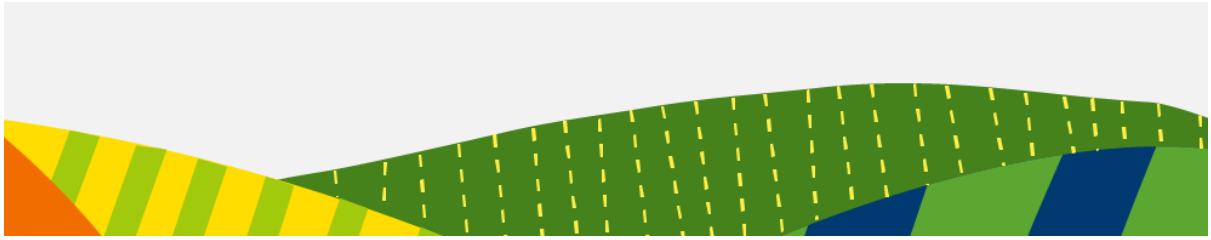

The Brookings Institution
Reimagine Rural podcast

"Intel's megasite means big changes in central Ohio: How are local rural communities responding?"

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Guests:

- BRYN BIRD, Trustee, Granville Township
- JEFF GOTTKE, President, Area Development Foundation, Knox County
- MELISSA HARTFIELD, Mayor, Granville Township
- JENNIFER ROBERTS, Executive Director, Thomas J. Evans Foundation

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Episode Summary:

Intel Corporation is building two multi-billion-dollar semiconductor chip fabrication plants in Licking County, Ohio. While this industrial installation, the largest private-sector investment in Ohio's history, promises to create thousands of jobs, it will also bring big changes to the area, affecting nearby rural places that were not part of the siting decision. In this episode, Tony Pipa talks with local leaders about how they are meeting the challenge by creating a shared vision for equitable development that seeks to protect the integrity of their towns as they face inevitable changes.

PRESIDENT BIDEN: Outside of Columbus, Ohio, Intel is building semiconductor factories on a thousand acres—literally a field of dreams. It's going to create 10,000 jobs, that one investment; 7,000 construction jobs; 3,000 jobs in those factories once they're finished. They call them factors. Jobs paying an average of $130,000 a year, and many do not require a college degree.

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PIPA: That's President Biden in his State of the Union address delivered to Congress on February 7, 2023, referring to a more than $20 billion investment being made by the Intel Corporation in central Ohio to build two semiconductor chip fabrication plants, or fabs.

The Intel project is the largest private-sector investment in Ohio's history. As the president said, in its initial phase, it's anticipated to create 3,000 permanent jobs and 7,000 construction jobs. It's exactly the type of investment that policymakers hoped for when they passed the bipartisan CHIPS and Science Act in 2022, a law that contains subsidies and incentives to bring computer chip manufacturing back to the U.S. and to spread technology and innovation jobs beyond coastal metro areas to places in the heartland and other areas across the country.

So, from that perspective, the Intel project reflects national ambitions about securing our supply chains and bringing American ingenuity to the heartland.

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And yet, on the other hand, it's a juggernaut that promises to bring big changes to the rural townships and villages that surround it. And even communities just nearby were not involved in the discussions nor the decision to bring Intel in. So, what does it mean for them?

In this episode of *Reimagine Rural*, you'll hear about this massive industrial installation from the point of view of those local rural communities as they try to help steer the inevitable changes and to take advantage of the potential benefits while protecting the character and the integrity of their towns.

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I'm Tony Pipa, a senior fellow in the Center for Sustainable Development at the Brookings Institution. And welcome to *Reimagine Rural*, the podcast where I talk to local people, and hear their stories of change happening in their communities and explore the implications and intersections with public policy.

The Intel megasite sits on one thousand acres about 25 minutes east of Columbus, Ohio. Eight hundred of those acres were a former hog farm. The area of Licking County that surrounds the site to the east is dotted with townships and small villages. Here's Bryn Bird, a trustee of Granville Township, with a population of about 10,000 people a little more than 10 miles to the east of the Intel site.

[3:10]

BIRD: The Granville community is truly, like, the most beautiful, quintessential Midwestern town. It kind of has a look of maybe a New England town in the Midwest. It is a planned community. Missionaries from Granville, Massachusetts, came and started Granville Village and then the Granville Township. They picked this area because of the Welsh Hills, as they call them. And it's very beautiful rolling hills. We're right where the glaciers ended and some of the Appalachia hills start. It's a beautifully picturesque community. It's very tight knit.

PIPA: Bryn is carrying on a family legacy in her role as a township trustee.

[3:44]

BIRD: I like being a trustee. It was like my dream job to be a township trustee. My grandpa was a township trustee, but I didn't know him when he was one. But when he died hundreds of people came to his funeral, and I was really little. I was 12 or 13.

[music]

And I remember just being blown away that all these people came, and they were saying like your grandpa helped me that one time when I had a flood in my basement and your grandpa was able to help me when I needed to figure out how to get a fence and he just how he was engaged in everybody's life. And I think that townships are like the purest, most efficient form of governance.

