



Embargoed until October 12, 2022

CONTACT:

Christine Dersi Davis, AICP
Info@OhioPlanning.org
(330) 814-6295

APA OHIO PRESENTS OHIO APA GREAT PLACES IN OHIO

Three communities recognized as great places in Ohio

CLEVELAND, OH (October 12, 2022) – The Ohio Chapter of the American Planning Association (APA Ohio) is pleased to announce winners of the 2022 Ohio APA Great Places awards. The biennial awards program honors outstanding physical spaces that planners have made permanent through careful planning and unbridled imagination in Ohio.

APA Ohio presented the following awards at the 2022 Cleveland Planning and Zoning Workshop on October 12, 2022. APA Ohio President Rachel Ray, AICP, noted that the Great Places Awards “2022 designees were selected from submissions for great commercial districts, public places or spaces, and neighborhoods from communities large and small from across the state. The entries represented beautiful designs, inspiring stories, and community-led transformations that honor their unique histories.”

The applications were reviewed and scored by members of the Awards Committee of the Ohio APA Board that have representation throughout the state. They evaluated the nominations based on the following criteria:

- Character, personality of place
- Uniqueness of the place
- Special history
- How the space is used
- Planning initiative
- Visual attributes through photographs

The following three nominations were selected as the 2022 Great places of Ohio Award Winners.

Public Space or Place – Jackson Street Pier:

In operation since 1900 as a parking lot and waiting area for oncoming ferries, the Jackson Street Pier was transformed in 2019 into the City of Sandusky's premier open space. This four-acre destination waterfront amenity invites tens of thousands of residents and visitors to enjoy year-round family-friendly entertainment, scenic views of Sandusky Bay, daily recreational opportunities, dynamic festivals, events of all scales, and remains in operation as a local and international port. Jackson Street Pier's unique characteristics include its status as Ohio's only non-airport border crossing.

While the idea had been around for many years, the transformation of Jackson Street Pier was elevated as a priority in the City of Sandusky's 2018 Bicentennial Vision comprehensive plan (adopted in 2016). Through that process, city leaders identified project funding and pursued an inclusive design process driven by public engagement to transform this waterfront amenity into a fully functional, flexible public space. Adopted in 2021, the Downtown Plan prioritized the programming budget that supported (along with sponsorships) the purchase of the stage and movie screen and dedicated annual budget for marketing and event production. The pandemic brought community attention to the value of high-quality outdoor public spaces and programming. The design of Jackson Street Pier allowed families and community members in 2020 and 2021 to gather safely outdoors and enjoy live music, movies, speakers, vendors, and more. This flexible space invites people throughout the day to enjoy a walk, watch the sunset, go fishing, or throw a picnic. City staff get daily feedback from residents how cherished the Jackson Street Pier has become, and the 2022 events are expected to attract more visitors to the waterfront than ever before.

Commercial District – Downtown Willoughby

Historic Downtown Willoughby is a beautiful, quaint and charming neighborhood and even goes by the nickname of the "Courtesy City" was listed as a Historic District on the National Register of Historic Places in 1995 for its commerce and architectural significance from the 1850s to the 1940s. Downtown Willoughby now is a bustling, eclectic community with something to offer everyone who lives, works and plays in the area. Unique characteristics: There are over 65 buildings and sites listed on the National Register of Historic Places. These buildings range from Greek Revival, Gothic Revival, Italianate and Classical Revival styles. Today, they serve as boutiques and shops, restaurants, churches, coffee shops, bars, bed and breakfasts and residential homes. But, it is said that the spirits of Downtown Willoughby's past still occupy these buildings and streets. Besides ghosts and historic buildings, the neighborhood offers plenty of outdoor public green spaces.

With Downtown Willoughby being considered a Historic District, the City of Willoughby follows strict planning initiatives to protect the historic integrity of the neighborhood. The City of Willoughby provides detailed design guidelines that must be followed in the historic downtown district. These guidelines include everything from rehabilitating windows, walls, paint, foundations to demolition and new construction. With these standards, Downtown Willoughby is able to keep a concise and historically accurate look. Downtown Willoughby's distinctive character and charm help attract events, business and visitors from all over Northeast Ohio. The

small-town feel and planning initiatives that support that are what make this place so great. The city also provides the parks and streets with fresh flowers in the spring and summer, creating barriers between the streets and sidewalks. This helps make the town not only look beautiful, but encourages a safe and walkable neighborhood.

Public Space or Place – Mentor Marsh State Nature Preserve

The Mentor Marsh is a lively and buzzing place to be! It is maintained, protected and restored by the Cleveland Museum of Natural History, the City of Mentor and the Ohio Department of Natural Resources Division of Natural Areas and Preserves. Throughout the years, the Cleveland Museum of Natural History has acquired over 690 acres of wetland area and manages the majority of the marsh. The marsh is home to many different local plant and animal species. Animals include leopard frogs, northern pike, yellow perch, bald eagles, owls, marsh wren, bitterns, sparrow, river otters, beavers, monarchs, turtles, and so much more. Unique characteristics: Because of the rate of development in Ohio, over 90 percent of wetlands in the state have been drained. In the 1960s, the Cleveland Museum of Natural History obtained the marsh in order to save it from becoming a marina. Today, Mentor Marsh is one of the largest natural marshes that still remains along the shores of Lake Erie. The wetland is situated between Mentor Lagoons and Headlands Beach State Park. This makes the area a great place for different animal and plant species to thrive.

One of the biggest planning initiatives taking place at the Mentor Marsh are the restoration efforts being led by the Cleveland Museum of Natural History. The first major step of the restoration process was to reduce the amount of phragmites in the marsh. With the guidance of restoration ecologists, the invasive plants were sprayed from helicopters with an aquatic-safe herbicide and mashed to the ground to allow native plants to grow through. With the help of staff, contractors, partners, volunteers and inmates, more than 19,000 plants of 23 native species have been planted. As part of a horticulture job skills program at a local prison, inmates collected and propagated seeds to be planted here, while other plants were purchased from sustainable nurseries and seed growers. Aerial seeding was also used to cover the grounds. Because of these efforts, native plants are sprouting, rare birds are returning, frog habitats thrive, fish are utilizing the water as a nursery and the marsh is becoming a stopover habitat for many animals, such as otters, beavers, waterfowl and shorebirds. While the efforts thus far have been very positive, the protection and restoration is not complete. The marsh is currently working with the Ohio EPA to keep the public informed and up to date on the remediation project of the salt fill.

APA Ohio offers the utmost congratulations to this year's Great Places in Ohio designees – Jackson Street Pier in Sandusky – Downtown Willoughby in Willoughby – and Mentor Marsh State Nature Preserve in Mentor.

Please visit the Great Places page on the APA Ohio website to see our previously designated Great Places, where this year's designees will be added. But most certainly, go and visit each of these, and we hope you'll be as inspired as we are by what has made them Great Places.

Because we plan, great places exist all across Ohio.

###

About APA Ohio:

APA Ohio is a statewide, non-profit association of citizens and professional planners committed to promoting and enhancing planning and the quality of planning for all governmental entities in order to maintain and improve the quality of life for all Ohioans. APA Ohio is a state chapter of the American Planning Association (APA). APA Ohio encourages legislation and action programs to enhance sound planning at the state, regional and local levels. APA Ohio operates under the guidance of a volunteer Board of Trustees elected from the general membership. Chapter sections include Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, Miami Valley and Northwest. Visit www.ohioplanning.org for additional information.