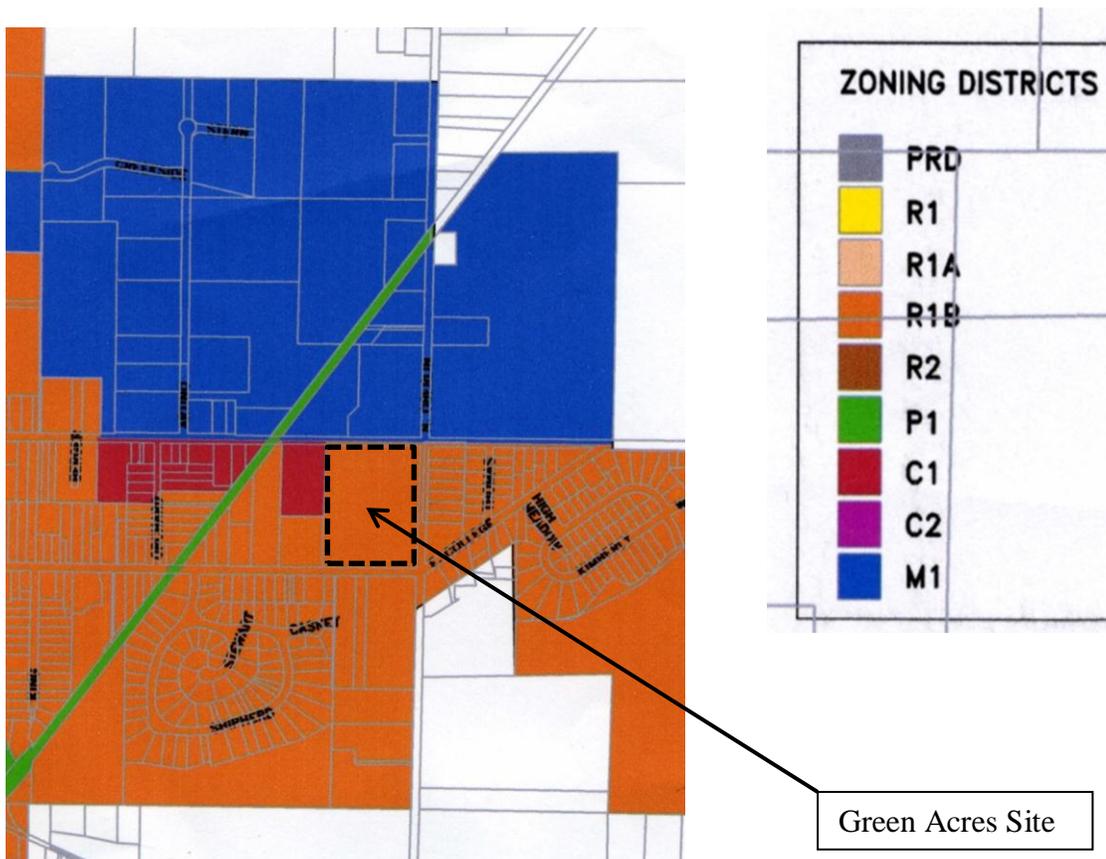
Green Acres Site



Oberlin Zoning Code

The City's Zoning Code and Map classify the site and its surrounds in several zoning districts.

- The site is classified in the R1B Single Family Dwelling District.
- Properties to the east, south and southwest side of the site are also classified in the R1B Single Family Dwelling District.
- The garden center site located at the northwest boundary of the site is classified in the C1 Central Business District.
- All properties north of Lorain Road are classified in the M1 Light Industrial District.



Citywide Recreation Plan. The city has recently prepared the Oberlin Parks and Recreation Strategic Plan. This document outlines the overall direction and philosophy towards parks and recreation, examines the current status of parks and recreation, and sets long term objectives.

The Strategic Plan makes several specific references to park and recreation needs in this area of the City.

- The subject site is identified on the map titled “Existing Parks or Open Spaces” as an “Other Open Space.”
- The subject site is identified on the map titled “Parcel Inventory” as a “Potential Development Area – Large Undeveloped Lots within City Limits.”
- The 4th Goal set forth in the Plan is: “Provide parkland that is easily accessible by all residents throughout the City of Oberlin.”

A specific need and strategy relating to this 4th Goal is discussed as follows:

Acquire and develop park land in the northeast portion of the City near Oberlin Road to address geographic deficiencies in the level of service (gaps in service radii).

There also exists a gap in the service radii to the east of downtown Oberlin that runs from the north to the south borders of the community and approximately one quarter of a mile wide. Roadside Park is the nearest park to this service gap but is considered to be inaccessible and less desirable as a community open space according to citizen input received.

