

- At Strong Towns, we believe that local government is a platform for strong citizens to collaboratively build a prosperous place. How are residents in your town involved in shaping its future? How do residents' experiences, struggles, and concerns directly inform the projects undertaken by local government? Provide one or more examples.

Amesville is lucky to have dedicated Council members that are willing to oversee the activities and ordinances of the Village. They all contribute additional volunteer hours in cleaning Gifford Park, weeding village garden areas and numerous other tasks. As mentioned earlier, many communities have abdicated their duties in managing local government, but must rely on County or State to provide basic services. This provides no measure of local control and often means services are not guaranteed to the local community. Also, the planning for these projects has been supported by the Mayor and Village Council through creating ad hoc committees to solicit input and suggestions, working with Ohio University to do a SWOT analysis of the village and other, more informal gatherings to solicit ideas for the community. One of the newest commitments is a team (working in conjunction with Rural Action) called the Entrepreneurial and Economic Advisory group. As taken from the Rural Action website, *"The Entrepreneurial Communities approach emphasizes local organizing and local leadership to create a long term support system for businesses of all sizes, products, and stages of growth. Rural Action believes that communities have many talented people that are running or want to run a business, and every community has people that want to see their local businesses thrive. Entrepreneurial community teams are currently working to support and grow local business in Amesville, McArthur, Nelsonville, Logan, and Pomeroy. To find out more, contact Dan Vorisek [dan@ruralaction.org](mailto:dan@ruralaction.org)." The members of that team are Gary Goosman (Mayor), Lynne Genter, Roxanne Groff, Sam Miller, Cindy Freedman and Chuck Blyth.* Running parallel to that effort is another project called the Community Improvement Challenge sponsored by Athens County. The goals of this effort are: 1) *"Promote civic engagement and community improvement! Work together with members of your community to make it healthier, happier and more prosperous. Spur innovation, creativity, problem solving, resourcefulness, social participation, community pride, excitement, and hope.* 2) *Learn about community improvement resources available. A list of resources will be shared to promote communities, build capacity, and support networks.* 3) *Assemble a diverse team representing your community to communicate with Athens County Planner while participating and leading self-identified community improvement efforts."* The committee for that effort is Adai Genter, Herron Linscott, Chuck Blyth, April Fields, Gary Goosman, Kevin Smyth, Lynne Genter, Harvest Whitford and Adrienne Tevis.

- At Strong Towns we believe that financial solvency is a prerequisite for long-term prosperity. What steps has your community taken to ensure its financial security? Do local leaders adequately do the math on new investments proposed in your town to ensure that they'll be able to afford them now and afford their maintenance in the future?

Amesville has done well over the last 7 years and was managed effectively during the 20 years that Mr. Frank Hare served as Mayor. Below are some of the statistics that reflect on the quality of life in Amesville in 2017.

- ☑ Amesville has the highest median household income in Athens County (\$47,899.00) compared to the closest other community (Coolville at \$34,006.14),
- ☑ Amesville has the lowest crime rate of any community in Athens County with a rate below 2.7%.
- ☑ Amesville has a low median house cost (\$85,544) compared to the lowest house value (Trimble at \$51,557.00). The City of Athens has a median house price at over \$157,000.00.
- ☑ Amesville has the second highest rate of college graduates (32%) trailing only Athens at 64%.

☑ 5 out of the last 7 years Amesville has been voted the “Best Small Town in Athens County” by readers of the A News.

Even with all these positive attributes there are still challenges faced by the Village. These challenges have been made worse by cuts from the State of Ohio and other revenue sources. Four years ago, the State Legislature cut local government funds to the Village by 50% which cost Amesville thousands of dollars. Then the State eliminated Mayors Court for small communities (under 500 population) also costing Amesville thousands of dollars. All this is occurring during a time of increasing prices for almost all consumer goods.

But, despite these changes the Village has managed to maintain a surplus in funds while maintaining most services. By looking at the Consumer Price Index we can compare costs for residents of Amesville compared to average cost of goods and service in the United States over the last 50 years (1965 to 2015).

- The Consumer price index measures the cost of goods (clothes, household, entertainment, food, travel, etc.) for American families and has been tracking those measures since 1950. This comparison looks at some of those costs from 1960 to 2015. During this time frame the CPI has gone up 801% or over 8 times the prior cost.

☑ Over this same period of time water rates in Amesville went up 31%

☑ Over the same period of time sewer rates (starting in 2007) have decreased 5%

☑ Over the same period wages for Village Council members has gone up 0%

☑ Over the same period of time wages for the Mayor went up only \$760

☑ Over the same period of time property taxes for the county went up 27%

☑ Over the same period of time property taxes for the Village went up 7%

This was all accomplished by seeking outside funding from private and public foundations, gathering individual donations for many projects and through volunteer labor on almost all new projects in Amesville.

- If we took a walking tour through your town, what would we see? How does your community use its land productively to promote long-term financial resilience?

