

America in Bloom 2017 EVALUATION REPORT



Community: Bluffton, Ohio

Population Category: 3,500 – 10,000

Evaluation Dates: July 20-21, 2017

Judges: Leslie Pittenger and Linda Cromer

America in Bloom envisions communities across the country as welcoming and vibrant places to live, work, and play – benefitting from colorful plants and trees; enjoying clean environments; celebrating heritage; and planting pride through volunteerism.

All evaluation criteria are adjusted to the climate and environmental conditions of the community’s location.

This Evaluation Report is based upon your community’s efforts in each of the following criteria:

Criteria	Possible Points	Actual Points
1. Floral Displays	175.00	129.00
2. Landscaped Areas	175.00	126.00
3. Urban Forestry	175.00	126.00
4. Environmental Efforts	175.00	120.00
5. Heritage Preservation	175.00	113.00
6. Overall Impression	125.00	90.00
Total	1000	704.00
%	70.00	
Bloom Rating	3	

Five blooms = 85% Four blooms = 72.50–84.95% Three blooms = 60.00–72.45% Two blooms = 45.00–59.95% One bloom = <45.00%

Community representatives to receive the Evaluation Report:

Name: Judy Augsburger

Title: Mayor

Email: mayor@bluffton-ohio.com

Name: Susie Stratton

Title: Volunteer

Email:

tcp@strattongreenhouses.com

General Observations and Recommendations:

Recommendations are indicated in italics.

Congratulations for being a first-time participant in the America in Bloom competition. Yours is a community that is the very definition of the word. Mayor Judy Augsburger describes Bluffton as a village where neighbors care about one another, and the judges saw ample evidence of that during our visit.

Your vibrant Main Street, quiet tree lined neighborhoods, and the presence of Bluffton University offer many opportunities and an enviable quality of life for residents. It's the kind of community that tempts visitors to take a serious look at real estate listings.

The village feels safe and welcoming, and that is embodied by the 4th National Night Out Celebration done Bluffton style - over 2,500 folks in a full-throttle celebration of the cooperative spirit that moves this thriving community ever forward. This joyride of a night is driven by the strong partnership between the police department and the community and everyone is sitting in the front seat.



Connectivity is a high priority in the village and with the help of the Lions Club you are making improvements and expanding routes to enable pedestrians and cyclists to use new trails and sidewalks connecting greenspace/recreational areas throughout the village, and eventually to a planned state-wide pedestrian/bike network. The project began in 2009 with a comprehensive master plan and boasts 9.3 miles of pathway and roadway around the village. This effort has been successful and continues to thrive because of determination and teamwork among the Bluffton village council, administration, community volunteer groups, and the pathway board.

You did an outstanding job putting together your Community Profile and developing a comprehensive itinerary for the judges' visit. *We encourage you to make it available to everyone in the community through the municipal website and at the public library. It would serve as a useful tool for Bluffton College to introduce parents and potential students to the village. The hard work of creating your initial Community Profile has been completed, so in 2018 simply revise the profile by adding and highlighting any new initiatives and perhaps indicating in some way improvements you have made in response to suggestions in this year's evaluation.* We commend you for the contact list included near the back of your profile; that information makes it easy for judges to follow up on specific projects or directly address questions to the individuals with the answers. *For 2018, it will be helpful for the judges to receive the Community Profile a week or two before their visit to familiarize themselves with Bluffton prior to their arrival.*

We were delighted with the generous and enthusiastic welcome we received throughout your community. It's thrilling to witness the energy and enthusiasm you have for your village. *Build on that enthusiasm by sharing a copy of this evaluation with everyone we met with and those who assisted with the development of the Community Profile and the Tour Itinerary. Analyze the suggestions and prioritize those you feel are a good fit for Bluffton; determine which of those are doable in the short term while keeping*



desirable longer-term projects in mind. Consider assigning a volunteer leader for each criterion to gather information and coordinate efforts in that area. Remember to categorize the information in each by municipal, business, residential and community involvement.

Keep the America in Bloom momentum going. Bluffton is a remarkable community and has much to share with the America in Bloom family. We look forward to your continued participation as an AIB community and are confident that yours will be a continuing success story as you strive to make your wonderful village ever better.

