

# Greater Chillicothe Ross County Visitor Center

## Introduction

### Purpose

The purpose of this study is to evaluate different areas in the greater Chillicothe region for the possible location of a Visitor Center. The new Visitor Center will assist in developing tourism as well as highlight the benefits of Chillicothe and Ross County to assist economic development, recruitment, and tourism. The study will consider the different assets of the area, traffic data, visitor information, and the input from community stakeholders.

### Background

Hopewell Ceremonial Earthworks is being considered by UNESCO for a World Heritage Site. Ohio's Hopewell earthworks are the pre-eminent examples, and the largest concentration in the world, of prehistoric monumental landscape architecture. The designation is comprised of earthworks at Hopewell Cultural National Historical Park (Mound City and other surrounding sites) in Chillicothe, the Fort Ancient Hilltop Enclosure, and The Earthworks at Newark Ohio. If selected, this designation will bring additional tourism to the area.

The objective of the Visitor Center is to promote Chillicothe and the assets of the Greater Chillicothe area to promote tourism, the community as a place to live, work and play, and to assist with economic development.

## Context

### Community Context

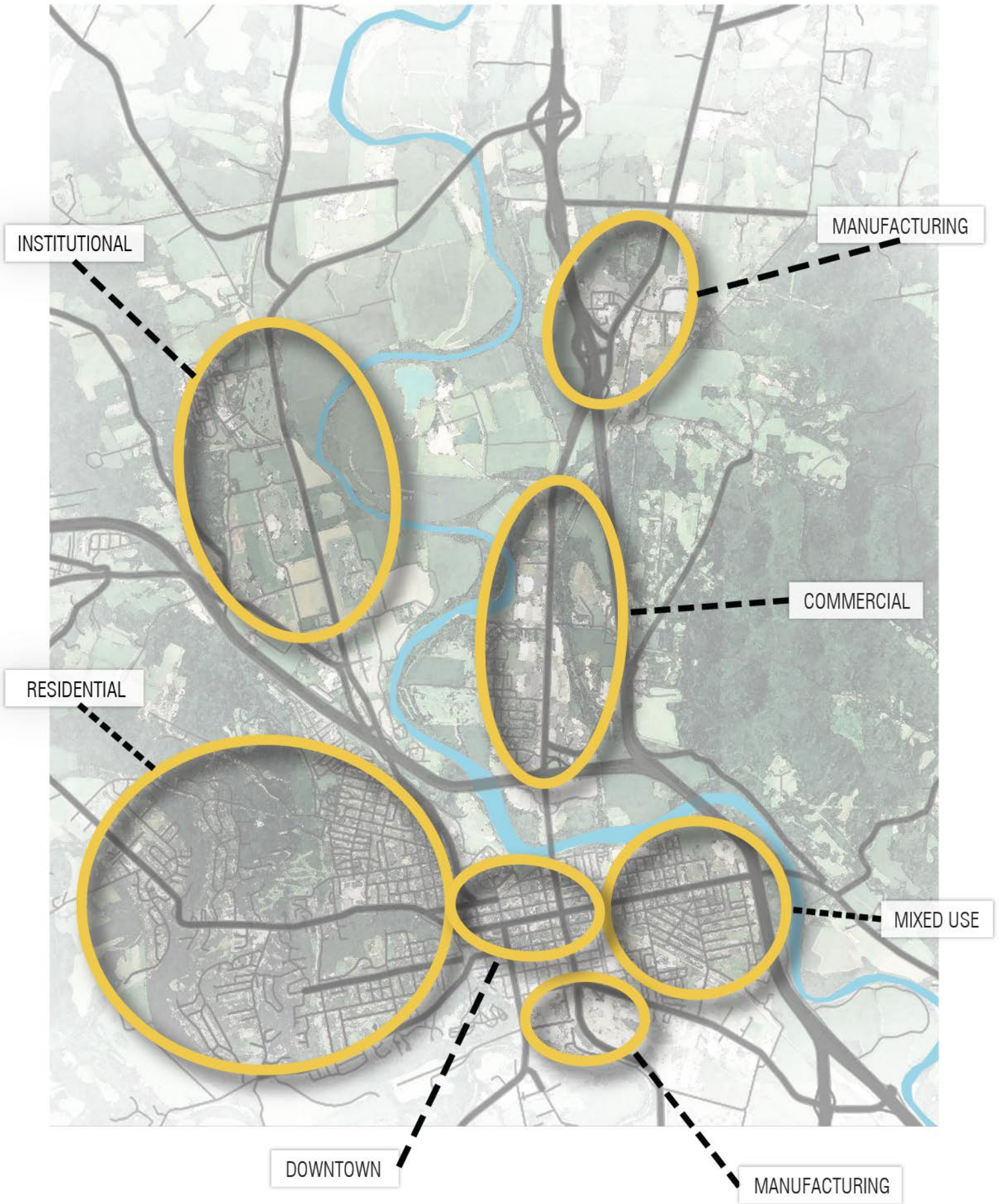
The City of Chillicothe has a rich history in the state of Ohio. Chillicothe was the first and third capital for the State of Ohio. The following is a description of the general character of the different areas under consideration. The descriptions are not a reflection of the zoning identified in the ZONING MAP OF CHILLICOTHE, OHIO, but rather an evaluation of the area's character to understand how a visitor center would fit into the surroundings.