One location that may provide a solution to this gap in service should it ever become available for community open space is the site of Green Acres Children’s Home. This fifteen acre property would not only fill the gap in service but also provide another recreational amenity on the east side of town that is perhaps more appealing to the neighborhoods immediately surrounding the property.

The National Standards Analysis and the Level of Service Analysis would both tend to suggest that the most desirable use of the Green Acres parcel in regards to recreation would be a Community Park (15 acres+). Community Parks is the only Park Classification that city has any shortcomings in based on 2028 population projections. Additionally, there are no Community Parks located north of College Street. If all 15 acres of the Green Acres site were developed as a community park, not only would that satisfy the service gap for the east side of the city, it would also improve the overall level of service for the entire city. That being said, there would certainly still be a benefit to developing the site as a Neighborhood Park (5 to 10 acres).

Re-use Alternatives

This section identifies and evaluates several potential re-uses for the subject site.

Several important considerations became apparent in the process of designing alternatives. These should be taken into account as decisions are made regarding the future of this site.

1. **Park Site.** Due to the very clear opportunity to address a park need identified in the recent Oberlin Parks and Recreation Strategic Plan, a park site is provided in each alternative.

Several factors may guide the decision regarding location of park land within the site:

- A park area which is clearly visible from one or more of the rights-of-way will have the greatest visual impact for the neighborhood and community and will likely be most secure due to that visibility. Consultation with the Police Department is advisable in the design of the park and any structures.
- A park area located in the southeast corner would be highly visible and most directly oriented to the surrounding residential neighborhoods.
- Walking and biking access to the park from both the residential neighborhoods and from the industrial areas to the north may increase daytime use of the park and add value to these areas.
- The amount of land dedicated to park use could vary from a neighborhood park area of 3.5 - 5.0 acres up to the entire 15 acres. Planned recreation uses will impact the amount of land needed. An area of 3.5 to 5.0 acres should accommodate a low-impact park intended for passive uses and features, such as walkways, a small picnic area, horticultural amenities, and perhaps a small playground. Larger areas of land may be required to successfully accommodate more active play areas or sport courts or fields which may also have greater impacts and necessitate space for separation from abutting residential uses. Active recreation facilities are likely to increase maintenance costs and may require programming resources. For the purposes of this study, park areas of 3.5 to 5.0 acres have been allocated.
- The park site may be designed to accommodate storm water management facilities for both the park area and any additional use areas. Storm water management facilities should be designed for environmental benefit and could also contribute to the aesthetic value of the park.

2. Opportunity to Protect/Improve Surrounding Land Uses and Rights-of-Way.

Development of this site should, to the extent feasible, be designed in a manner which respects existing and /or planned future uses in the surrounds.

In particular, impacts on abutting residential uses, which are often the most sensitive to change, should be considered. Generally speaking, new residential development will create impacts which are compatible with the existing residential uses. If a development pattern creates rear yards abutting a right-of-way, buffering will be appropriate to make those rear yards functional.

Industrial or commercial development on any part of the site should be carefully designed with buffers which protect existing and/or new residential development. Attention must be given to mitigating appearance, lighting, noise, parking, and other impacts through careful site layout, landscaping, and other features.

A public park site has great potential to benefit and add value to the surrounding residential areas by providing activity space, maintaining open space, and creating improved environmental features. Attention should also be given to site design which mitigates potential negative impacts such as noise, intrusive lighting, vehicular traffic, and others.

3. Opportunity to Guide or Impact Surrounding Development Pattern.

Attention should be given to the potential for redevelopment of this sizeable site to set the stage for redevelopment in abutting sites. Two specific opportunities may be considered.

First, if all or part of this site is developed for residential use, the character of the residential development (i.e., single family sublots, clustered single family, or other) may encourage redevelopment of lots to the west, extending to the bikeway, particularly those with frontage on Lorain Road and the deep rear or landlocked areas of lots on East College Street. Any new residential public streets could be planned to coordinate with such westerly redevelopment.

Second, if all or part of this site is developed for office/industrial campus use, this may also encourage similar redevelopment of some of the lots to the west. As noted above, such development would require careful buffering to protect the abutting residential areas.

4. Opportunities to Improve Existing Rights-of-Way. The site abuts three important roads which are likely to increase in importance as the community develops in the future.

Lorain Road is an important part of the regional road network and an important link to the interstate highway system. Both Oberlin Road and East College Street are important elements in the local road network. Oberlin Road in particular is identified

in the Comprehensive Plan as a potential connector/collector for traffic and utilities development to the south and west.

