



# Fostering a Sense of Place

BIG COLLABORATIONS IN A SMALL UNIVERSITY TOWN





March 30, 2018

Greetings from Athens, Ohio! The City of Athens and Ohio University have maintained a symbiotic relationship since 1804 when Ohio University was founded as the first institution of higher learning in the Northwest Territory. Ohio University and the City of Athens have grown up together over 200 years to reflect a current vibrant town and gown community as a whole.

Our theme is titled “Fostering a Sense of Place: Big Collaborations in a Small University Town” to reflect our unique collaborative relationship that leads us to having strong relationships that foster a strong community. We continue to build upon our current endeavors in following the true spirit that Larry Abernathy initiated from which ITGA was born.

In 2011 we entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the City and the University to formalize existing collaborations and partnerships and foster additional endeavors that address areas of mutual concern. These identified subjects include safety and security; utilities and infrastructure; transportation; communications and business and economic development. Since the formation of an MOU workgroup we have succeeded in joint collaborations that are outlined in the following pages.

These partnerships reflect some of the meaningful ways we work together to benefit all who live, work, and study in Athens and we continue to explore additional opportunities for partnership in the future. We continue in our combined efforts to truly make Athens a beautiful place to study, work and live through established best practices in town/gown relationships that result in the best learning and living environment for all citizens.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "M. Duane Nellis".

M. Duane Nellis  
President, Ohio University

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Steve Patterson".

Steve Patterson  
Mayor, City of Athens, OH

# Larry Abernathy Award Application International Town Gown Association

April 1st, 2018

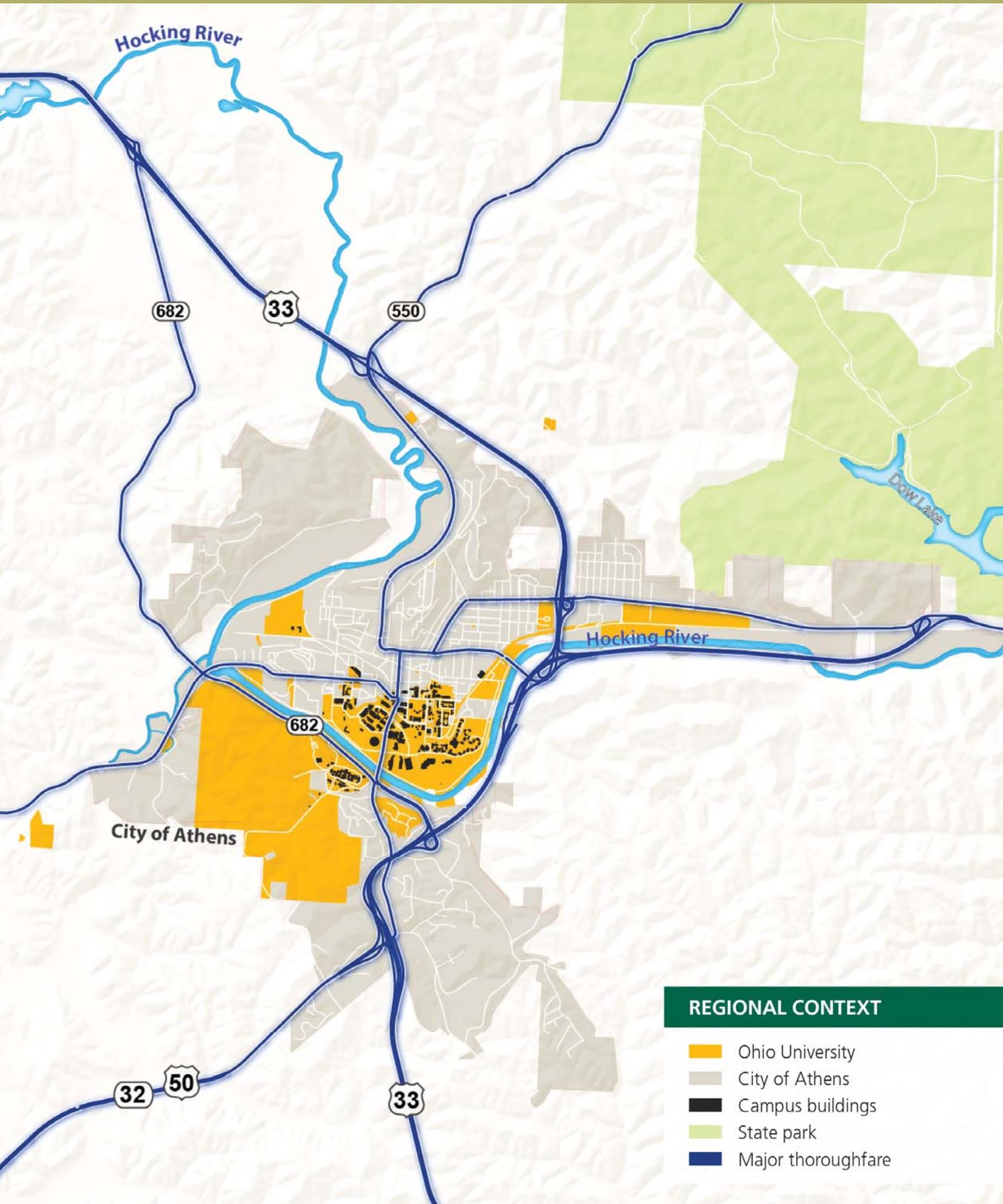
*Submitted by the City of Athens, Ohio  
and Ohio University*



