ARTICLE II

PHYSICAL INVENTORY
AND DEMOGRAPHICS
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CHAPTER 6

HISTORY OF THE CITY
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SECTION 1
FOUNDING HISTORY

As with many Northeast Ohio communities Solon began as a rural farming community. Residents grew a variety of crops including wheat, oats, potatoes, and grapes. While years of residential and commercial development have now replaced its former rural character, Solon has matured into a thriving suburban community that boasts first rate subdivisions, schools, shopping centers, parks, and high quality government services.

"Figure 6-1-A"
Hribal farm at southeast corner of Aurora and Cochran Roads, circa 1935

The Hribal and Marek farms shown in “Figure 6-1-A” and “Figure 6-1-B” represent the rural atmosphere of Solon typical of the 1930’s. Haystacks shown at left and potatoes and grapes shown below were common crops of the time that were brought to Cleveland for sale.

Source: Pictorial History of Solon, Ohio

"Figure 6-1-B"
Marek farm on Cochran Rd., circa 1930

But how did Solon become the community that it is today? First, an understanding of how Northeast Ohio was established will provide the basis for discussion of Solon’s recent and not so recent past.

Source: Pictorial History of Solon, Ohio
Ohio was the first state to have its lands subdivided and sold by the federal government and “The Connecticut Western Reserve”, established in 1786, was one of nine major land surveys that divided the area that was to become the State of Ohio. Ten Northeast Ohio counties were included within The Connecticut Western Reserve: Ashtabula, Trumbull, Mahoning, Lake, Geauga, Portage, Cuyahoga, Summit, Medina, and Lorain.

The area currently occupied by the City of Solon was established as a township in 1825 and was originally known as Milan, part of Range 10, Township 6 of the Connecticut Western Reserve. The township originally measured 25 square miles in area but over time, Bentleyville and Glenwillow, sectioned off from the original Solon Township to become villages in 1831 and 1914, respectively. Solon itself became a village in 1927 and then incorporated as a city in 1961, at which time the mayor-council form of government that is still in effect today was established.

The first settlers were the Bull and Robbins families, who moved from the state of Connecticut to Solon in August of 1820, claiming and clearing just enough land to build a log cabin. In 1825 the county commissioners allowed these two pioneering families to rename the township in honor of one of the families. The name Solon was chosen as it was the middle name of Isaac Samuel Bull’s twelve year old son, Lorenzo Solon Bull, who later became postmaster. The name “Solon” dates back to a statesman in ancient Greece who was both a poet and a leader for Athenian democracy.

Members of the founding families including the Wells and Carver families, were the first government officials. Several roads throughout Solon are named after other prominent settlers such as Elija Pettibone, James Cannon, Henry Baldwin, John Cochran, and James Harper.

Other well known families at the time were the McConougheys, McClintocks, and the Chamberlains. Members of the Chamberlain family are shown in “Figure 6-1-C” clearing land at what is believed to be their property located on Liberty Road circa 1895.

Source: Pictorial History of Solon, Ohio, 1820-1991
Farming and the gathering of maple syrup and black salts (ash residue from burned trees used to make soap) were two other prominent commercial activities in Solon’s early history. Trading of these goods was common between Solon, Hudson, Newburg, Cleveland, and even extending to the state of Connecticut. Dairy farming was another significant activity, supporting the operation of five cheese factories during the 1800’s.

Former President James A. Garfield also spent time in Solon, as a young man of eighteen years old he was a circuit preacher at the Disciples of Christ church which burned down in 1899 and is now the location of Solon Historical Society. Mr. Garfield also taught at Ledge School, which was located at the southeast corner of SOM Center and Cannon Roads. His parents are buried in the Roselawn Cemetery on Solon Road.
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SECTION 2
RESIDENTIAL HISTORY

As more families moved into the greater Cleveland area in the late 1800’s and early 1900’s the demand for land naturally increased. In 1926, the operation of four real estate firms and the construction of Aurora Road (State Route 43) connecting Solon to Cleveland further fueled the land boom. Interestingly, Aurora Road was originally a path that was etched out of the existing woods by the U.S. Army to transport supplies during the War of 1812.

In the early 1900’s many major infrastructure improvements were made including the paving of roads and the extension of water and sewer lines. SOM Center Road (State Route 91) became established as the major north-south thoroughfare. It was so named for the three original townships that it ran through: Solon, Orange, and Mayfield. “Figure 6-2-A” shows its original “rustic” construction in 1920.

In the post World War II years, Cuyahoga County, and many other counties in Ohio, began to experience extensive residential, commercial, and industrial growth. This growth corresponds with the period when Solon became a city in 1961.

In the 1960’s and 1970’s most of the City’s residential land was zoned for 1/3 acres lots, however, the need became clear to limit population density in order to avoid overburdening the schools and city services.