**Downtown** Chillicothe has a rich stock of historic, architecturally significant buildings and an intact historic fabric. The downtown area consists of several blocks and includes the county courthouse, the historic Majestic Theatre, several historic churches, shops, restaurants, and businesses. Adjacent to downtown is Yoctangee Park. The park has several assets including the historic Armory, ball fields, lake, and the Pump House Center for the Arts.

State Route 104 from US-35 north to State Route 207 has several campus **institutions** including: Hopewell Culture National Historical Park (Mound City), Chillicothe Veterans Affairs (VA) Medical Center, VA golf course, Ross Correctional Institution, Chillicothe Correctional Institution, and Camp Sherman Memorial Park. The large campuses that exist give this area an institutional feel. The large campuses limit the opportunity for future development.

# Context Map

Chillicothe Visitors' Center



The area north of US-23 on State Route 159 has several of the Chillicothe **manufacturers**, services and employers, including: Adena Medical Complex, Kenworth Truck and supporting industries. This area is currently the most direct route for visitors to go to the Tecumseh! Outdoor Historical Drama. When State Route 207 is extended to connect to State Route 180, visitors going to Tecumseh! Outdoor Historical Drama will be divided between exit State Route 159 and the extended State Route 207.

North Bridge Street is a primary connector between the manufacturing and health center mentioned above and downtown. The street is a limited access street with **commercial** development on both sides. The area contains hotels, restaurants, and big box retail.

The area west of downtown is a **residential**/mixed use area. This area is predominantly residential with some businesses on primary streets.

The area east of downtown is also **mixed use**/residential with a higher concentration of businesses and services.

## Places of Interest

### Hopewell Mounds

The Hopewell Culture National Historical Park contains earthworks and burial mounds in different geometric shapes from the Hopewell culture, indigenous peoples who flourished from about 200 BC to 500 AD. The Hopewell Mound group provides a place to learn about the sacred spaces and reflect upon the lives of the Native American Indians. This is the most attended attraction in the Chillicothe area with 60,897 visitors attending in 2017.

### Tecumseh! Outdoor Historical Drama

Tecumseh! is a unique outdoor theater with a museum, on-site dining, behind the scene tours and live performances. The live performances act out the story of the Shawnee leader as he struggles to defend his sacred homeland during the late 1700's. The facility operates between June and September and drew 46,887 visitors during those months in 2017. This is the second most attended attraction in the Chillicothe area.

### Downtown

Downtown Chillicothe is the Historic First Capital District. It provides entertainment, local culture, food and drinks as well as retail shops. There are multiple events held throughout the year to bring the community together to indulge in the downtown experience. The downtown's mission is to provide vibrant, active and family friendly entertainment for all to enjoy.

### Yoctangee Park

Yoctangee Park is composed of 48 acres located adjacent to downtown Chillicothe. The park includes a swimming pool, six tennis courts, basketball courts, volleyball court, baseball/softball diamond, picnic facilities, playground, shelter houses, leisurely walking paths, gorgeous views, grandstand and public restrooms. This community park hosts both active and passive enjoyment. Yoctangee Park is also home to the restored Municipal Water Plant built in 1882, which now serves as the Pump House Center for the Arts. There are multiple, well-attended events held each year within the park.

### Other Regional assets

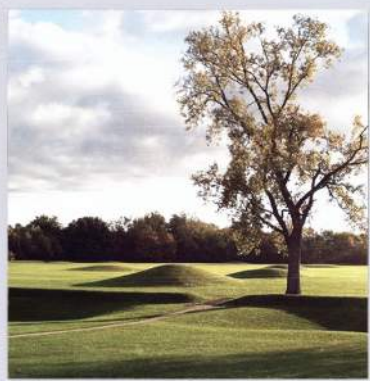
There is a network of bike trails, parks, and other outdoor recreational activities in the area. Among them are the Great Seal State Park, Ross Lake Wilderness Area, Pleasant Valley Wildlife Area, and a vast network of bicycle paths, mountain bike trails, hiking and horseback riding opportunities.