*Submission Video Link:*

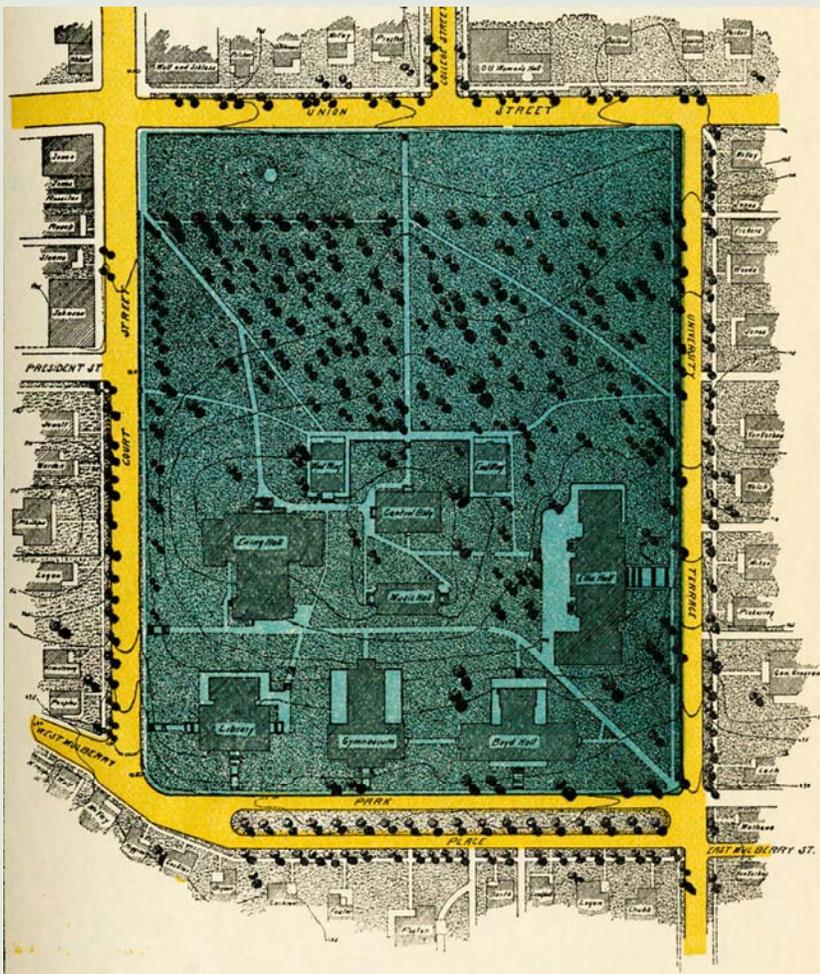
[www.ohio.edu/larry-abernathy-award](http://www.ohio.edu/larry-abernathy-award)