Regards,

Leslie Pittenger and Linda Cromer

1. Floral Displays

	Max points	Actual Score
Flower beds, containers, planters, baskets, window boxes, trellises. Arrangement, originality, distribution, location, diversity, balance, harmony, quality of maintenance. Use and integration of annuals, perennials, ornamental grasses, bulbs, tropical plants, and seasonal flowers and colorful foliage that provide year-round interest.		
Municipal		
Leadership and plan of action for floral displays	20	15
Concept and design, variety of plantings, overall effect	20	16
Maintenance and quality of displays	20	16
Design for all seasons	15	10
Business		
Concept and design, overall effect	15	9
Maintenance and quality of displays	15	9
Residential		
Concept and design, overall effect	15	12
Maintenance and quality of displays	15	12
Community Involvement		
Volunteer involvement in design, planting, and maintenance of floral displays	20	15
Financial and in-kind contributions to floral displays	20	15
Total (the fields automatically calculate – do not type in them)	175.00	129.00

Observations and Recommendations:

Beautifully voluminous hanging baskets and large planters spilling over with blooms make busy downtown Bluffton a destination for residents and visitors anxious to see flower power in full display. The dedication and hard work of Steve and Susie Stratton of Stratton Greenhouses has been the catalyst for this project. Sponsorships that underwrite a portion of the costs are now part of the program's success and this has allowed the basket and container program to continue. *While the sponsorships have helped augment the remarkable generosity of the Stratton's, now is the time for the Village of Bluffton to formally acknowledge how important the Main Street floral displays are to the quality of life and economic development in the community, and to provide for this program in the yearly budgeting process.*

The quality of the plant material and care of the baskets and planters is outstanding. Consider incorporating the "thriller, filler, spiller" formula for the sidewalk planters *by adding a taller vertical feature such as ornamental millet "Jade Princess" or "Jester", or perhaps even more intriguing, provide for an echo of the peace pole theme seen at the college and churches. Recruit artists, students, and civic organizations to sponsor a pole which could be as simple as a picket fence post painted and "planted" in the pots as the focal point.*



Bluffton is fortunate to have many civic and youth organizations actively involved in the betterment of the community. *Enlist the Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, and senior citizens in a fun project such as planting bulbs to add spring interest to floral displays. Bloomin' Bucks with Brent and Becky's Bulbs is a progressive fundraising program designed to earn select non-profit organizations cash for every order received through the Brent and Becky's Bulbs website! <https://www.brentandbeckysbulbs.com/FUND-RAISING>*

Bluffton Hospital is growing and becoming an ever-greater asset to the community. The entry area is tidy but somewhat uninviting. *Encourage the hospital to add entryway containers that can be changed out for seasonal interest.* It is important for a health care institution to project an inviting first impression for those visiting in what are often stressful times.

Several businesses are adding floral color to their landscaping efforts. The judges were on a whirlwind tour and almost certainly missed other examples, but we want to note the efforts by State Farm Insurance and Diamond Manufacturing.



Bluffton College has done a remarkable job of making the campus appealing. Colorful floral displays draw your eye and lift your spirits across the campus. *We recommend highlighting the lovely welcoming message at the Lion and Lamb Peace Center with a little floral color.*

The floral displays at St. Mary's Catholic Church are a joy to behold. A rainbow of blooms embraces the church and instills in viewers a sense of gratitude for the pleasure of reflecting on the wonders around us.



Many Bluffton residents have created outstanding floral displays. Thanks to all who shared their passion for flowers and their community with us during our visit. Yards are bursting with color, texture, and artistic displays. Kudos to Ralph Miller and Beth Boehr, Gerald and Jeanne Wehri, Nancy Mistovich, Willard and Janice Brewster, and Bruce Augsburg and Keith Johnson for the enthusiasm and commitment to gardening evident at their homes. Walking through your gardens was a special treat and one we thoroughly enjoyed. *To encourage others to enhance their own floral displays, promote a yard of the week/month program. Work with the police department to choose the winner. These public servants travel the entire village several times a day and they know more than anyone what positive things are happening in the community. An acknowledgement and/or yard sign designating the honor could be given by a council member or the mayor at a village council meeting.*

Mennonite Memorial Home (MMH) is a model of the generosity so common among gardeners. Residents have historically gardened and tended flowers at their homes before moving to MMH, and they take pride in beautifying the front entrance with vibrant color. Each year, residents' families are invited to donate to the annual flower fund in honor of a mother or father. In 2017, over six thousand dollars was donated toward the effort and the results are a gift to everyone who passes by.

Sponsor an AIB garden tour of select gardens as a fundraiser for Bluffton's America in Bloom efforts and to encourage others to become involved. Work with Stratton Greenhouse and downtown merchants to promote the event and recruit gardens.