PIPA: In Ohio, townships provide government and services in areas not within a municipality. A village is a municipality but can span township and county lines. Granville Village is within Granville township and home to Denison University. Melissa Hartfield has been its mayor for 18 years.

[4:42]

HARTFIELD: I am in fact the longest running mayor of this village and grew up here. My mom's family came here in the late 1820s horseback from Virginia and settled here. And some have come and gone. But somehow my chain, you know, I'm the descendant of those who stayed. So, this place, I have extraordinarily deep roots here and really care about what happens to the community.

PIPA: Melissa loves the timeless feel and sense of community of the village.

HARTFIELD: It has a historical flavor to it that I feel is really rich. And, you know, you can kind of feel it when you walk in some of the buildings and the museums, just kind of the essence of the history. The architecture—I love the architecture. I love beautiful architecture, old buildings.

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Personally, I love history, so, I'm kind of one of those genealogy chasers. Love to walk old graveyards, love to walk the halls of extraordinarily old buildings and hear the tales of those who came before and understand why they were there. And there's just so many fascinating pieces of history to understand where we are and why. And I think that sometimes we forget those pieces and have to kind of do things over because we don't look at what's been done in the past.

PIPA: Newark is the county seat for Licking County. From the perspective of Jennifer Roberts, the executive director of the Thomas J. Evans Foundation, a private family foundation located in Newark, the area's strong sense of community sets it apart.

[6:25]

ROBERTS: I value Licking County because of its rich sense of community. I've worked in a number of places throughout central Ohio, and we are really special here. People care about one another. They care about the community. They care about the natural landscape within our community. It's just a very unique place. It has a very strong sense of philanthropy. We have generational families that have really invested in trying to make Licking County a better place to live, work, and play.

PIPA: When outsiders like me think of central Ohio, we often place it in the so-called Rust Belt, that portion of the Midwest characterized by a long downturn in industry with aging factories. The county has endured its share of losses for sure, but its decline has been tempered somewhat by new kinds of economies.

[7:18]

ROBERTS: I think Licking County is a manufacturing community that has survived better than most comparable midwestern manufacturing communities. We have a variety of industries that have helped us to weather through large manufacturers closing over time.

Licking County has outpaced the metro and state since about 2015 in gross domestic product production. And so, that is something that's really important for people to understand. We are not growing just because of Intel. We actually have had a really strong growth performance for a number of years. Over the last, I think, 10 years we have had more than 19,000 jobs created primarily in the transportation and warehousing sector,

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which leads to some other challenges because the wages for those jobs make it a challenge for many single income families to find housing in our community.

PIPA: Melissa Hartfield is glad that the county has been able to attract those new economic enterprises, but she also worries about the quality of those jobs and what it means for homeownership and economic security for the employees, as well as the overall impact on the character of the community. She sees real potential for changing that in the jobs that Intel can bring.

[8:47]

HARTFIELD: And those are frankly 50 percent less than the median income. And so, those people that have those jobs can't even live here. And one of the things that I've been really worried about that's happening to Granville is kind of the gentrification of this town. I don't want this to be the kind of town where the only people who can live here have to pay half a million dollars for a house.

[music]

You see it happening all over the United States. You know, this whole county, we've lost a lot of capacity at Owens Corning Fiberglass. We lost Rockwell. We've lost so many manufacturing jobs and production facilities and things like that.

Once upon a time someone could work at Owens Corning Newark, whether it's husband, wife, whatever, one partner in the family would have to work and that was enough. That was enough. They had the health care. They had a retirement. Pension. They could pay for their kids to go to college. Well, that's no more.

And so, I'm hoping that these can bring jobs like that for people to have those opportunities where you don't see people working two, three jobs just to survive.

PIPA: In addition to manufacturing, Licking County has also been known for its agriculture. Bryn Bird is a farmer herself.

[10:12]

BIRD: Licking County has a strong agricultural background. As Columbus has grown out, Licking County has not really grown out with it. If you look at the Columbus region, a lot of the population density has gone north towards Delaware County and into some of the other surrounding communities. And Licking County has kind of been able to stay very agricultural based, very rural, its own little oasis in that Licking County never joined the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission until after Intel was announced, and a part of that was to kind of stay separate, not to grow and not to become like a suburban area.

And so, having that kind of just told to us and mostly not being a part of the decision-making—Jobs Ohio kind of site selected the site and moved forward and everybody else was left to play catch up.

[music]

That really felt like it happened to us and not something that our community, our county was really seeking.

PIPA: What Bryn is alluding to is that Granville Township, Granville Village, Newark, and other surrounding jurisdictions in Licking County were not part of, nor privy to, any of the discussions or decisions that led to Intel siting its project in Licking County. Mayor Hartfield describes her reaction.

[11:28]

HARTFIELD: We heard whispers about it before it became public, as many people did, you know. It's kind of one of the worst kept secrets, so to speak. And so, kind of the first is shock, and oh my goodness, and you know, what are we gonna do and where and what? And utilities? And what's this gonna bring? How's this gonna change? It's been it's been a lot This is not just a development. This is a mega development that's going to alter the course of our history in a generational way. And that can be good or bad.

PIPA: Jennifer Roberts at the Evans Foundation agrees. The announcement by Intel was a surprise that's going to alter the future course of the region.