Through a walking tour you would see many of the recent successes like those described here: Amesville is also lucky to have a wide range of groups that help improve the quality of life for residents by hosting events, fundraisers, workshops and other recreational activities. Over the last few years several volunteer projects stand out: 1) Supported by donations from Airclaws and Coonskin Crossing the basketball court was re-surfaced and repaired. 2) Supported by the Athens Foundation and local donations (volunteer labor) the Frank and Catherine Hare History Kiosk was built in Gifford Park. It is the only solar, roadside kiosk in the State of Ohio. 3) Supported by the Athens Foundation and local donations the Amesville Community Garden was built in 2016. 4) Supported by the Athens Foundation the Amesville Grange offered free gardening classes in 2015 and 2016. 5) Supported by Federal Hocking students, Athens County Engineer and local donations the Amesville playground in Gifford Park was revamped and new features were added. 6) Supported by the Athens County Municipal Court the former railroad bed in Gifford Park has been cleared in anticipation of a new historic trail.

All the above projects were completed through volunteer labor and donations at no expense to tax payers in Amesville. Additional successes over the last several years:

- Installation of FREE wifi internet in collaboration with the Athens County Library at the Grange Hall. Over 2,000 users last year.
- Summer Youth Employment group from Community Action painted curbs, mulched gardens and did other general maintenance in the Village for free.
- Capstone Properties was encouraged to repair and renovate their property on State Street.

Also, you would see the successful completion of the AEP energy challenge that created a sustainability plan for Amesville. Some highlights are: The Village of Amesville's Sustainability Roadmap was led by Mayor Gary Goosman and his team with support from AEP Ohio's Community Energy Savers pilot representatives. The roadmap leveraged existing sustainability initiatives already adopted within the community that are either in the planning or completion phase. The end result is an actionable plan that targets four (4) priority areas to achieve Amesville's goal of creating a more sustainable and engaged community.

The priority areas of this Sustainability Roadmap present a set of initiatives to achieve the overall sustainability objectives. Additionally, the document offers various tips for residents and businesses to reduce their energy consumption and adopt sustainable practices:

**1. Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy:** The Village of Amesville is working on numerous initiatives to educate its residents and organizations about the environmental and economic benefits of energy conservation and energy efficiency, while actively seeking funds for implementation. Through these engagement initiatives and active community participation in energy efficiency programs, the village aims to contribute to the region's energy efficiency efforts

**2. Water Conservation:** The Village of Amesville is currently in the planning phase of a major water infrastructure improvement. The project is scheduled to start in the fourth quarter of 2015 and is estimated to be completed within two years from start. Through water conserving initiatives, the Village of Amesville will instill the value of water conservation throughout the community so that these improvements are fully optimized.

**3. Reduce, Reuse and Recycle:** An increasing number of residents and businesses are participating in waste reduction and recycling programs. The Village of Amesville will continue to promote this initiative by finding new ways to increase participation in recycling, waste reduction and composting initiatives.

**4. Economic Development:** The Village of Amesville is located approximately 10 miles away from the closest large grocery stores and other services that are not available within the village. There is currently no public means of transportation for residents to access these areas. This is an opportunity for the Village of Amesville to explore and take a smart and more strategic approach to rural transportation and connectivity to local goods and services.

- Tell us about your community's local economy. Who are the key players, big and small, and how do they help your town to be financially strong and resilient? What local businesses are you most proud of?

There are two primary business foundations. They are Airclaws HVAC and the Unified Bank. They describe themselves this way: **AIRCLAWS:** Our goal at Airclaws, Inc. is always high quality and complete customer satisfaction. We strive to make sure that what you expect from a team of professionals is what you get. Airclaws, Inc. offers equipment service, installation, and preventative maintenance. With over 50 years of experience with both residential and commercial projects, we are standing by ready to provide helpful advice, troubleshooting assistance, **HVAC** equipment service, installation, and preventative maintenance.

**UNIFIED: The Community Bank!** Founded along the banks of the mighty Ohio River in eastern Ohio in 1902 by a group of forward-thinking businessmen, The Citizens Savings Bank is a state chartered, commercial banking organization committed to upholding the vision of its founding fathers by strongly supporting the communities in which it is located and meeting the needs of the residents and small businesses that serve these communities...and beyond! But there are also three key non-profits that contribute greatly to the social and economic fabric of the village. They are: 1) **ACRE** (Amesville Community Resources for Entrepreneurs): ACRE primary purpose is to offer affordable space to artists, businesses and organization so they can grow their capacity to offer services. 2) **Federal Hocking School District, Amesville Elementary School:** Amesville Elementary prides itself on getting to know our children and families well. We are fortunate that our school is small enough so that we can get to know the children we educate. The responsibility of your child's education falls greatly on our shoulders and with your much-needed help we believe that your child can succeed. 3) **Village Productions:** Village Productions (VP) is a private, non-profit community-based organization serving rural, mostly Appalachian, area around Amesville, Ohio. VP has three major program sections: Children's Programming, Adult Education and Community Events. These three groups mobilize tons of volunteers, support planning and development strategies and build the quality of life for the area.