Municipal control of the subject site, whether permanent or temporary, puts the City in position to ensure that the segments of these rights-of-way abutting the site are or will be improved to meet future planned needs. At the least, they should be improved with public sidewalks. Bike lanes and street trees could be additional improvements. Limiting and carefully locating curb cuts will also help to preserve the future use of these roads.

5. **Opportunity to Promote Sustainable Housing.** Municipal ownership may be an opportunity to encourage a sustainable housing development on this site, perhaps through favorable terms of sale or financing. A sustainable development would be consistent with and supportive of the sustainability efforts of the City of Oberlin.

Alternative 1: North Park and Residential

This alternative illustrates the potential for a 5-acre park with frontage on Lorain Road and a small cul-de-sac subdivision in the remainder. While several lots can be platted along existing Oberlin Road and East College frontages, a new public or private street would be required to provide frontage for additional new lots in the interior. The street would most efficiently extend from East College. It could be designed with a temporary dead end with potential for future extension to the west.

This layout creates a very private new subdivision of approximately 25 sublots in the southern half of the property, compatible with abutting residential uses.

The park site would buffer the residential areas from the industrial/office district and Lorain traffic. The park frontage, however, would be separated from the residential area.



Alternative 2: South Park and Residential

This alternative illustrates the potential for a 4.5 acre park site oriented toward the intersection of Oberlin Road and East College Street. The park site is surrounded by a new subdivision of approximately 30 single family sublots.

A new interior street is required to provide frontage for all of the sublots. The rear yards of the northerly sublots would be oriented toward Lorain Street with a landscape buffer along that frontage.



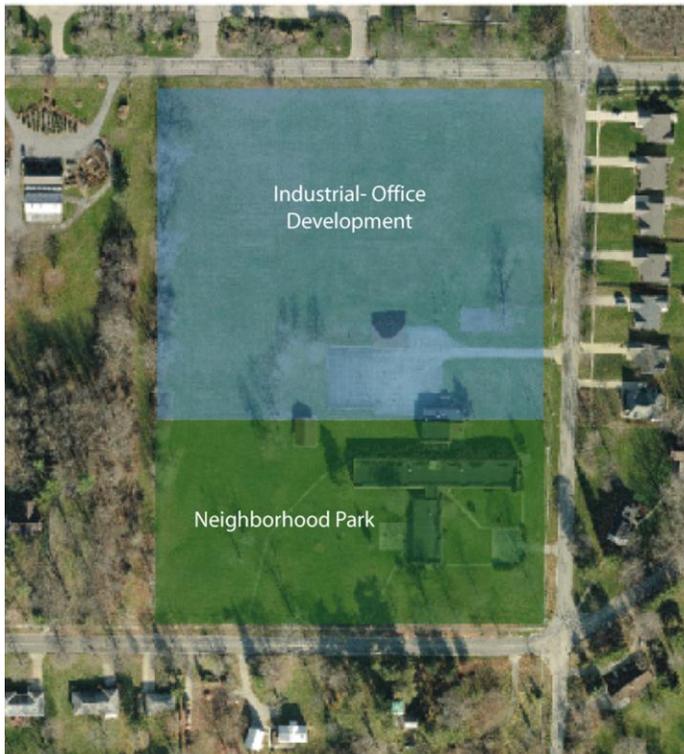
Alternative 3: South Park and Office/Industrial Campus

This alternative illustrates a potential office/industrial redevelopment of the site if coordinated with underdeveloped properties to the west. Industrial-office rezoning could create a new development opportunity of approximately 7.5 acres on the Green Acres site and an additional 6-7 acres to the west.

The alternative has the advantage of reflecting the existing office/industrial development on the north side of Lorain Street and could create an attractive campus-like environment. Attention would have to be given to careful design and siting of the office/industrial buildings to protect the existing residential neighborhoods.

A 7.5 acre area remains on the south side for a neighborhood park.

This concept may be the least feasible and least appropriate of the concepts considered herein for several reasons including the need to involve additional properties to the west in rezoning and land assembly and the availability of undeveloped municipally-controlled industrial land in the northeast quadrant of the Lorain-Oberlin intersection. The concept is also likely to raise concern among neighboring residential owners about potential impacts.



Alternative 4: New Commercial Area, Neighborhood Park, and Residential Subdivision

This alternative illustrates a potential expanded commercial district across the Lorain Street frontage. A new commercial development could be coordinated with redevelopment of the existing commercial zoning located to the west.

The southern part of the site is shown with a single family subdivision of approximately 14 sublots and a neighborhood park.

Concerns about this concept include those voiced by residents at the neighborhood open house event regarding potential negative impacts. The Oberlin Comprehensive Plan has also discouraged continuation or expansion of commercial use in this area. The impacts of new commercial turning movements on Lorain Road would also require careful consideration and design.