# History of City and University



The City of Athens, Ohio was established in 1797 as “the light on the hill” and the location for the first university to be built in the Northwest Territory. One year later, Ohio University was chartered by an Act of Congress and, subsequently, in 1804 was established by the State of Ohio. It’s safe to say the “Town/Gown” relationship in Athens remains one of the oldest, most enduring of its kind in the United States. The rolling hills of Appalachia have long been home to hardworking people who seek to meet the challenges that each new century brings. The City and the University work in tandem through shared resources, programs, and services to bring a helping hand and renewed hope to those in need.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) Work Group between the City of Athens and Ohio University was established in 2011 and is comprised of senior-level administrators from both entities. The impetus for this high-level collaboration came from City Council’s request to Ohio University to assist with the cost for the purchase of a new ladder-truck for Athens Fire Department. Ohio University not only committed \$250,000 over five years for this purchase, but subsequently committed an additional \$250,000 toward a new pumper-truck. Prior to this agreement, there was not a clear process for coordinating our efforts surrounding planning and implementation of projects that might have an impact on one another. What this MOU has accomplished, in addition to advancing the relationship between the two entities, is to provide a mechanism for assuring collaborative planning.



*There is a determination on the part of the City and the University to pursue common objectives and build upon previous and existing agreements in a spirit of partnership and collaboration. We have a core belief that cultivating this partnership is essential for a productive and mutually supportive future.*

“Athens was founded in 1794 by an act of the Northwest Territory Legislature. The town plat

# Intentional Collaboration and Planning

**“Working for the greater good” is our motto. The City of Athens and Ohio University have been members of ITGA since 2012, and through intentional collaboration we can ensure that our planning endeavors are thoughtful, both in the development and implementation stages. Collaboration isn’t just a box we check, we believe that it truly enriches our shared community.**



Athens residents participating in an open forum for Park Place Corridor Planning, a shared City and University space



Central Building of the Ridges Complex



Ridges Framework Plan

**The Ridges Framework Plan:** Originally built in the 1880s as an asylum for the mentally insane, The Ridges now belongs to Ohio University and has become a treasured historic place for the community. As the University began making improvements to the property, many members of the Athens community were discouraged that one of the buildings on the 700-acre plot of land was demolished. Before any future restoration projects were completed, the University made sure to include City officials and community members in the strategic planning process for the preservation and future use of these buildings.



Athens Comprehensive Plan Visioning Session



OU Master Plan Precinct Meeting

**University and City Plans:** The University included the City Planner and a City Council member on its Campus Master Plan steering committee, and the City's Comprehensive Plan update is now underway with representation from Ohio University. Both entities hold public planning forums to ensure broad participation and collaboration.



# Merging Art & Culture into the Historic Fabric

We consider Athens to be a wonderful, interesting, and rare place and we want to ensure that it continues to be so. In 2014 the City of Athens adopted the Essence of Athens plan to help guide public art decisions and explore strategies to reinforce the uniqueness of Athens in our built environment. The plan was a way to make sure that the City of Athens continues to be defined by its rich history, culture, art and soul, through its built environment. Over time, implementation of our design hopes and wishes will leave a lasting impression on visitors and encourage an even deeper ownership by locals.