# Places of Interest Chillicothe Visitors' Center



Tecumseh! Outdoor Drama  
Annual Visitors: 46,887



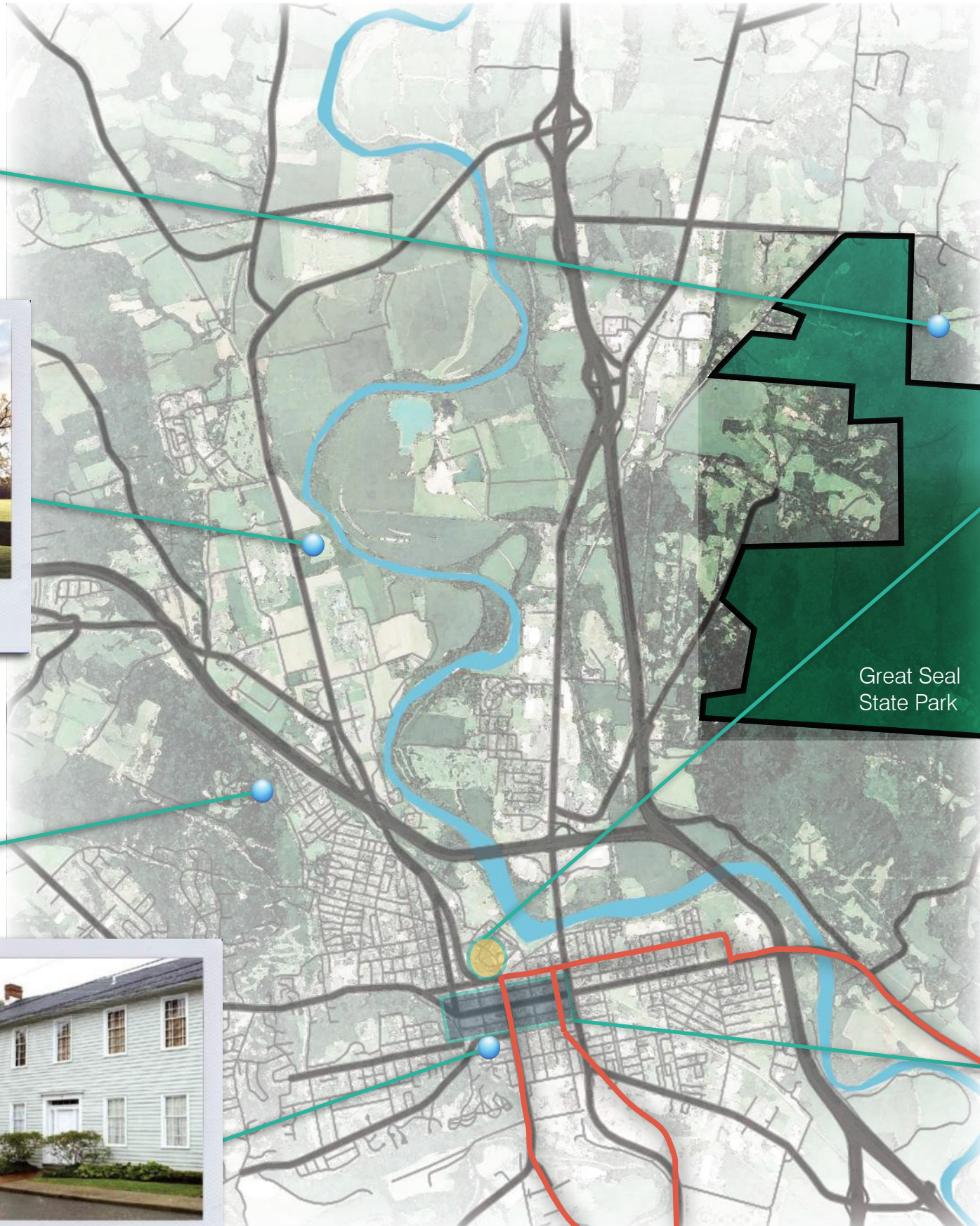
Hopewell Historical Park  
Annual Visitors: 60,897



