

Learning/Achievement in Summer Planning Internship with Licking County Planning & Development

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From July 8 until August 16, 2024, I worked as a Planning Intern at Licking County Planning and Development, specifically with the Licking County Planning Commission (LCPC). The Licking County Area Transportation Study (LCATS) were also in the same office and worked very closely with the planners.

As a public employee, I learned about how county government interacts with the public on a day-to-day basis. Specifically, as the intern working mainly with the Compliance Planner, I met with various property owners while conducting site inspections of various parcels all across Licking County. When there was a new construction project in the county (outside of city limits), the Planning Commission completed routine inspections of the work being done to ensure that floodplain limits were not being violated and sediment basins and silt fences were properly installed. If a site was not built in accordance with the approved plans made by the engineers, then the risk of flood water dispersing and depositing sediment in neighbors' properties becomes a problem. In certain cases, owners of these properties would call the office with a complaint, and we would go on site to complete an inspection. I would take pictures of anything pertinent on the property, then report back to the planners to conclude what steps to take next. If the property was found to be in violation of Soil, Erosion and Stormwater regulations, then a violation letter would be sent. In extreme cases, a stop-work order could be placed on site to immediately halt all construction.

After each visit, I would update an Excel spreadsheet that contained all of the important information about each site that was in violation. After finding each parcel's identification code, I sorted each violation by which township it was in to help decide which sites would be most efficient to visit all in one trip. I used ArcMap in order to make a map which highlighted each parcel that was in violation, showing whether it was soil, erosion & stormwater, floodplain or access management, and whether as-built construction plans were needed from the completed projects. In this map, I included a URL link attached to each parcel that was directly tied to the county's OnTrac website which contains all further information about the parcel. This way, I could easily view the information simply by clicking the parcel on the map. I thought it was interesting how there were so many sites being built in Etna township in the southwest corner of the county, yet much less in the other corners. Nearly every time I went on a site visit, it was to Etna Township, and I saw the new Amazon and FedEx distribution facilities. Many of the new buildings were adjacent to these. When I wasn't in Etna, there were also many projects going on in Jersey township, most notably due to the massive Intel project there inside the New Albany city limits. This caused issues all around the county, because people were taking the cheap dirt from Intel for their own projects, which caused issues if they raised their surfaces without providing proper floodways for water to follow. In one case, a high school built a new soccer field without a swale, catch basin or any other form of drainage. The neighbor, an RV Store, called the office after a significant rain event saying that his property was flooded. When we visited and observed, it was clear that the construction plans had not been followed and the floodwater from the school was draining directly onto the neighbor's property. As the intern, it was my responsibility to use satellite imagery to know exactly where certain parts of properties lined up compared to where the new construction was happening. Certain sites, such as large neighborhoods or developments, required weekly visits to ensure compliance and keeping documentation. All in all, I learned more than I ever imagined about what it's like working in the public sector, and how county level planners work in their daily lives.