Court Street Through The Years



1917



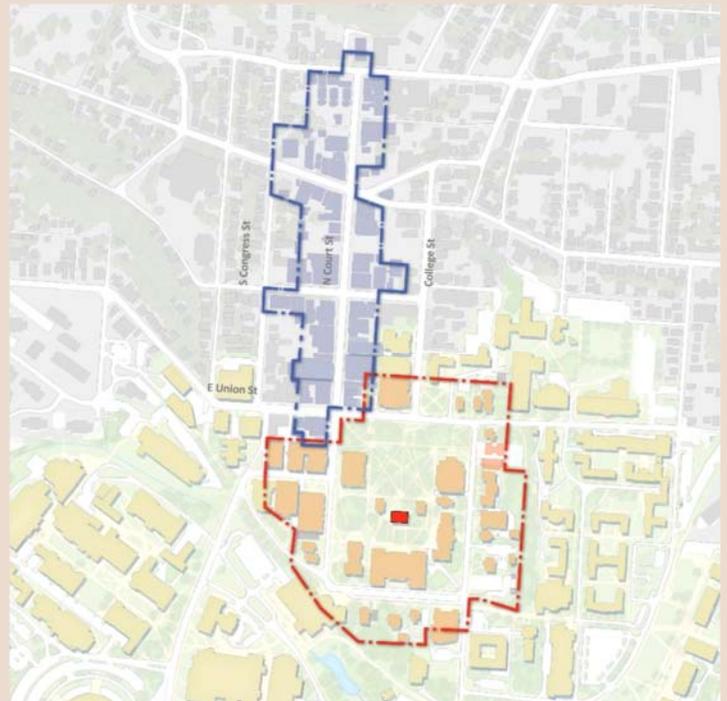
1942



1960s



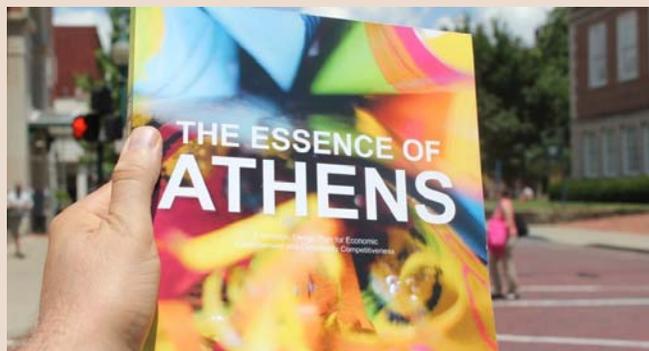
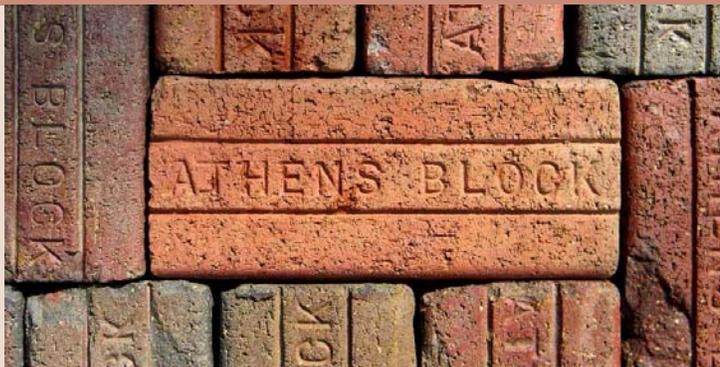
Present



Overlapping historic districts: Two of the City and University's four historic districts

- - - Athens Downtown Historic District Boundary
- - - Ohio University Campus Green Historic District Boundary
- National Historic Landmark—Cutler Hall

Athens Block, Essence of Athens and Community on Court Street...



# Infrastructure: Transportation



Shared transit stops, technology, signage, and programs have provided the building blocks to developing a seamless transit future.



Bridge prior to updating



SR 682 Roundabout

***South Green Drive and Mill Street Roadway Extension:*** Ohio University rebuilt an unmaintained portion of an existing platted City street, improving circulation around campus and within the City.

***Between the Bridges:*** An award-winning renovation of a historic bridge that runs through the heart of campus and to the main uptown district of Athens incorporated sidewalk and lighting improvements with monetary contributions from the University.

***SR 682 Roundabout:*** The new iconic gateway to the City and the University, and the first modern roundabout in the region, became a reality through the extensive efforts of both parties. Included in this project was also a property conveyance from the State to the City.