Adena Mansion  
Annual Visitors: 9,592

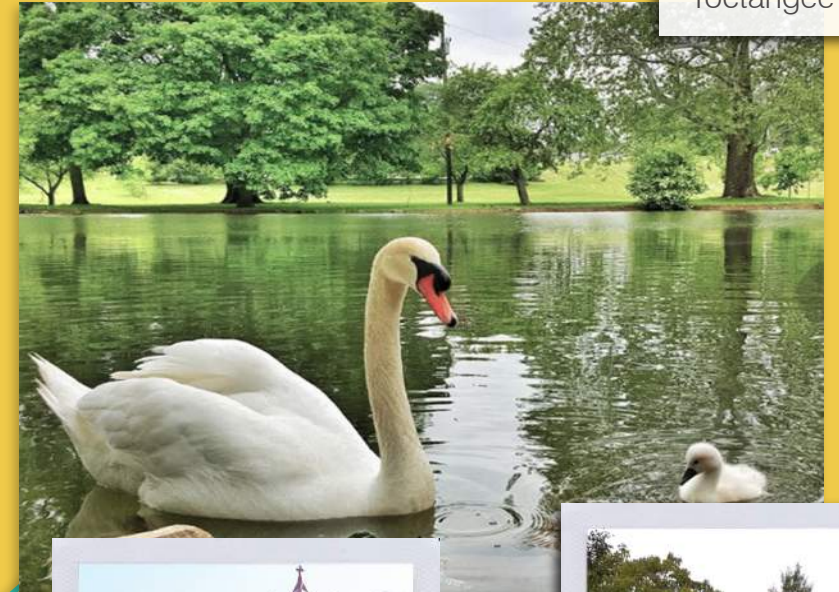


Lucy Hayes Heritage Center  
Annual Visitors: 3,236

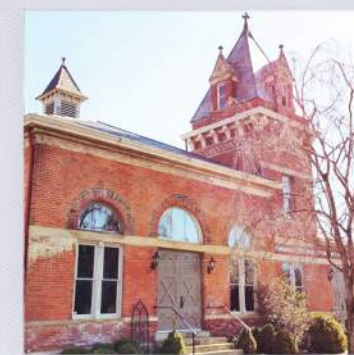


Great Seal  
State Park

— Bike trails



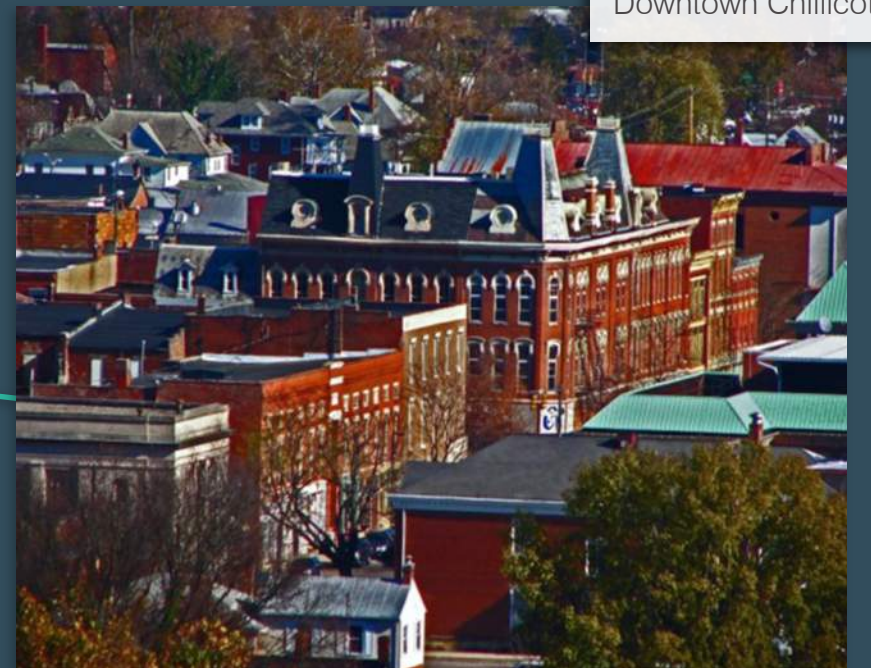
Yoctangee Park



Pump House  
Annual Visitors: 4,789



Railroad Museum  
Annual Visitors: 1,374



Downtown Chillicothe



## Visitor Data

The below information was taken into consideration while comparing potential sites for the Greater Chillicothe Ross County Visitor Center.

### Hopewell Mounds

According to the Ross-Chillicothe Convention & Visitors Bureau, the Hopewell Mounds is the most popular attraction Chillicothe has to offer. In 2017, 60,897 visitors came to experience and enjoy the views and history of the Mounds.

### Tecumseh! Outdoor Historical Drama

Tecumseh! Outdoor Historical Drama is the second most attended attraction in Chillicothe, Ohio with 46,887 visitors attending the event in 2017. Guests are requested to list the zip code in which they are traveling from upon attending the event. This information is beneficial to Tecumseh! and the entire community to better understand travel routes, needs and amount of exposure in specific locations. These factors could be used to accommodate future and existing needs for visitors. Tecumseh!'s accumulated zip code data from January 1, 2017 to December 13, 2018 was analyzed and categorized by which major route visitors would most likely be traveling from. The major routes entering the city of Chillicothe are US-23 and US-35. The most traveled route to attend a Tecumseh! event was US-23 Southbound. Approximately 30,431 visitors were projected to travel via US-23 Southbound to reach Tecumseh!. The second most traveled route was via US-35 Eastbound. This route accommodated 12,615 visitors attending a Tecumseh! event. The least traveled route to reach Tecumseh! was US-35 Westbound with 4,746 visitors. These numbers are logical due to the vicinity of major cities in each direction.

### Hotel Stays

Hotels in Chillicothe keep track of how many rooms are booked each year by visitors. Last year there were 114,351 rooms booked. The data on the location of the visitors cannot be accurately identified due to how discount travel sites book the rooms.

