Ohio Expo Center & State Fair / Expo 2050 Master Plan

Initial Phase

MASTER PLAN PROCESS

The Ohio Expositions Commission embarked on a Master Planning process, in partnership with the Expo 2050 Task Force, the Ohio Facilities Construction Commission, and a team of renowned third-party consultants including Wellogy, Populous, CSL, and Edge. These experts have local and national experience in the fair, convention, and livestock facility industries, and have collectively created more than 250 facility designs and master plans for fairgrounds across the country. The process was extensive, and included many layers of work:

- Interviews and surveys of **more than 90 stakeholders** from approximately 40 different organizations.
- An in-depth **facility assessment** of each building, resulting in a letter grade.
- A review of **existing and prospective event needs**, along with the current frequency that many buildings are in use for set-up, tear-down, or event days. In 2023, the Ohio Expo Center is slated to be occupied for 293 days of the year with event days, official set-up, and tear-down.
- **Benchmarking** research on markets, facilities, and every state fair across the nation, including structure, budget, size, parking availability, and more. The experts found that Columbus is the ideal home for the Ohio Expo Center and the Ohio State Fair.

SUMMARY AT-A-GLANCE

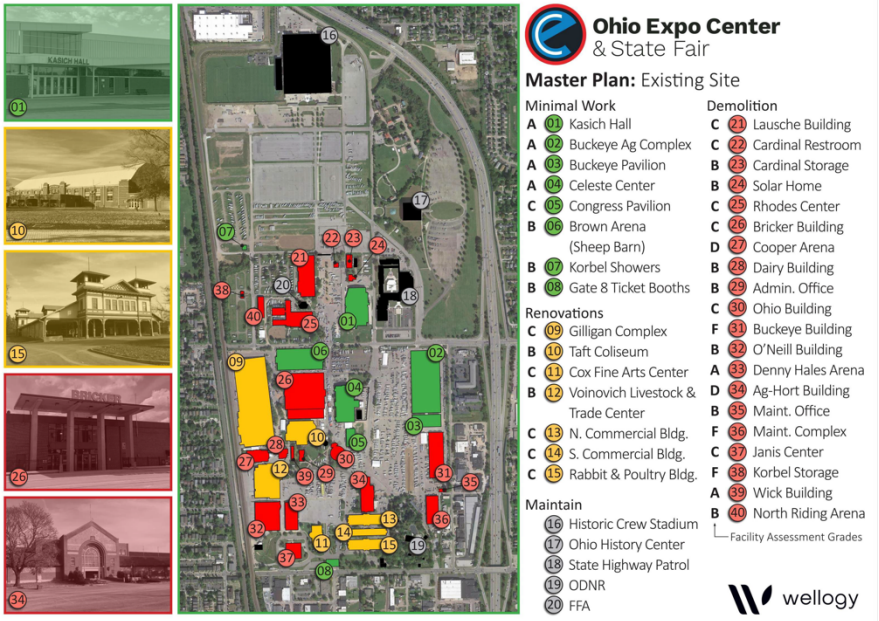
Expert consultants have developed a **comprehensive framework** that would **modernize** and **enhance** the entire Ohio Expo Center. It's a **long-range vision** for the future to attract and maintain events, showcase Ohio, and focus on agriculture. It's a long-term plan; it's called Expo 2050 for a reason. These changes can't happen all at once, or overnight. The initial phase will make much-needed **unseen infrastructure repairs** and **create new spaces** that will benefit both the Ohio State Fair and year-round events. Specific aspects of the initial phase include:

- A new Town Square outdoor gathering space,
- A new north entry gate,
- A building to showcase Ohio's story,
- A new multi-use agricultural education building with the farm-to-fork experience including education and food served by Ohio farmers,
- Improved navigational flow through the facility.

We hope that these initial efforts will set the stage to lead into the full scope of the long-rage plan in a phased approach.

FULL SCOPE

The consultants proposed a **comprehensive framework** that will modernize and enhance the entire site. This isn't just a construction project – it is a vision for our future and an opportunity that will benefit the year-round event venue to attract and maintain events. This framework will:



- Enhance the Ohio State Fair as a modern venue, showcasing Ohio while maintaining a focus on agriculture.
- Reorganize pinch-points that have prohibited ideal flow through the Ohio State Fair.
- Make much-needed infrastructure repairs to account for deferred maintenance.
- Create new, modern facilities to best showcase Ohio during the Ohio State Fair and the hundreds of events held at the facility throughout the year.
- Demolish 20 buildings as indicated in red in image above).

LONG-TERM, PHASED APPROACH

Expo 2050 is a long-term vision; these projects can't happen overnight, or all at once. It's simply impossible to raze the entire facility at once and impact hundreds of events, including the Ohio State Fair, for years. As we've worked with the consultants and spoken with our stakeholders, we know that we can work toward the end goal by making steps that are impactful for both the Fair and the facility right away. By taking a phased approach that will make impactful changes with projected completion in 2026, our goal is that the many other elements of the long-range Master Plan can still happen in

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the years to come.

INITIAL PHASE, COMPLETION GOAL IN 2026

The initial phase has been identified to impact the most fairgoers, focusing on creating new spaces, an improved navigational experience, and vital unseen infrastructure improvements. The priorities include:

Town Square – A new open space we're referring to as the "Town Square" is a blank canvas in the center of the grounds to be used by non-fair events to best accommodate their unique needs and improve flow. During the Ohio State Fair, the "Town Square" will feature additional food, family-friendly resting areas, and children's activities. Located just outside the entrance to the Natural Resources Park, it will highlight the core Fair foundations of agriculture and natural resources, within a modern, fun, and intentional setting that will be one of the "go-to" destinations of the Fair moving forward.



Multi-Use Agricultural Education Facility – A two-story, innovative new agricultural education building with on-site classrooms, built-in kitchens, dining space, meeting rooms, and convention space. During the Ohio State Fair, this building will combine functions of the round Taste of Ohio Café and the beautiful but deficient Agriculture & Horticulture Building in partnership with the Ohio Farm Bureau Federation and Ohio's agricultural commodity groups during the Ohio State Fair. At 136,000 square feet of temperature-controlled space, it also creates new space for year-round event rentals.



Iconic Showcase of Ohio's Story – This building stands approximately three-and-a-half stories high to provide a birds-eye view of the Fair and the Expo Center facility. It will house several kitchen and dining spaces, and anchor the center of the grounds near a new open "Town Square" gathering space. A centerpiece of this building is an exhibit to be designed in partnership with the Ohio History Connection, to highlight Ohio's story, including the history of agriculture in our great state.



New Entry Gate from Main Parking Area – A new, iconic state-of-the-art entry gate to replace the aging lackluster gate between the main parking lots near Historic Crew Stadium and the giant red cardinal on the north side of the grounds. About 80% of fairgoers enter through this gate right now, and an upgrade will make a lasting first impression. For year-round events, the gate will offer either vehicular or pedestrian access based on event needs. The historic gate spelling out OHIO along 11th Avenue will remain as-is.



Defined navigational pathway through the grounds, with a different material that will help with overall flow through the facility, directing visitors toward the new buildings described above, the new Town Square, and Natural Resources Park.



BUDGET

The project has received $70 million in funding ($50 million from H.B. 45 in ARPA dollars, $10 million in capital funds granted to Expo 2050, and $10 million in capital funds previously granted to the Ohio Expositions Commission). The Ohio Expositions Commission has requested $190 million from the state's executive biennial budget for Fiscal Years 2024-2025, for a total overall project funds of $260 million for the initial phase detailed above.

**Note: these images are conceptual designs only and are not necessarily reflective of the final designs.*

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