2. Landscaped Areas

Overall design and suitability of landscape, turf, and ground covers. Use of native and introduced plants. Good use of design principles (i.e., balance of plant material and constructed elements, harmony, color, texture, shape, focal points, etc.). Sustainability. Integration of lighting, hardscapes, and site elements such as lamp posts, water features, drinking fountains, bicycle racks, benches, trash/recycling receptacles, etc. Maintenance (weeds, mulching practices, edging). Site rejuvenation and rehabilitation. Efforts in strategic planning. Community gardens, children’s gardens, healing gardens, pollinator gardens, Backyard Wildlife Habitat, Audubon, and other specialty public gardens and zoos.	Max points	Actual Score
Municipal		
Overall design and planting of landscape, turf and groundcovers	15	11
Environmental management of sports fields and turf	15	11
Quality of landscape maintenance	15	11
Sustainable management, naturalization and eco-design	15	11
Business		
Overall design and planting of landscape	15	10
Management of turf and groundcovers	10	6
Quality of landscape maintenance	15	10
Residential		
Overall design and planting of landscape	15	12
Management of turf and groundcovers	15	12
Quality of landscape maintenance	15	12
Community Involvement		
Volunteer involvement, i.e. garden clubs, neighborhood groups, Master Gardeners and University extension, in funding, planting, and maintenance of landscaped areas	15	10
Participation in future planning (committees, councils, and advisory boards.)	15	10
Total (the fields automatically calculate – do not type in them)	175.00	126.00

Observations and Recommendations:

As we approached downtown on Hwy 103 from our lodging, we noted that the gateway sign is set well back from the road and has no attendant landscaping to enhance the sign and add visual weight. It was, in fact, our second trip along the route before we spotted the sign. Visitors to Bluffton shouldn’t have to wait until they get to Main Street to know they’re somewhere special. *Work to add/improve landscaping at all gateway signs to preview the care evident in the downtown and residential neighborhoods. Sign location is vital to the overall strategy; ensure that placement is close enough to the road to be noticed in relatively rapidly moving traffic.*



Many public buildings are sited in such a way that landscaping is minimal by necessity. *The library, however, has broad expanses of turf that would be a greater asset if converted to include an attractive landscaped feature utilizing a judicious mixture of shrubs with interesting textures and leaf colors, ornamental grasses, perennials and bulbs. Because the sign is sited so close to the sidewalk on one side, a more typical “island” of landscaping around the sign is not possible. An attractive alternative would be a landscaped area adjacent to and spanning the length of the frontage. Incorporate the library sign, utilizing groundcovers such as sedum or liriopoe or prostrate evergreen shrubs near it to enhance and not impede*

the view of this handsome feature. Existing sidewalks would create barriers on three sides to help with maintaining a clean edge. You might even consider a ground level concrete or paver strip on the fourth side to simplify mowing. Consider including a piece of public art that complements the sign. Alternatively, we suggest you design and install an ample island planting bed anchored by the locust tree.

For three decades, the Men’s Garden Club of Bluffton has operated a community garden in the village. Located amidst a large open farmed area with ample parking and large plots, this is a wonderful amenity. This year a Boy Scout troop is working on a merit badge through a project using the opportunity the garden provides. The youngsters’ enthusiasm is paying off personally (lessons learned in horticulture and teamwork) and for the community (the fruits of their labor go to a local food pantry). We’re confident these scouts got some good advice from Mr. Patrick Flinn, who has been tilling the soil in this location for 27 years!



Every corner of the Bluffton College campus is graced with attractive well-maintained landscaping. With grounds this expansive, the college mindfully concentrates annual floral displays in high traffic areas, but the landscape throughout features a judicious mix of trees, shrubs, perennials and some concentrations of annual color for the summer season. Being in planting zone 5 makes for a limited season for floral color in the landscape, but contrasting foliage textures and colors extend the season of interest. *Add to the show by naturalizing daffodils and some of the lesser bulbs like scilla, crocus and muscari in grassy areas where it will be acceptable to let the foliage ripen before mowing.*

The grounds outside the Sommer Center for Health and Fitness Education (LEED Certified Silver) are a perfect location to install a sustainable garden using native plants. This would be in the spirit of the environmentally sensitive structure and would provide an additional educational element with appropriate interpretive signage and discrete plant markers.