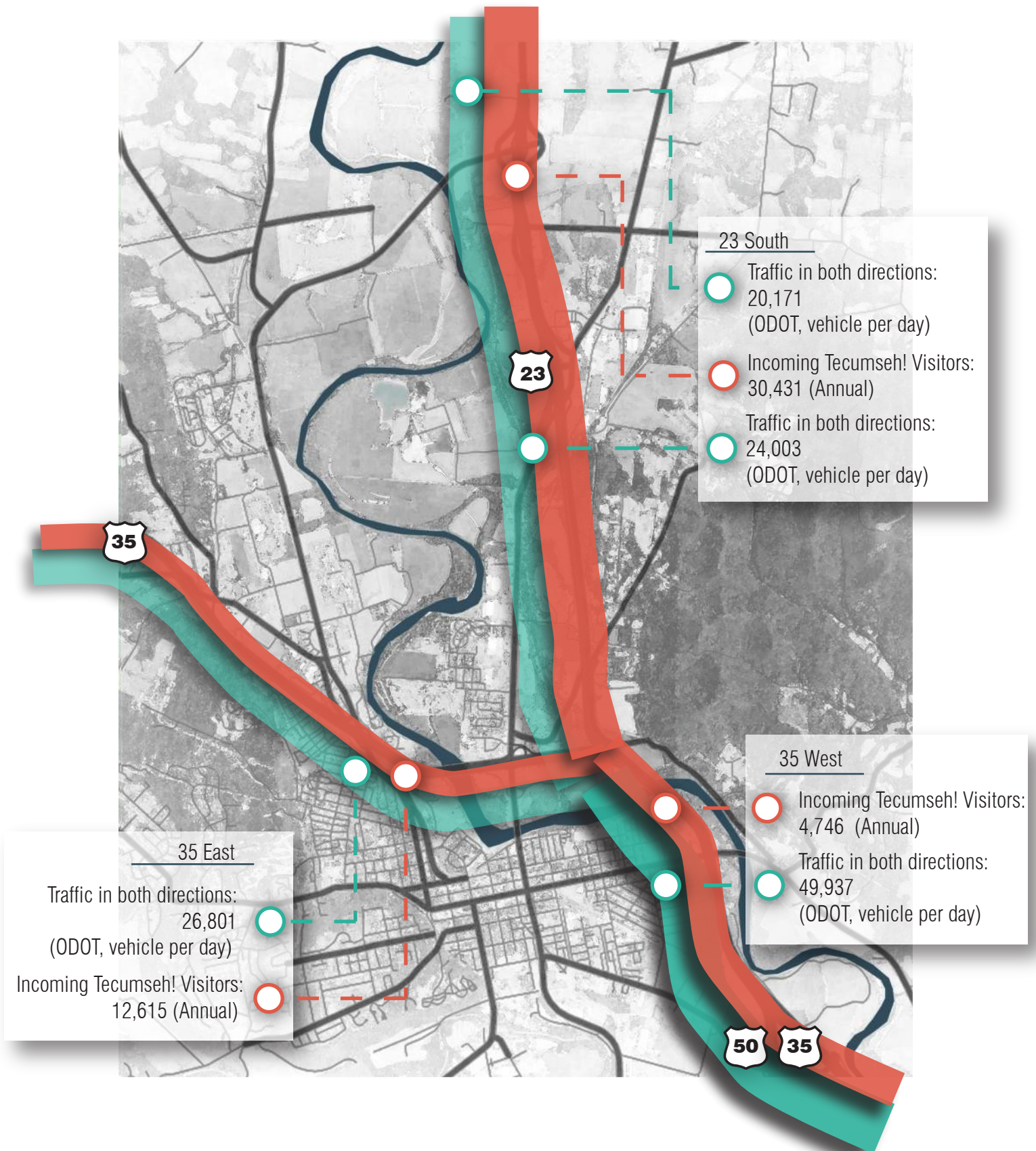
### ODOT Traffic Counts

The Ohio Department of Transportation provides traffic counts for major and minor roadways throughout the state. On US-23 north of SR-159 the number of vehicles traveling north and south combined is 20,171 per day. South of SR-159, approaching the downtown area of Chillicothe, the traffic count is 24,003 vehicles per day. To the west of the city of Chillicothe, the number of vehicles commuting east and west on US-35 is 26,801. Southeast of the city, US-35 and US-23 merge into one highway. The traffic count in this area is 49,937 vehicles per day.



# Counts

Chillicothe Visitors' Center





## Community Engagement

### Workshops

Two meetings were held at the Chillicothe Ross Chamber of Commerce at 45 E. Main St, Chillicothe, Ohio 45601.

The first meeting was held on November 16, 2018 at 9:30 am. These meetings involved community leaders, the Greater Chillicothe Ross County Development and Ross-Chillicothe Visitors Bureau.

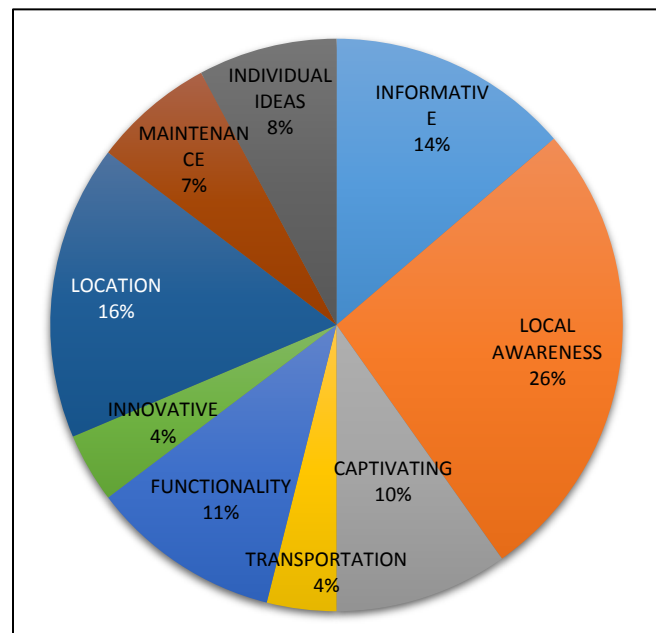
- Objective/goal of new visitors' center is to be the "hub" for tourists, guide them to all attractions in Ross County, and potentially grab attention from people on the highway.
- Attractions in the area: Mounds, 1<sup>st</sup> capital of Ohio, Ohio's Great Seal Park, Tecumseh! Outdoor Historical Drama, state parks, Hopewell Culture National Historical Park, Adena Mansion, and bike trails.
- Expansion of Chillicothe area is anticipated to be to the west and north.
- SR-207 and SR-159 connection is scheduled for construction in 2021.
- The current visitors center had over 764 visitors in 2018, most of the visitors are staying in the adjacent hotels.
- Visitors include buses, schools, and individual visitors.