***Transit: Bobcat Pass & GoBus:*** City of Athens and Ohio University worked collaboratively to develop a free-ride system so that students or employees could ride Athens Public Transit system buses for free. GoBus, a rural intercity bus service, provides opportunities for our community and University members to travel back and forth across the state. The City and University collaborated with other partners to support this initiative.

***East State Street Improvements:*** The City completed pedestrian enhancements along this high-traffic road, including sidewalks inside easements granted by Ohio University.

***Richland Avenue Pedestrian Passageway:*** For many years, both the City and Ohio University received requests to improve safety and congestion issues on this major North/South arterial road. The City and University collaborated to establish a common vision for a new pedestrian crossing. The City sought funding, and the University is contributing as well, to implement the improvements.



City of Athens and Ohio University collaborated to develop a safer pedestrian crossing

# Emergencies and Mutual Support



The 2014 Athens Fire

Emergency services divisions of the City of Athens and Ohio University work closely together during natural and man-made disasters. We assist one another in uniting resources to address any crisis that may occur.



The Fire Department Worked into the A.M.



The New Fire Engine



OU Halloween and 'Fest' Crowds



Joint Patrol Police Cruiser



Police on Horseback Supervising a 'Fest'

**Fires:** On November 16, 2014, a major block in historic Uptown Athens was destroyed by fire, displacing a number of students who lost the majority of their belongings. Multiple responding agencies participated in the event, including the efforts of Athens City Code Enforcement and Ohio University's President and Student Affairs offices. Donations for the displaced students exceeded expectations and all worked in a tremendously cooperative manner solidifying the collaborative nature of our Town/Gown co-existence. In March of 2017, we unfortunately experienced another apartment fire that displaced some international students as well as low-income residents. Due to the established nature of our interactions, Ohio University once again rallied to provide temporary shelter and goods for the victims. This collaboration to assist students in need also emphasizes that the influence of the town-gown relationship in Athens is not limited to permanent residents and University personnel. Through these examples, you can see that University students are an integral part of this town-gown relationship.

**Halloween Block Party:** Known widely as the Mardi Gras of the Midwest, the annual Halloween Block Party brings travelers from across the state to Court Street, a central street in downtown Athens. Ohio University has partnered with the City on providing "Green Jackets," comprised of faculty and staff, who patrol areas on campus and within the student neighborhoods. These Green Jackets are equipped with flashlights and resource information for the large influx of out-of-towners. These patrols are set in place to not only assist the permanent Athens residents in the nearby areas, but even more so, to assist the University students that reside in the area, in keeping the event safe, clean and maintaining the large crowds of visitors.

**"Fests":** Different neighborhoods throughout the City have their own "Fest." Fest-season is comprised of multiple house and block parties that can easily spread beyond their defined street parameters. As these events are not sanctioned by either the City or the University, they cause additional strain on various safety and enforcement divisions, so both work together closely to minimize impacts.

**"CIRT":** Ohio University convenes a group, known as the Critical Incident Response Team, to conduct preventative or responsive measures in the wake of natural or man-made disasters. CIRT complements the disaster response work of the City's first responders by leveraging both entities' resources to rapidly address problems.

**Joint Patrol:** During the weekends, University and City police use a unified cruiser to conduct patrols throughout the student neighborhoods surrounding the campus.

# Community and Student Life

Both Ohio University and the City of Athens work closely together on student activities, community events, and outreach.



**Athens Beautification Day:** Athens Beautification Day is the largest day of community service in Athens County, OH. The single day of service attracts nearly 1,000 volunteers from Ohio University and the surrounding Athens community. Throughout the day, volunteers work on over 50 different service projects throughout the day that range from trash clean ups to landscaping to painting. Due to the success of this one day of service, this year, an entire week will be set aside for engaging in service projects in our community.



***JPAC (The Joint Police Advisory Council):*** The Council develops and maintains productive lines of communication between members of the City-University community and the police departments who serve them. The Council emphasizes shared solutions that make optimal use of resources that best meet the needs of the overall community.