Riverbend is a neighborhood comprised of well-manicured lawns and attractive residences. Positioned along the bike/pedestrian pathway it is a very visible community within the village. *Work with the landscapers responsible for the common areas of the subdivision to begin using selective pruning on shrubbery. Over time,*

judicious hand pruning is cost-efficient, and certainly results in a more aesthetically pleasing outcome than a full-on assault with gas-powered hedge trimmers. Property owners and passersby would rather look at attractive healthy shrubs than over-pruned, unnatural bowling balls.

Saint Mary's Catholic Church is graced by a memorial and meditation garden installed in 2015 to recognize the 150th anniversary of the church. It is a stunning tribute to this active congregation and features a pathway of memorial pavers. The garden is landscape design at its finest and it was a pleasure spending a few moments in this serene setting.



The Sportsmen's Club, across from Buckeye Park, is a valued amenity in Bluffton. It is the venue for countless community and private events and the structure is also home to American Legion Post 382. A nice planting area circumscribed by an appealing low border of stacked flat stones and anchored by a sign and flagpole has been created in front of the building, but it is sparsely planted and weeds are encroaching. *The area would be greatly enhanced by the addition of slow growing low maintenance shrubs and/or well-behaved ornamental grasses. Consult with Stratton Greenhouses for advice on plant choices that will provide visual interest through the colder seasons and leave room for the addition of summer*

annuals to accent the design.

Several businesses have attractive landscaping; notably Tower Automotive, Citizens National Bank, and Mustard Seed Café. The café makes optimum use of a challenging location to incorporate an attractive small landscaped area enhanced by hanging baskets.

The grounds at the MMH are one of the major attractions of this retirement community. Central to the campus, an outdoor amphitheater and a gazebo are adorned with bountiful hanging baskets, a wonderful spot to rest and enjoy the beauty of the outdoor environment.

The judges met the owners and toured several beautifully landscaped residential gardens that sported outstanding floral displays. While we didn't meet the property owners, we stopped briefly and looked over the fence into the backyard at Small House Bluffton (SHB), designated a Certified Wildlife Habitat by the National Wildlife Federation and a Monarch Waystation by the University of Kansas Monarch Watch initiative. Congratulations on your efforts and accomplishments! *As you work to develop a garden tour to aid in fundraising efforts for Bluffton's America in Bloom program, try to enlist a variety of garden styles to give visitors as many ideas as possible for their own gardens.*

The Monarch Waystation at SHB is one of five in Bluffton. Most accessible to the public is the Girl-Scout installed habitat at Buckeye Lake, a joint effort of Bluffton troops from kindergarten to high school, the Sportsmen's Club and the Village of Bluffton. The Monarch Waystation is visible to the myriad of visitors at Buckeye Park and provides an excellent model for others.

3. Urban Forestry

Distribution, variety and suitability of trees; new plantings; urban tree program; qualified personnel or access to trained individual(s); inventory or database; frequency of tree surveys; care and maintenance programs; preservation of heritage trees and woodlots and green buffer zones; scheduled succession plantings, Tree City USA and their Growth Award. Efforts in management, planning, maintenance, improvement, and innovation. Written policies, bylaws and regulations, long- and short-term plans, trees on private property protected.	Max points	Actual Score
Municipal		
Overall plan of action, tree planting programs, variety of species, inventory	20	17
Tree maintenance	15	11
Preservation and restoration of natural areas	15	11
Tree protection/planting regulations and by-laws	15	10
Business		
Overall planting program	20	10
Tree maintenance	15	7
Residential		
Overall planting program	20	16
Tree maintenance	15	12
Community Involvement		
Volunteer involvement in funding, planting, and maintenance of trees (i.e. Tree City USA)	20	16
Volunteer involvement of youth in tree programs (i.e., Arbor Day, etc.)	20	16
Total (the fields automatically calculate – do not type in them)	175.00	126.00

Observations and Recommendations:

The Village of Bluffton has been a Tree City USA since 1994. This designation should be a source of real pride. *Join many America in Bloom communities that proudly fly the Tree City USA flag as part of the display on flagpoles in your parks and other public areas.*

An active tree commission pre-dates the Tree City USA designation. The Bluffton Village Tree Commission, chaired by Joanne Antibus, meets regularly. The village also has a tree inventory, updated with the assistance of an urban forester with the Ohio Department of Natural Resources. *If not already being done, ask Joanne to assign someone or take on the task herself to keep the inventory current Quarterly.* It is easy to let an inventory become outdated if not addressed on a regular schedule.