[12:19]

ROBERTS: From our perspective in Licking County, it was much of a surprise. As you know, with these types of business endeavors, there are lots of confidentiality agreements. And so, the general public was not aware of what was happening until January 21st of 2022.

And so, when the announcement was made about Intel siting its new fabrication site in Licking County, I would say we had a range of emotions. Some people were very excited about the economic opportunity that that would bring to Licking County. Others were fearful about what that would mean for our community and the changes that would happen.

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We have longtime Licking County residents, you know, multigeneration, who have lived and farmed here, worked here, and, you know, in the media, you hear Intel's being located in the middle of nowhere. Well, for us, it is somewhere. And that was really a difficult process for people to absorb the information and then figure out what was next.

PIPA: So, how did Intel, a company so synonymous with Silicon Valley in California—in fact the silicon chips that it manufactures helped give the region its name—come to be in central Ohio and a central figure in what some state and national leaders are now starting to call Silicon Heartland?

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Over the past decade, policymakers have become concerned with the consolidation of the chip-making industry in Southeast Asia and China, a concern that picked up momentum as the political relationship between the U.S. and China grew both more competitive and more tense.

By 2022, semiconductors manufactured in the U.S. accounted for about 12 percent of the global total, just one-third of what it had been 30 years previously. And the supply chain issues experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic, when demand for all the products powered by computer chips far outstripped the supply and led to worldwide shortages, just heightened the worries that policymakers had.

Side note here: in fact, two years ago the hosts of another Brookings podcast, *Vying for Talent*, interviewed the founder of Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company Morris Chang about whether chip manufacturing could or should return to the U.S. For extra credit, you can find that on our website.

So, in 2022, Congress passed the CHIPS and Science Act providing $52 billion in incentives and subsidies for increasing chip manufacturing in the U.S. And Central Ohio has many natural and intellectual assets that made it attractive to a manufacturer such as Intel, as Bryn Bird explains.

[15:09]

BIRD: We sit on a crossroad of a power grid. So, we have a very stable power, very cheap and stable power, electricity. And then, you know, we have good transportation when it comes to 70 and 71. And also, as we're continuing to find out, we have a lot of water.

As a farmer, the part that really kind of stresses me out is we have non-irrigated farmland. Farmers here don't have to irrigate anything. And I work with Farmers Union and go around the country and like farmers anywhere else, you say that, like, we plant corn, and it just grows. We don't have to water it. It just happens.

[music]

PIPA: Stable power. Good transportation. And abundant water. Hmm, water. I'll come back to that later, as concerns over the extraction of that water have created controversy and become a source of disagreement.

The area is also seismically stable, which is important for a semiconductor facility given the types of chemicals and components used. Add the talent pool and nearby educational institutions such as Ohio State University, the local community colleges, and several highly regarded liberal arts universities, and it's no surprise Intel saw central Ohio as an attractive location.

The Intel site itself is located in the New Albany International Business Park, developed by the New Albany Company, which was founded by two college classmates and business partners, Les Wexner and Jack Kessler. Wexner grew up in the area and founded The Limited, Victoria's Secret, and other retail brands that became L Brands and made him a billionaire.

The pair began developing the area around the town of New Albany in the mid-'80s, starting with the New Albany Farms Housing development, which has some of the most exclusive housing in the state. Their financial and political capital were instrumental in facilitating the Intel deal and give the New Albany Company powerful influence.

Now, as you know, the jurisdictions in Licking County that immediately surround New Albany and the megasite were not part of the siting decision to bring Intel in. So, how did all these different communities and interests in Licking County even start to think about how to manage the impacts, whether positive or negative, that it would have on their communities? Bryn describes the situation that local leaders were facing in the immediate aftermath of the announcement.

[17:38]

BIRD: Because Licking County and Ohio have such a landscape where we do have these townships and then we have villages, and we have cities and we have counties, it makes it more complicated. You have to wrangle together a lot of people. I think out West, you know, you have incorporated areas and unincorporated. You usually can have, like, one jurisdiction that you're working with. Here, you're going to

have to work with so many different jurisdictions. And so, how do we all coordinate so we're all hearing the same voice?

And also, when we're independent of each other we don't have a strong voice, so how do we come together and kind of say back to the state, to Columbus, to the New Albany Company, hey, we have our own autonomy. We have our own choices. You need to listen to us.

I think we all looked to the county for that at the beginning. And there just was none of that coming out of the county. At the beginning, the county even kind of had said like, well, townships don't want our help.

[music]

Well, we kind of were cool being left alone before Intel came. But once it came, we were ready for some help.

PIPA: Local leaders were determined to have a say on how Intel's arrival would change and could benefit their communities and the people living here. Enter the Thomas J. Evans Foundation, which became the catalyst for an innovative collective planning effort called Framework, designed to help Licking County communities develop a set of collective priorities for managing the impact of the project. Jennifer Roberts describes how this idea emerged and the important role of the foundation in acting as a neutral convener.

[19:11]

ROBERTS: Quickly after we began a group that was convened with the Licking County Chamber of Commerce, Grow Licking County, which is a local C.I.C.—

PIPA: That means Community Improvement Corporation

ROBERTS: —and the Heath Newark Licking County Port Authority formed a group to talk about what we would do to try to welcome Intel to our community and to plan for it.