***T.A.G. (Targeting Area Graffiti):*** Working in partnership with the Athens Police Department, the City's core graffiti task force, T.A.G., periodically meets to remove graffiti and make the area just a little bit cleaner. The initial task force was made up of volunteers from City Council, employees of the Mayor's office, the Athens Police Department, and University Students, including the Fraternity Sigma Alpha Epsilon.

***Student Senate:*** These elected student leaders meet twice a year with City Council members to discuss a range of topics. This year's Undergraduate and Graduate Student Senate approached the City to add student representation on several of the City's key Boards and Commissions; new appointments are in process.

***SEROC (Southeast Regional Operations Center):*** Seven public service agencies across three organizations (Athens County, Athens City, and Ohio University) came together to study a co-location opportunity for law enforcement and first-responder facilities. The SEROC Feasibility study effort brought these agencies together in a planning process that resulted in an innovative vision which leverages common needs in a co-located efficient facility to better serve the local communities in the future.

***City and University Memorandum of Understanding on Disabilities:*** The City Commission on Disabilities and the University Presidentially Appointed Committee on Disability and Accessibility Promotion (PACDAP) provide a means for the concerns of people with disabilities to be heard. They advocate for public policy change, review accessibility of Uptown Athens businesses, and provide expertise to the community on disabilities, accessibility and inclusion.

***International Street Fair:*** Every spring, University student organizations and departments, along with community organizations, come together to celebrate our global diversity on the streets of Uptown Athens. Organizations set up booths with cultural displays, free interactive cultural activities for kids, and food from around the world.

***Ohio Town/Gown Inauguration Event:*** This event, first held in 2016, brought together a variety of elected community officials, city planners, safety officials, city administration, community ambassadors, higher education professionals, and college students to discuss important topics related to community and university relations. The event spun off the energy of Ohioans attending the 2016 International Town Gown Association, and after conversations about its possibilities with ITGA Executive Director Beth Bagwell. The meetings have rotated to different host towns: Pickerington, Oxford, and Bowling Green, Ohio.

# Economic Development



City Engineer, Mayor, and University President at the opening of North 1804 Way, an enhanced entrance to City and University, shared project that enhanced access to local businesses.

The City of Athens and Ohio University are only two of several Athens County partners, all striving to work collaboratively on initiatives aimed at improving our local and regional economies.



Stimson & 1804 Way Roundabout



The following are just a few examples of collaborative efforts which improve our community and economic development opportunities:

***Athens County Economic Development Council:*** With members from both the City of Athens and Ohio University, Athens County Economic Development Council moved to adopt a new comprehensive, county-wide economic development strategic plan that sets goals for site development infrastructure, increasing living wage jobs, and securing business investments in Athens County.

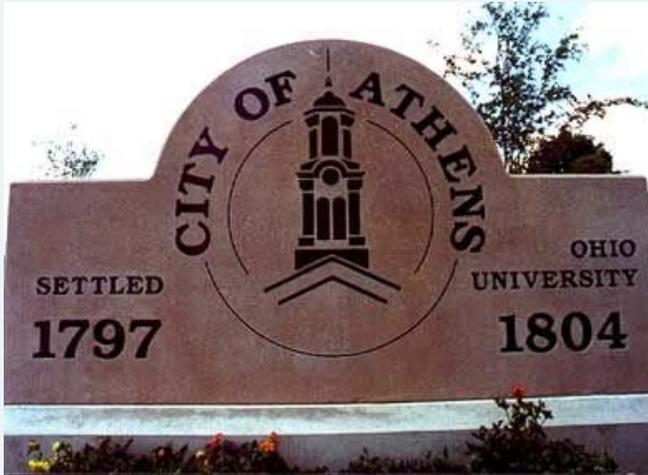
***Stimson Avenue and N. 1804 Way:*** Thoroughfare improvements were made to the northeastern corner of campus, providing a beautiful new gateway for local business truck traffic to and from U.S. Routes 33 and 50. Beyond City and University funds, State and Federal grants allowed for the rapid design and construction of this project.