The second meeting was held on December 12, 2018 at the Chillicothe Ross Chamber of Commerce. These meetings involved community leaders, the Greater Chillicothe Ross County Development, Ross-Chillicothe Visitors Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Scioto Society, Ohio History Connection, National Parks, and other community leaders.

During the meeting Burgess & Niple was able to gather critical information to analyze the potential sites and choose the best fit for the future visitor's center. After the meeting, individuals were contacted to gather more information such as visitor counts, trail maps and zoning maps. The meeting produced a divergent set of criteria.

The Visitor Center should be the starting point for an adventure in the Greater Chillicothe area. The meeting provided feedback which was consolidated into several different categories:

- Local Awareness: Provide quality information on local activities, history, food, etc.
- Location: easy to see & access
- Informative (well-designed space/exhibit)
- Functionality (flexible design and space)
- Captivating: Unique design, a draw
- Maintenance (easy to maintain)
- Transportation (connection to other modes of local transportation)
- Innovative (for the next generation of visitors)
- Individual Ideas (other standalone feedback)





Greater Chillicothe Ross County Development and Visitor Bureau provided a condensed list of key components to use for the site assessment. These components are listed below:

- Access from major routes
- Easy in/out for bus and car traffic
- Dining area and charging stations
- Numerous restrooms
- 24/7 availability of tourist info, parking, restrooms and vending machines

With this information Burgess & Niple was able to proceed to the site analysis.

## Site Analysis

### Site Comparison

During the study, several areas and sites were considered. There are some features of the Chillicothe area that present challenges to finding an ideal site for a Visitor Center. US-23 and US-35 meet in Chillicothe. This connection brings traffic in from the north, south, and the west. The intersection of US-23 and US-35 does not allow traffic to flow in all directions. Southbound US-23 traffic cannot go west on US-35. Eastbound traffic on US-35 cannot go north on US-23. This eliminates the possibility of locating the Visitor Center near one exit that will capture both the eastbound travelers on US-35 and the southbound travelers on US-23.

Another challenge is how the Scioto River and associated flood plain separate the different assets in the area. The Scioto River bisects the development on North Bridge Street (SR-159) and the Hopewell Mound City, which divides the traffic patterns of visitors to different exits depending upon their direction and destination.

The following are the more notable areas evaluated for the Visitor Center.

#### Site 1A: US-23 & SR-207

The area off the intersection of US-23 and SR-207 is a potential site. While US-23 and US-35 have similar total traffic numbers, the greater number of visitors going to Tecumseh! Outdoor Historical Drama come from the north.

##### Advantages:

- This exit is the primary exit for visitors from the north to visit the Hopewell National Historical Park.
- SR-207 will extended to connect to SR-180. This may make the interchange the primary exit for Tecumseh! Outdoor Historical Drama for visitors from the north and possibly from the south. This may also place the Visitor Center on the preferred route from the west.
- The area is undeveloped and the Visitor Center can be placed in a location allowing easy access, visibility and presence at this interchange.
- The site can be designed for easy bus access.
- The site can be located to provide good visibility from US-23.

##### Disadvantages:

- The Visitor Center would not be adjacent to downtown.
- The Visitor Center would not be very close or connected to other attractions.

## Site 1B: US-35 & SR-104

The area off the intersection of US-35 and SR-104 is a potential site. US-23 and US-35 have similar total traffic numbers, however the greater number of visitors going to Tecumseh! Outdoor Historical Drama come from US-23.

### Advantages:

- This exit is the primary exit for visitors from the west and possibly the south to visit the Hopewell National Historical Park.
- SR-104 leads to SR-207 which will extend to connect to SR-180. This may make this exit the primary exit for Tecumseh! Outdoor Historical Drama for visitors from the west.
- The area has opportunity for development on the north side of the SR-104.
- The Visitor Center can be placed in a location allowing easy access, visibility and presence at this interchange.
- The site can be designed for easy bus access.
- The site can be located to provide good visibility from US-35.
- The Visitor Center may be able to have a connection to the bike trail on the south side of US-35.

### Disadvantages:

- The Visitor Center would not be adjacent to downtown, but it would be closer to downtown than US-23 & SR-207.
- Visitors coming from the north would have to pass the Hopewell National Historical Park to visit the center.

## Site 2: North Bridge Street & US-23

The area on North Bridge Street is already a highly developed area.

### Advantages:

- The Visitor Center would have reasonable access to downtown.
- The site can be designed for easy bus access.
- The site may be visible from US-35.