Congratulations to by Bluffton’s tree commissioners and village administrators for completion of the ODNR Tree Commission Academy.



A bounty of tree lined streets graces Bluffton, and there are ongoing efforts to increase the urban canopy. We were pleased to observe that there is a program for succession planting in the village, but are concerned that your right tree/ right place initiatives are being undermined by well-intentioned but unwanted interference. Three attractive Forest Pansy redbuds have been planted in the tree lawn on the west side of Jackson Street between Kibler and Grove. Someone has planted additional seedlings between them. *Remove the small seedlings this fall if you have not already done so. They appear to be recently planted, so they may survive removal and replanting in an appropriate location.* To leave them in place would compromise the properly sited redbuds.

You have a myriad of handsome trees in your two fine parks. It is important to plant new trees, but the best time to plant a tree is yesterday. That is why it is so important to give mature trees the best chance of continued survival that you can. *Trees in your parks and public areas should be properly mulched to retain moisture and create a visual barrier/safety zone to prevent damage from mowing and weed eating. The village is operating with a limited number of employees to care for your streets, parks, and public areas. They are doing an excellent job but simply do not have time to take on this task. Work with the tree commission to develop a group of volunteers to mulch park trees in the spring.* Mulch should be 2" deep and 2"-3" from the trunks of the trees. *It would be wise to have a brief training session for volunteers in the proper method for mulching (consider www.tlcfortree.info).*

The ever-expanding bike/pedestrian pathways are a tremendous amenity for the community. *Where possible, add trees along the pathway to provide shade in years to come and enhance the aesthetics of the pathway.* This is a gift you will be giving to your grandchildren.

We can't over-emphasize the importance of proper mulching. Perhaps riskier than no mulch is the practice of "volcano mulching" by mounding mulch up around the trunks of trees. We spotted this unfortunate practice at the hospital. *We suggest that the tree commission prepare a friendly informative letter that can be sent to businesses including the hospital where groundskeepers are mulching incorrectly.*

As funds permit, work to produce a list of recommended small, medium and large trees for Bluffton. Ask the Urban Forestry Division of the Ohio Department of Natural Resources for assistance. Produce the list in booklet form and include information on right tree/right place tree selection and proper planting and mulching techniques. Make the publication available on the village website and print booklets for distribution to residents and businesses. Hand out the booklets at your Arbor Day celebration. Require developers to use the recommendations for new projects. Many America in Bloom communities have developed similar documents and find them tremendously useful in their public outreach to improve their urban canopies.

The Sportsmen's Club is a much-used venue in Bluffton. *Unfortunately, there is an unobstructed sight line from the club to the village brush dump. We recommend the village plant a hedge of quick-growing viburnum to block the view.*

Bluffton identified its "best idea" for 2017 as the tree mapping initiative at Bluffton Arboretum taken on by the Girl Scouts. Excellent choice! This ambitious project included working with the tree commission to identify and flag the forty-two species of trees in the arboretum, research interesting facts about each tree, and select



and install tree markers. The girls raised funds through cookie sales to purchase some of the markers. The tree commission assisted the scouts in creating a brochure from the information gathered. The girls have drawn up prototypes of interpretive signs to present to the tree commission. *This is an outstanding project and we urge the community to continue marking all trees in the arboretum and proceed with installation of the proposed interpretive signage. Additional partners may be required to fund the effort, so consider setting up a "speakers' bureau" of members of Girl Scout Troop 20007 and the Bluffton Tree Commission to make presentations to civic organizations who may be able to help.*

Several trees in the arboretum and throughout the community are showing signs of iron deficiency. *Try a topical application of Ironite in the root zone to correct the problem.*

4. Environmental Efforts

	Max Points	Actual Score
Sustainability practices. Recycling (paper, glass, metal, plastic, electronics, clothing, etc.), transfer/recycle stations, policies and by-laws, sustainable development strategies, waste reduction, hazardous waste minimization and collection (oil, paint, chemicals, used batteries, etc.), water quality and conservation, energy conservation, environmental cleanup activities, reducing carbon footprint, environmentally friendly transportation, LEED certification, air, noise and light pollution, Integrated Pest Management (IPM), rain gardens and rain barrels, composting, energy efficiency, youth programs, etc. Events such as Earth Day, Recycling Days, Bike to Work Days, etc.		
Municipal		
Leadership in environmental initiatives	25	21
Effective communication of environmental strategies and initiatives	25	16
New programs, improvement and innovation	25	17
Business		
Participation in environmental efforts	20	10
New programs, improvement and innovation	10	5
Residential		
Participation in environmental efforts	20	13
New programs, improvement and innovation	10	8
Community Involvement		
Volunteer involvement in environmental efforts	20	15
Youth participation in environmental activities	20	15
Total (the fields automatically calculate – do not type in them)	175.00	120.00

Observations and Recommendations:



The Village of Bluffton is leading by example in environmental initiatives, including contracting for curbside single-stream recycling along with regular refuse pickup. There is a Lions Club drop-off site in City Hall for specialty items and Informational signage directs residents to the American Legion for disposing of worn and faded flags.