***Uptown SID (Special Improvement District):*** The City of Athens and Ohio University are working with uptown property owners to establish a Special Improvement District that will create community enhancements including streetscape improvements well-coordinated special events.

***Chamber of Commerce:*** The mission of the Chamber is to facilitate a strong business climate in Athens County and to assist their member companies in meeting their full potential. Promoting Jobs and Progress while encouraging consumers to “Keep It Local” drives their success.

***Athens Uptown Business Association (AUBA):*** The AUBA evolved as a sub-committee of the Athens-Area Chamber of Commerce to promote and showcase the vital membership service industries, restaurants, retail establishments, and businesses connecting the Uptown area directly adjacent to Ohio University.





The City of Athens and Ohio University have created a true partnership in their endeavors to exhibit strong communication between both entities, collaborate on community improvement projects, and work to enhance the already-vibrant environment in which our citizens live. As we look to the next 220 years, we will continue to make efforts to collaborate and build upon the foundation created by the many City and University officials who served before us.



**Senior Housing:** Members of community, City, and University are beginning to undertake an effort to review opportunities for expanded senior care and housing in the community.



**Comprehensive Plan:** The city of Athens is currently in process of updating its comprehensive plan. This process includes extensive engagement with the Athens and Ohio University community in order to establish a long term vision and priorities for our development. University faculty, staff, and students are included in the plan advisory committee and are active participants in this important planning process.

**The Ridges:** The University is getting ready to make a major investment in rehabilitating part of the historic Kirkbride facility for relocation of administrative offices. The Ridges is a prime opportunity for 24/7 life, including housing, retail activity, conferencing, expanded museum offerings, and recreation. The City of Athens and the University will continue to work with community and private industries to develop a mixed use environment for economic development, historic facility investment, and programmatic alignment with community needs.

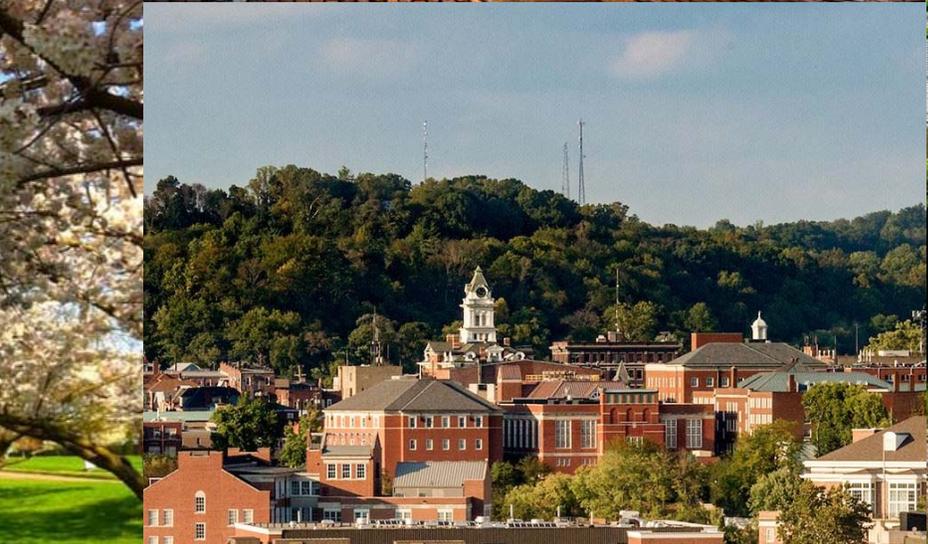


University Development in the West Union Street Corridor will enhance this area of city and present opportunities for community and local businesses.

**Affordable Housing:** The City of Athens and Ohio University created an Affordable Housing Task Force aimed at addressing affordable non-student rental options and single-family structures that can lead to mixed use opportunities/developments. The per-bed rental cost for student housing has inflated housing prices, and currently, only 28 percent of City housing is comprised of non-student rental properties creating a lack of available inventory.













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