### Disadvantages:

- This route carries a lot of local traffic.
- The site is not on a direct route to the primary Hopewell site, Mound City.
- The Visitor Center would not be adjacent to other attractions.
- The site is separated from US-35 by the flood plain.
- The site would require wayfinding to guide travelers from the north and south due to the development in the area.

## Site 3: VA Golf Course vicinity

This site is located along SR-104 between Site 1A & 1B. The area is between US-35 and US-23. The proposed site is in the vicinity north of the VA Golf Course along SR-104. This site will have similar characteristics as Site 1A (US-23 and SR-207) but it is further off the interstate.

### Advantages:

- The US-23 exit for SR-207 is the primary exit for visitors from the north to visit the Hopewell National Historical Park.
- SR-207 will extended to connect to SR-180. This may make this exit the primary exit for Tecumseh! Outdoor Historical Drama for visitors from the north and possibly from the south.
- There is not a lot of development along SR-104 in this area



- Visitor Center can be placed in a location allowing easy access and visibility from SR-104.
- The site can be designed for easy bus access.

#### Disadvantages:

- The Visitor Center would not be adjacent to downtown.
- The Visitor Center would not be very close or connected to other attractions.
- The Visitor Center will not be visible from US-23 or US-35.

### Site 4: Main Street & US-23

Main Street & US-23 site would capture north and southbound travelers. The area is developed, and the selection of the site presents challenges regarding having the Visitor Center stand out from the surrounding development.

#### Advantages:

- The Visitor Center would have easy access to downtown.
- The site can be designed for easy bus access.
- The site may be visible from US-23.

#### Disadvantages:

- The site is not on a direct route to the primary visitor draws.
- The Visitor Center would not be adjacent to other attractions.
- South and westbound travelers would pass their points of interest to get to the Visitor Center.
- The site would require enhanced wayfinding to guide travelers from the north and south.

### Site 5: Yoctangee Park

Yoctangee Park site and surrounding properties offer a location that is well connected to downtown and many amenities Chillicothe has to offer. The team visited several potential sites in this area including the Armory, Bus Garage site and Parks & Recreation building. The Visitor Center would not be on the route to the two primary visitor attractions in the area. The Visitor Center name and marketing would need careful consideration to help draw visitors to the center to learn more about the area.

#### Advantages:

- The Visitor Center would be adjacent to downtown.
- The Visitor Center would be very close or connected to other attractions (Pump House Center for the Arts, flood wall bike path, Yoctangee Park).
- The site can be designed for easy bus access.

#### Disadvantages:

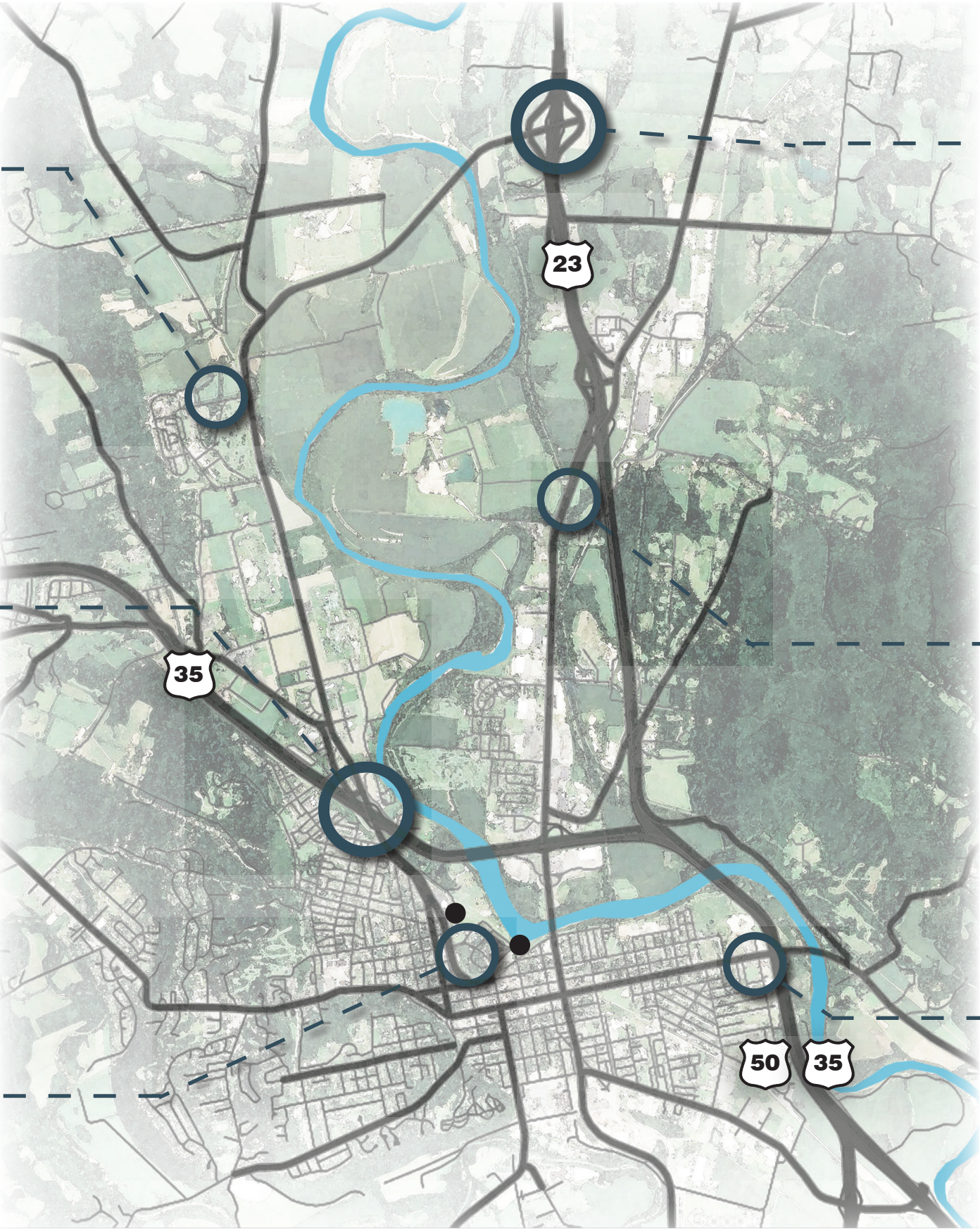
- The site is not directly off a primary street leading from an US-23 or US-35 exit.
- The site would require enhanced wayfinding (SR-104 to Mill Street, Bridge Street to Water Street or Riverside Street).
- The site would not be visible to travelers on US-23 or US-35.
- Designated Visitor Center parking is recommended to make the center friendly/accessible during peak park periods of use.