- What transportation options exist in your town for people of varying ages, abilities, and means? How easy is it to live in your town without regular access to a car? What transportation investments has your town recently made or is it in the process of making?

Transportation is a big challenge for Amesville and any small, rural community in Ohio. There is no public transit and no Uber access. Athens On Demand Transit serves Amesville and is a transit service available to persons with disabilities providing accessible and affordable door to door transportation service. As space is available this program will also provide transit service to elderly and persons with temporary mobility issues needing transportation to medical and social services appointments. Persons needing assistance for grocery and other rides are also available as scheduling permits. Beyond that people rely on neighbors and friends to help them with travel plans. The village does not have enough funds to address this problem in any significant way and is looking to the county, state and feds for long term solutions.

- How easy is it to become an entrepreneur or a small-scale developer in your town? What kinds of support are available for a resident who wants to open a business or build on a small vacant lot?

It is not necessarily easy to start a new operation as an entrepreneur, but there is lots of support through groups like the Entrepreneurial Advocacy Team and their current plan:

Vision: We envision a community that is vibrant, welcoming and engaged. We also see a community that supports social innovation, new businesses, new ideas and provides a quality of life for those that live in or near Amesville. We plan to bring together musicians, historians, artists, farmers, retail businesses and other sectors of Amesville to provide expertise and support for new entrepreneurs that have a dream and vision for their lives.

Community Planning and Development: The community (Amesville and surrounding townships) feel there is a need for more entrepreneurial development and support. This includes the following sectors: agriculture, food service, arts, tourism, health/wellness and recreational activities and cultural events that can bring together all the diverse groups of people living in our area. This project is intended to build a sense of community, offer small business opportunities, engage local artists, farmers, businesses, and build a central place for community pride and sustainability. Our expected outcomes for this effort should be:

1. Increased property values
2. More jobs with higher wages
3. Stronger tax base for Amesville
4. Retained population
5. Increased positive image
6. More accessible business financing
7. Better overall quality of life

Arts & Culture Strategy: We see the impact of this effort in several areas: 1) Small scale economic development: increased awareness about activities at Village Productions and Amesville can draw more people to events, concerts and classes that will benefit the entire community. 2) Educational demonstration: the recorded lore and history would be displayed through local websites, displays and other venues and provide information about Amesville and its culture to students, residents and non-residents alike. 3) Support for local businesses: local sponsorships and participation in concerts, classes and other events and would by default boost image and services of local merchants. 4) Image: the Amesville project would bring attention to an innovation and creative project in Amesville that would bring more positive attention to our community and our local history.

- What is your favorite thing about your town?

Amesville is perhaps best known for the Coonskin Library. At an 1803 town meeting (held to discuss roads) settlers talked about their desire for books and their lack of money to pay for them. Most of the business was done by barter, so little money was in circulation. However, the surrounding forest had pelts that could be sold in the East to buy books. In the spring of 1804, Samuel B. Brown was given the pelts and, accompanied by Ephraim Cutler, went east to bring back books for the town. Fifty-one books -- mostly on religion, travel, biography and history -- were purchased for \$73.50. These books were passed from home to home until Ephraim Cutler was elected librarian in 1804. Amesville was also part of the Underground Railroad. There are several remaining homes that were part of this path to freedom. Local information about this history is mostly oral history from residents that have lived in the area all their lives.

But, the sense of community is the best part of Amesville. In 1998 a 500 year flood destroyed 50% of the businesses and 15% of the housing stock in town. It was a devastating blow, but the community rallied and cleaned the town, supported their neighbors and started to rebuild homes and businesses. Then last year, twenty years after the flood (June 29, 1998) the residents gathered to have a pot-luck dinner and celebrate the community spirit that helped everyone survive the flood and begin to thrive again.

- What is the biggest challenge your town faces, and what are you doing to address it?

With a lack of economic opportunity many young people get a chance at higher education and never return to the area. We are trying to create new opportunities through arts, history, tourism and culture that make Amesville more vibrant. These elements can make for a deep and rich lifestyle for those wishing to retire or for young people wanting a diverse, unique community. When paired with the natural beauty of Amesville (hills for hiking, rivers for canoeing, great places for camping) it can become a thriving community again.

- Yes or no: Does at least one member of your team agree to participate in additional activities if you make it to the next level(s)? This may include submitting photographs of your town, being interviewed on a Strong Towns podcast and/or participating in a webinar. Please consult the contest schedule in advance to know when these deadlines will occur.
- Yes or no: If selected, would you be willing to provide a list of local media sources (and, if available, media contact email addresses) for the major publications, stations and media outlets in your town?
- Please email one photo of your town to [daniel@strongtowns.org](mailto:daniel@strongtowns.org) with the subject header: "Strongest Town Photo: TOWN NAME." We'll use this if you make it to the first round of the contest. You must include the name of the photographer or the photo credit in your email and the photo must be one that we have permission to publish on our site (If you find it via internet search, it must be Creative Commons or Public Domain licensed).