Emerging from that initiative, it became pretty quickly apparent that they were more focused on the workforce piece, ensuring that there would be employees for Intel and also trying to support the existing employers who didn't want to lose their employees and were a little concerned about potential change.

So, out of that effort, the Thomas J. Evans Foundation was tapped and encouraged to participate as a neutral convener for a project that would do more regional planning and visioning than we've really ever set out to accomplish in our community.

PIPA: Jennifer explains how the process began to take shape, and how they thought about which places to involve.

[20:12]

ROBERTS: As we began looking at whether or not the Thomas J. Evans Foundation could serve as a neutral convener, we brought together one elected official from each of 14 jurisdictions plus the county. And we selected communities and jurisdictions that were primarily along the 161-16 corridor because we knew those were the areas that would have the greatest, most immediate impact from Intel and the growth on the western part of Licking County. We knew that it would impact our whole county, but we kind of had to start somewhere.

Licking County doesn't have a rich history of planning in this manner, and I would say does not have a history of any multijurisdictional planning, so this was really something that we are we're trying to kind of figure out the best path forward each step of the way as we moved on.

We brought that group of individuals together on April 28th of 2022, and we asked what their greatest opportunities were and their greatest challenges as they thought about Intel relocating to Licking County.

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From that meeting, we asked would they see value in a public private partnership? And there was unanimous interest in that opportunity.

PIPA: Granville Village's Mayor Melissa Hartfield was enthusiastic from the start.

[21:34]

HARTFIELD: I became involved in Framework, number one, because I'm the mayor. And so, Sarah Wallace from T.J. Evans Foundation called and said, hey, what do you think about thus and so and thus and so? And I was like, I said, thank goodness. Thank goodness someone is going to pick up the leadership mantle on this. And really kind of grabbed it by the horns. Because you hear information, this, that, or the other, I mean, it was just really, frankly, a train wreck. And they took the leadership about this and became what they would call a neutral convener.

And all the jurisdictions sat down for an initial meeting or two and hey, do you want to do this? Would you be willing to put some money into it? The businesses put some money into it. T.J. Evans Foundation put a significant amount into it. The county helped as well. And we worked for 15 months on the leadership committee. I was one of those members with those business leaders and with T.J. Evans Foundation and with Planning Next.

PIPA: Bryn Bird had prior experience working with the Evans Foundation, and she knew that they had built up a level of trust in the area.

[22:53]

BIRD: One of Licking County's biggest strengths is our non-profit, philanthropic community that we have. We have some foundations in our community that spend millions and millions of dollars. And I luckily had worked for the Thomas J. Evans

Foundation that sponsored Framework, actually, and helped start a farm market down in downtown Newark. They invested millions of dollars into this beautiful space.

And so, I had already worked with them. And they had approached some of the townships and called early on and said, hey, we are hearing that there needs to be help. And would this be helpful to you? Do you think that this would be good?

[music]

And so, they brought together a bunch of businesses, the county, cities, townships, and villages to the table who'd be most affected. And what it really did is it broke down the power structure. We all became equals in that room. It was not the county. It was not cities over townships. We all were equal. And I think that was such a show to everybody in the room—we're all gonna be equal, nobody's over anybody. And it broke down power structures so we could have honest conversations.

Because up until that moment I think we were all very paranoid and nervous and stressed, like, is this community gonna sell out? Is this community gonna put in all these houses? Is this community going to put in all these businesses? Nobody knew what everybody was going to do. And it allowed for us to have, like, open conversations about what did we want as a county. And it was a really tremendous process and it worked really well.

PIPA: Seeing the construction of the fabs is quite a sight. What was once a two-lane country road is being transformed in real time to a four-lane thruway lined with a convoy of heavy machinery and large trucks, with cranes rising into the sky on a massive parcel of land. The incongruity with some of the small ranch houses that remain, which once sat next to quiet fields, is stark.

[music]

And that's one thing to realize here. Almost immediately after the Intel announcement, these particular communities I'm talking to began experiencing significant changes. Real estate prices began to increase exponentially, both from the interest in buying or building housing, as well as from suppliers eager to locate their operations near Intel. A company proposed placing two asphalt- and concrete-mixing plants in Alexandria, a village of about 500 people right next to Granville, raising immediate concerns about the extent to which their operations might threaten the area's drinking water.

So, as Bryn points out, the amount of change added immediate stress and made it difficult for different communities to trust each other and for each of them to feel comfortable that they even had the information that they needed. This is in real contrast to other places in the region.

For another perspective on this, I talked to Jeff Gottke, who is the president of the Area Development Foundation in Knox County. Knox County abuts Licking County to the north, but even the closest towns in that county are about 15 to 20 miles away from the Intel site.

[26:02]

GOTTKE: We're far enough away geographically that the immediate impact won't be felt. That we've got some time. We've got five to seven to eight years in order to really think about who we want to be. Development is like water, right? It goes where you channel it. So, we've got some time where we can figure out, okay, how aggressive do we want to be for growth?

TONY PIPA: The luxury of that time means that jurisdictions in Knox County are taking a bit more of a traditional approach to planning, with each of them doing their own planning and then packaging it together through the development foundation.