Through the following decades, especially in the 1980’s and 1990’s, the City proposed and voters approved several comprehensive city wide re-zonings that increased the minimum residential lot size requirements to a half acre, one acre, or more. As of 2009, there are approximately one hundred eighteen residential subdivisions that provide a mix of large and small lots permitting density levels up to four dwellings per acre. More recent residential developments tend to provide larger size lots with an average of one to two dwellings per acre.
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SECTION 3
COMMERCIAL HISTORY

During the early settlement of the township there were problems with drainage in and around the center of town and much of the land was cleared and drained to accommodate commercial development. Nelson P. Bard wrote *Pioneers with Web Feet*, which chronicled life in early Solon. The book was so named because the settlers at the time were said to need webbed feet in order to walk through the swampy, marshy land.

The first store was established by Archibald Robbins in the 1830’s, at the intersection of Solon and Liberty Roads, now part of Bentleyville Village. A sawmill also located nearby. In 1840, however, after much of the land was drained, the store relocated to the center of town, near the intersection of SOM Center Road and Bainbridge Road.

“Figure 6-2-B”
Solon Cash Store, circa 1900

By the late 1800’s there were four general stores, such as the Solon Cash Store pictured in “Figure 6-2-B” which was located east of the train depot on Bainbridge Road, a drug store, tin shop, hotel, two blacksmiths, a shoe shop, and a steam sawmill to serve the approximate 1,000 residents.

Another store pictured in “Figure 6-2-C”, owned by W.P. Trimple, was also located on Bainbridge Road, and provided residents with an assortment of food and supplies. Food was kept cool with ice that was cut from Briar Hill Lake. This store is one of the historic buildings that remain today and is located at 33790 Bainbridge Road.

“Figure 6-2-C”
Trimple’s General Store
The SOM Center Road and Bainbridge Road intersection marked the beginning of a thriving commercial center that is a constant focus of new development and redevelopment. “Figure 6-2-D” and “Figure 6-2-E” provide a perspective of the area near the turn of the century.

“Figure 6-2-D”
SOM Center Rd and Bainbridge Rd.
intersection looking west down Bainbridge Rd.

Source: Pictorial History of Solon, Ohio, 1820-1991

“Figure 6-2-E”
SOM Center Rd. and Bainbridge Rd.
intersection looking east down Bainbridge Rd.

Source: Pictorial History of Solon, Ohio, 1820-1991
SECTION 4
INDUSTRIAL HISTORY

Solon now has significant areas zoned for industrial uses, accounting for 15% of Solon’s total land area. This is in part due to the fact that in 1947 village voters passed strict zoning regulations and Solon began a fervent effort to encourage industrial growth. Approximately 930 acres was purchased in the southwest portion of the city for an industrial park. Over time, most of the farms in this area were converted for industrial purposes.

One of the first industries to locate in Solon was the Austin Powder Company in 1907. This company was located in the southwest corner of the city (now Glenwillow). Bready Cultimotor, a tractor company that located here in 1931 was the first manufacturing business in Solon. It was located on the south side of Aurora Road between SOM Center Road and Solon Boulevard.

Other industrial businesses to open their doors for operation in the city were the Solon Foundry in 1946, Falls Industries in 1949, and David Round in 1951. The year 1968 marked the opening of Stouffer’s frozen food plant which continues to be one of the city’s major employers. Today, more than 250 manufacturing and warehousing businesses operate in Solon and now occupy approximately 1,966 acres.

Railroad access was crucial to being a vital component of the local economy in the 1800’s. The Cleveland and Mahoning Valley Railroad that bisects Solon diagonally east to west began operations in 1857 and connected Cleveland to Youngstown, providing access to the Mahoning Valley coal deposits.

The Solon Depot pictured in “Figure 6-2-F” was built in 1896 after the original 1857 structure burned down.

The Cleveland and Mahoning Valley Railroad became part of the Erie Lackawanna Railroad in 1960, which then filed for bankruptcy in 1972. The line, subsequently purchased by Conrail, included commuter rail service from Cleveland to Youngstown that operated until 1978 when Conrail ceased operations due to a lack of profit. Today rail service essentially ends at the Solon-Bedford Heights border.
SECTION 5
SUMMARY

Understanding the transformation that a community experiences over time provides the basis upon which to identify and define future needs and goals. To quote the 1975 Land Use Plan, “Solon...will be a prime participant sharing in the population and industrial expansion of the 1970’s. The community’s future will be tied to an increasingly urban environment, (which) could mean that the community will be plagued with a variety of problems associated with progress and urbanism.”

Solon indeed has experienced progress and urbanism and has managed it well with distinct and attractive residential, commercial, industrial, and recreational areas. This Master Plan will help to ensure that the City will continue to prosper with new developments and redevelopment into the early 21st Century.
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