### Other Sites

Other sites that were considered are the parcels near the water fill station south of the YMCA, and the building across the street from the water fill station. These parcels are adjacent to Yoctangee Park and are similar in character but not adjacent to the amenities of the Park.



Site Recommendations  
Chillicothe Visitors' Center

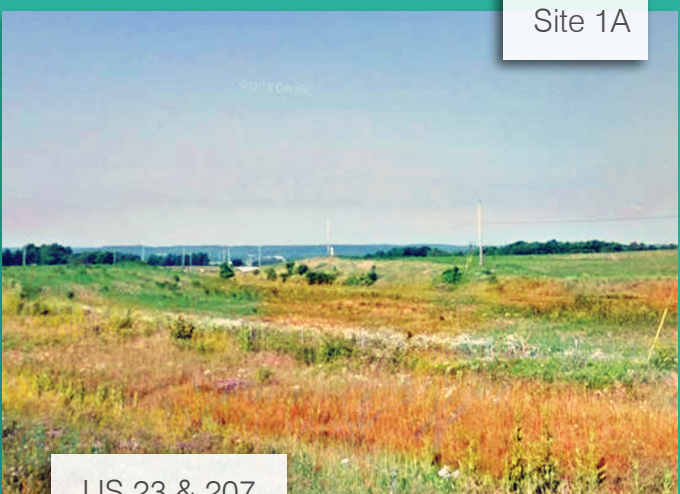


Site 3



VA Golf Course

Site 1A



US 23 & 207

Site 1B



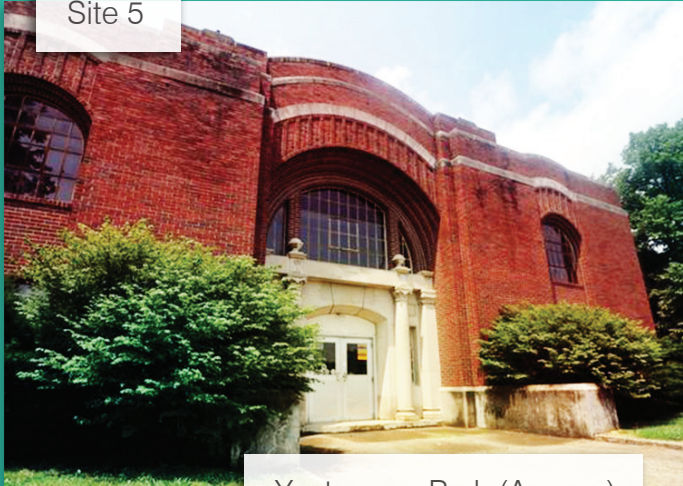
US 35 & 104

Site 2



N. Bridge Street & US 23

Site 5



Yoctangee Park (Armory)

Site 4



Main Street & US 23

● Other Recommendations



# Conclusions

## Site Selection

The recommendations in this report are focused on selecting a site that has the ability to be the “hub” and a starting point for visitors’ journey in the Greater Chillicothe area and based on the established criteria for the new Visitor Center:

- Access from major routes
- Easy in/out for bus and car traffic
- Dining area and charging stations
- Numerous restrooms
- 24/7 availability of tourist info, parking, restrooms and vending machines

This report recommends Site 1A: US-23 & SR 207 or Site 1B: US-35 & SR 104. These sites offer the greatest opportunity to capture incoming visitor traffic, access from a major route, easy in/out, can be 24/7 with little security concerns. The selection of the site and the development of the building can meet the goals established from the workshops.

Greater Chillicothe Ross County Development and the Ross-Chillicothe Visitor’s Bureau would like to thank Fluor BWXT for helping to fund this project and the JEDISO partners for supporting future development in Ross County and the City of Chillicothe.





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