GOTTKE: Knox County is 386,000 acres, right? So, that's a pretty big county. So, each jurisdiction is going to have different needs. So, I kind of see it as we're the liaison to all of those different jurisdictions and we can kind of help them through the principles outlined in the strategy to develop their own vision and then create and deploy some mechanisms for implementing it.

The first thing is we need to update our county comprehensive plan. So, that's going to happen in 2024. So, by the end of this, the county itself will have a vision for what it wants to be like in 10 years. And then each village, they have their own strategic plans that were done pre-Intel. So, really, we've been using those as the compass for the journey that they're on.

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But it's really more of a hub and spoke model with us kind of in the middle than it is that collective agreement that Framework has.

PIPA: That's important to give some context to how innovative Framework was. Not only was it a collective peer effort among the elected leaders of those jurisdictions in Licking County, it also reached deep into the communities and the people themselves. The process was widespread and iterative to make sure it reflected the unique character and priorities of the place, according to Bryn Bird.

[28:11]

BIRD: But they had multiple listening sessions. And what they would also do is they would test. So, they would go out and have listening sessions in the community, at the football games, at the farm markets, at Kiwanis, at Rotary, at any place that they could. And then they also had like, you know, at the library, at the university in Newark, they would have big listening sessions. And they would gather data, gather information. And then their planning team would kind of work on develop like, okay, this is what we're hearing. We're hearing that these are your priorities. We're hearing these are your concerns.

And then they would bring it back to these groups and say, all right, we finished this first round, and this is a draft of the language that we are starting to put together. This is a draft of the principles we're putting together. What do you think, community?

And then the community actually had a chance to edit and give feedback, and say, yes, you heard me correctly, or no, you didn't hear me correctly, I didn't want that. And they did that multiple rounds.

[music]

And I think that was what was really neat, is how they didn't just go listen once and then go into a corner and write what they had already said they were going to write. It is very nuanced. It's very particular to Licking County.

PIPA: Jennifer Roberts describes some of the key gaps and priorities that surfaced through Framework.

[29:25]

ROBERTS: Some of the key challenges that our community faces: utilities, transportation, capacity from a planning and zoning perspective, housing, trying to be able to house folks that are moving into our community. So, our challenges laid before us were pretty significant.

The way Framework tried to respond to this was to help educate our community and the elected officials about what the landscape of our county really is. What is our current economic landscape? Where are the jobs? How are they paying? Where's the growth occurred? We looked at housing needs. Licking County is already facing a significant housing shortage and a lack of housing meeting variety of types. So, we currently have 82 percent of our housing is in single family homes. We have more mobile home units than apartments. So, we're currently facing issues with housing that I'm not sure all of our elected officials and our community as a whole really understood.

And then trying to understand with our current trends the potential growth that could happen. How can we shape the growth in a way that can help us improve and that can we all benefit?

PIPA: Framework ended up encompassing seven townships, three villages, and four cities, and they all were asked to make a financial contribution scaled to what was appropriate to that community.

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[31:01]

ROBERTS: So, Framework has given a voice to our residents, to our businesses, to our government leaders and really has served an important role within our community. We have focused on securing general public and insight. We have focused on educating the general community about the issues that we face, helping to educate our elected officials on what our current trends are, what potential growth may happen and the tools that they can use to respond.

PIPA: Now, this is the kind of innovative, multi-sector, public-private civic collaboration that simply pops up over and over as I visit places for the podcast that

are managing change. But at the end of the day, no process can guard against every eventuality. And these collective priorities, well, they're not binding.

Just as I arrived in the community to talk to these leaders, a case arose that tested the proposition that these communities and their residents could manage this growth together, with one voice.

[32:13]

GRANVILLE TOWNSHIP SECRETARY: All right. It is seven o'clock. I will call the order of Granville Township Board of Trustees regular meeting for October 11th, 2023.

TOWNSHIP MEETING AUDIENCE: I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the republic for which it stands, one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

TOWNSHIP MEETING SPEAKER 1: I don't know if you signed a bad contract without legal counsel reviewing that contract. Maybe you got hoodwinked. I don't know. But you sold all of us up the river. You didn't think about anybody in Granville except yourself. And I think to look at my property, my pond's down three feet right now. And you tell me four million gallons a day coming out of the same aquifer for somebody else's problem.

But I've never screwed over thousands of people by signing a bad contract, only myself. I think you should resign from your post because you breached, by the very definition of trustee, you have removed any trust of the people that elected you, and I voted for you, you've removed any trust that anybody put into you to do this job. It's a shame.

TOWNSHIP MEETING SPEAKER 2: I come from a family of farmers, so I appreciate, you know, you working the ground. But I feel like as a trustee, you have a fiduciary responsibility to protect the interests of the people that you represent above your own interests. And I do not think that you did that in this instance whatsoever. So, I second the call for you to resign.

[music]

PIPA: That was the scene at the regular biweekly public meeting of the Granville Township trustees that I attended on October 11, 2023. The voices you hear are Granville township residents referring to the sale of a piece of property by Dan VanNess to New Albany Company. Dan is a farmer and lifelong resident who serves as an elected trustee of the township.

The meeting that night was standing room only, with the residents speaking at a microphone about six to seven feet from their elected trustees, visibly upset about the potential impact of the sale of the property on the aquifer that provides water to their community.

Several more people also called for VanNess to resign. The trustees and residents had heard from the county that after buying the parcel, the company had inquired

about pulling permits to draw water from the site. The rumors suggested it could be as much as three million gallons of water a day.

Mayor Hartfield expressed her unreserved frustrations to me.

[34:47]

HARTFIELD: And we have worked really hard, this village has, and other municipalities, through that Framework to really face it head on. And what's disappointing is, you know, we've worked for months and months and months on all these, and really feel like you have a grasp on it, and you finally feel like the world isn't gonna end. We're all gonna be okay. It's all gonna be okay. And then you turn around and you have New Albany Company buy a hundred acres, three parcels from our wellfield, to pump all the water out of there. Okay?

So, you have a lot of hostile things going on, when as a county you're trying to really work for the benefit of all, not just one. And so, what's frustrating is when you have all these billions of dollars running around, there's just a lot of mischief. And probably folks that couldn't care less what the people in Licking County think or want or anything. And that's the most frustrating part.

PIPA: Emotions were certainly high at the township trustee meeting in the aftermath of the sale, but it was also impressive to see how civil the residents who participated were and to watch how they respected the local democratic process. Mayor Hartfield offers additional perspective.

[36:18]

HARTFIELD: This water situation, you know, we feel let down by the county. We don't know where the state resides on this, they've been real quiet about it. And I get it. They want this to go through and I'm not blaming Intel. I'm not blaming Intel for this. You know, they've been sold you're gonna have this this thus and so. I'm not blaming them. But those that sold this package didn't have all the T's crossed and the I's dotted, and that's what's frustrating to me.

If you go to our farmer's market on a Saturday morning, it's enormous.

[music]

You can literally just grocery shop there. Literally. And people forget about all that, that we don't just need water for data centers to cool the electronic processes and the chips. I get you need to do that, but you don't need to take all the water, because we need it for food, and for the people to be able to have something to drink. Right? Water is life.

PIPA: According to VanNess, the farmer and trustee who sold his land, the New Albany Company told him they were considering using the property for wetlands remediation. He also said at the meeting that he would have sold the property to Granville Township, and even more cheaply, if he had known before he signed a contract that the township was interested.

[37:44]

VANNESS: I do appreciate everybody's concern and I'm willing to sit down with anybody at any time. I got a buddy seat in my combine, you're all welcome to come out and take a ride while we talk. But, you know, my allegiance really is with Granville, raised all my kids here, my grandparents were here. I would do anything that Granville needs. So, I'm the first one to give the shirt off my back when I find somebody who's in, needs help, is in trouble. So, that's all I have to say.

PIPA: For Bryn Bird, it isn't just about the water. It's about autonomy.

[music]

[38:25]

BIRD: But I think for me more than giving up our water, it's the giving up of our autonomy and having a municipality that's miles away come into our community without, you know, coordination, without any coordination, without any respect for the community, without any looking at the future of how do we want to build out.

We're not saying our heads are in the sand. We don't think things are going to happen. Things aren't going to change. But I think there's a responsible way of doing it. And I think that there's enough there's enough case studies from around the country of how do communities build out best? How do you build out you know, a sense of place and healthy communities? And how do you do it just kind of rogue, very fast to the highest bidder? And we want to make sure we're not doing that.

PIPA: It doesn't sit well with several of the surrounding communities that the massive changes in store for the entire region were decided really by one municipality in conjunction with the county and the state.

In this instance, it was disappointing to put so much work into Framework, to create that platform for engagement with other stakeholders and for that engagement not to happen.

[39:34]

BIRD: I just have not seen it play out as well as the decisions are being made, especially from the New Albany Company and the city of New Albany. They have money and power that we as a little township don't have. And I don't think that they really care much about our autonomy or much about what we want for our future. I think they have a plan of what they need for the future, and they don't have a problem not talking to us.

But, you know, we were doing this Framework thing and saying, hey, let's work together. Let's all come together. Let's have our plan. It would have been really great had they come and said, hey, you know what? We're going to be short 3 million gallons of water a day on this project that we have going on. You guys sit on a lot of water. What if we got this piece of property and we shared this and we did a resource exchange and we can pay for this.

Well, had there had been a conversation, that could have been very different than you finding out after meetings have already happened that the New Albany

Company and the City of New Albany are trying to take your resources, your natural resources at no regard to your community.

PIPA: For Bryn, that personal, face-to-face interaction is what makes local governance work.

[40:43]

[music]

BIRD: When I ran for trustee, I always said—I ran in 2017—and one of the things I said a lot of that time was, like, we rebuild trust in democracy at the local level. And I think when people have faces that they see every day, you can start to take out that, like, "they/them," and you can start to take out the they're not a person, they're just a name that you can characterize. And so, I do think that it forces us into conversations that we don't have to have at the federal level.

PIPA: It was those kinds of in-person conversations that helped Alexandria stave off, at least for the time being, the asphalt- and concrete-mixing plants that had been proposed in their town. The county planning commission voted unanimously to reject the request in November of 2023.

[41:34]

BIRD: I look at the community next door to us, Alexandria. They fought a big asphalt plant and watching them do that, I mean, it was the most nonpartisan. You had people on the far right and the far left just coming together. And you drive down that road and every house has a sign, no asphalt plants here, no asphalt plants here.

And I asked them recently with this, I said, how did you guys do it? How did you keep politics out of it? How did you keep everyone together? And they said, we took it offline. We only had meetings in person. And they said, we would put online we're having a meeting. If you're worried about this, come to the meeting. And we only had in person meetings.

And I'm wearing my sweatshirt that says Midwest Nice. And I do think that Midwestern people have a way of, we're sometimes too nice to each other. And so, we when you're in person, we don't say super mean things to each other. And that can keep the conversation more civil.

[42:21]

[music]

But I do think that some of these environmental issues, and I do think like right and left, we all are concerned about corporate monopolies, we're worried about corporate consolidation, we're worried about power, where power structures are, abuse in power structures.

And I see that this conversation is that conversation, and how do we make sure that we are coming together and looking at some of these some of these power

structures from right and left, and we can all agree that it should stay in the hands of the local citizens and local residents for sure.

PIPA: After the sale of the VanNess property and the resulting uproar, it came to light that the search for water to service the new fabs had been going on for more than two years. The regional economic development organization, One Columbus, had commissioned an engineering firm in 2021 to identify potential local water sources. None of the jurisdictions where the identified sites are located were consulted or alerted.

Given the reaction to this, earlier this year New Albany withdrew its request for a permit to drill a test water well on the property as Granville Township was preparing to mount a defense, with New Albany saying that they, quote, “want to take time to collaborate with community members and leaders to ensure that their efforts are understood,” end quote.

And while Intel has announced that it won’t be opening the fabs in 2025 as originally announced, construction proceeds apace, and it recently received $8.5 billion from the Biden administration as it implements the CHIPS and Science Act to support this and several other projects Intel has underway across the country.

Mayor Hartfield sometimes feels caught in the middle of geopolitics.

[44:08]

HARTFIELD: And the president and others kind of want to stand at the podium and say, jobs, jobs, jobs and we’re reshoring. Listen, I’m all for reshoring. I’ve worked in the construction industry. My father, his business is mechanical contracting. I got to see firsthand all of these manufacturing facilities move to China, and the places where he worked. He does niche work in, you know, places with conveyors, and paint booths, and Owens Corning where they have production lines for roofing and insulation and just on and on and on.

And so, I watched all of that shrink. And so, I’m a big proponent of that. I’ve never understood where the wisdom was in all of that other than just shareholder wealth is all it is.

And COVID put it on full display. You know, you can’t get masks, you can’t get this, you can’t get that. And so, I’ve never been a fan of the way we did that. So, I do support reshoring all these jobs. Don’t get me wrong. I just think It’s been a lot to swallow.

PIPA: Having said that, she ties everything back to the process that Framework developed with the various communities.

[45:25]

HARTFIELD: And this Framework piece that we’ve done here has been 15 months of really hard work to kind of say, okay, it’s not going to be the end of the world. We have a lot of challenges to address.

[music]

We have some housing shortages. We have infrastructure issues as far as water and sewer. We have to as a county think about net fiscal benefit for the property uses.

PIPA: So, now, in 2024, after the groundbreaking ceremonies are long over and the work that will transform Licking County and surrounding communities is well underway, what happens next? Here's Jennifer Roberts from the Thomas J. Evans Foundation again.

[46:15]

ROBERTS: The results of our yearlong learning process with the leadership group, the elected officials, and our public outreach, we were able to survey the community and understand what is most important to them.

The top three items that surfaced from our public outreach in round one was, number one, people care about schools. Number two, they care about and value having a sense of community, and they don't want to lose that as growth occurs. And number three, they care about housing and want to ensure that if you have a young child graduating from high school, they can come back, or from college, they can come back and live in our community or if you have an aging parent that they can step down into housing that's appropriate for them.

They value the fact that in our community, people live here. They grow up. They may go away, but they come back. And we have to ensure that while growth is occurring in our community, we don't prevent that from continuing to happen because it's a really important part of what we value.

PIPA: Bryn Bird added a few other priorities to this list.

[47:26]

BIRD: And then so, it was really interesting to see that when it came down to it, the things that Licking County were most concerned about were our schools, our rural character, and conservation of our land.

[music]

And it could have been jobs is what they were most concerned about. Transportation. And that wasn't. That wasn't the concern. And I think that for me, sometimes I think that could be feedback of this whole Intel thing is that that wasn't a top concern and that our concern really is, how do we protect our schools? How do we protect our rural landscape? And how do we protect and conserve our lands?

PIPA: Jeff Gottke in neighboring Knox County is also focused on whether and how the Intel megaproject will affect the rural character of this area, if at all. But he signaled to me that Knox County is paying close attention to what's happening further south and planning for it.

[48:16]

GOTTKE: Well, the number one key concern is how do we maintain our rural character, right? Everybody's here because we like it here. And so, how do we protect, preserve the small-town charm, the rural character, those kind of relational things that we all like about the county? I think the good news is you can do that and still grow. That small town charm and rural character does not mean few people. Okay? You can have a larger town and still maintain those things, I think.

PIPA: At the same time, the folks I spoke to about Framework have a watchful eye on the sort of growth that has happened in other places. In 1980, for example, Intel began production of semiconductors in Chandler, Arizona, when its population was about 30,000 people. It's now grown to about 270,000 people and part of the metropolitan area of Phoenix.

[music]

To what extent will Framework help Licking County communities protect the integrity of their towns and assets as the population and economic activity grows? Jennifer Roberts offers her perspective.

[49:31]

ROBERTS: As a Licking County resident, I truly hope that we can continue the momentum that we've started with Framework. The cross collaboration is critical. I think we all have to work together to ensure that we are all proud of what Licking County becomes in 5 to 10 to 15 to 20 years, and that's going to take work. And we're going to have to be thoughtful about how we do it.

I believe we can't stop growth. And I'm not sure that's helpful to our community. I think it's important for us to continue to grow, but we really need to be able to guide it to ensure that we can maintain strong school districts, that we can maintain the sense of community that is so important to all of us.

I think the opportunity was to be able to try to help lift all of our communities up so that one particular jurisdiction, let's say where Intel was specifically located, or some of the other large employers that are placing themselves on the western part of Licking County, we want this growth to help lift our entire community. And without a thoughtful and strategic planning process, I'm not sure that would happen.

So, Framework was an opportunity for all those individual elected officials to come to the table and to learn about current trends within our community, what potential growth could happen, and then how to respond to that growth.

PIPA: And Framework has provided a way for the participating jurisdictions to put their interests on the table.

[51:06]

ROBERTS: It has given us a way to communicate externally outside of the county. And that's been critical. We have met on a number of occasions with the governor, the lieutenant governor, their cabinet, the Ohio Department of Transportation. People

are looking very closely at the work that's being produced in Framework because it's the first time in our region that there has been a collaboration like this.

And I think it's become very clear that we have so much work to be done in infrastructure and transportation and really preparing our communities for the growth that we're expecting that in order for us to respond to this. We have to be working collaboratively across jurisdictional lines and at the state and federal level, because these individual jurisdictions that are impacted don't have the resources to do it on their own.

PIPA: And yet Framework does not necessarily translate into an official seat at the table. Governance responsibilities and official decision-making procedures haven't changed, so Framework relies on its collective nature to give it credibility and informal authority. It remains to be seen whether the state or county will be willing to adopt key elements of Framework into the official decision-making or growth plans for the region. And unlike the policies we heard about in an earlier episode about offshore wind, the implementation of the CHIPS and Science Act does not mandate a community benefit plan.

Dan VanNess remains a trustee of Granville Township. So does Bryn Bird, though given her personal frustration over how the county has handled issues associated with the Intel siting and the water controversy, she's now running for county commissioner. She also worries that while Granville might be able to maintain its character due to its strong zoning and a tax levy that protects open spaces, it could still become what she calls an "oasis" where only wealthy people can live.

[53:19]

BIRD: And so, I worry about that. So, I do hope as we continue to grow out, that we find ways to include attainable housing, which is something our community has not had to tackle, and we have not really dealt with. And that's something that we'll have to continue. And that we just keep education at the center because I do think our schools is what makes our community. I have three daughters that are all in school and all three of them, their teachers live right around the block. Like, they're riding their bike and their teachers are walking their dogs. And like, if my kid has a problem at school, I can literally walk over and talk to the teacher and be like, oh my gosh.

[music]

PIPA: For Mayor Melissa Hartfield, it's that experience of interpersonal relationships, the pride that comes with those independent community identities, and above all, the rural nature of these places that she hopes to preserve.

[54:06]

HARTFIELD: For Licking County as a whole I hope in 30 years from now we can turn around and look back and say, this place is still beautiful. It's more developed, it's more grown up, and it was done in a very thoughtful way. It's not entirely covered in asphalt and pavement. We still have farms. You can still go to a farmer's market. You can still see the essence of all these towns and their culture, and the niche

cultures that each of these places possess. You can still feel all that when you drive through here and it's not lost.

And that's one of the most important things that the residents of this county want, is to preserve the rural aspect of this. That's their favorite part. And what I've told people is, we're all, you know, it's like there's 10 to 15 brothers and sisters from the same parent. We're all a little different. We all have our own identity, but we all come from the same, parent, which is Licking County. And so, we all have a love for it for similar reasons. And none of us want to be told what we're going to do and how we're going to do it. End of story.

TONY PIPA: Well, that *is* the end of today's story, but the story of these towns in Licking County and Intel is just beginning. Going through the process to create Framework provided these local places a chance to create a shared blueprint and a vision that articulates how they would like that story to evolve.

But the extent to which the state, the county, and other regional stakeholders incorporate key elements from Framework's vision will likely determine how well this growth is equitably managed, and ensure the potential negative consequences aren't borne by just a few communities. How, for example, will these shared water resources be managed? These kinds of decisions will set the footprint for what these communities look like in the generations to come.

Thanks for letting them tell you today what they'd *like* it to look like.

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I'm Tony Pipa, and this is *Reimagine Rural*.