Continue converting all public buildings to LED lighting, switching to low flow toilets, and installing motion detector switches for lighting

Weekly curbside pickup of brush goes to the village “brush dump” to be held along with brush and grass clippings dropped off by residents. Once a year the village hires a company to grind the brush into mulch which it provides free of charge to residents.

Continue your proactive environmental efforts by installing an electric charging station for golf carts and cars and converting lighting at signs and flagpoles to solar power.

The fire department has one unit that captures diesel fumes to protect personnel from exposure to diesel particulate matter (DPM). It is unclear to us whether this was a factory installed feature or an after-market conversion. *If there are other diesel-fueled vehicles in your fleet, we urge you to invest in the conversion of*

these vehicles utilizing readily available technology. Many fire departments that have older diesel units are utilizing these kits to make their fire houses safer for first responders.

Recycling containers send the subliminal message that a community cares about the environment. *We recommend pairing recycling bins with trash receptacles downtown, in your parks, along bike/pedestrian trails, and at special event venues.*

The waste treatment plant provides Class B biosolids to area farmers to apply to wheat stubble. A local company, Soil Tech, works with farmers to ensure best management practices.

We were happy to see evidence of a comprehensive in-house recycling program at the Comfort Inn upon our arrival.



Bluffton cares about its water and has joined with the Blanchard River Watershed Partnership, the City of Findlay, and Streamside LLC to demonstrate Sand Wand removal of silt, sand, and fine sediment from the Little Riley Creek. *This is an important tool for stream mitigation and we urge you to share the information with other communities as you attend conferences with municipal leaders around the state.*



Increase your efforts to improve your watershed by marking storm drains in the village to discourage dumping. To further help protect water quality, stencil "No dumping - Drains to river" on the sides of curbs to increase notice by vehicle passengers.

Take an additional step to protect your waterways by reducing the impact of storm water runoff. Institute a pilot project using permeable paving when you replace or install a sidewalk or public parking lot.



Kudos to Bluffton University for your LEED Certified Sommer Center for Health and Fitness Education. *Continue your environmental upgrades to older buildings on campus. If not already in place, consider installing a pollinator garden featuring native plants. Install a charging station on campus for electric cars.*

Transition Bluffton is an organization whose mission is to be a catalyst for conservation and sustainable change in the Bluffton community. One of their many initiatives was the Bluffton Green Homes Tour in July of this year. *We suggest that Bluffton's AIB committee partner with them to feature demonstration rain gardens, backyard habitats, sustainable gardening and examples of rain barrel usage and composting for a future tour.* We saw several outstanding examples of these initiatives during our visits to residential gardens.

Ethically and environmentally responsible merchandising has hit a trifecta in Bluffton with 10,000 Villages, the Et Cetera Shop thrift store and a thriving used book emporium. Retail therapy can be good for everyone.

5. Heritage Preservation

	Max Points	Actual Score
Historical, natural, agricultural, and cultural heritage. Preservation and restoration of buildings, homes, churches, cemeteries; heritage sites and/or monuments; heritage parks, historical gardens; historical trees, artifacts; historical society; heritage advisory committee, museums, archives, history books, land trusts/conservation easements and interpretative programs; ordinances and policies including protection of structures/sites from demolition/development. Resource availability. Farmers markets, festivals and parades.		
Municipal		
Leadership in preservation and restoration initiatives	25	15
Legal protection of heritage sites	25	15
Resource availability for preservation and restoration	25	15
Business		
Conservation, restoration, and rehabilitation of properties	15	11
Participation in and support of heritage/cultural activities	15	11
Residential		
Conservation, restoration, and rehabilitation of properties	15	11
Participation in and support of heritage/cultural activities	15	11
Community Involvement		
Volunteer involvement in cultural, historical, and natural heritage activities	20	12
Youth involvement in heritage activities	20	12
Total (the fields automatically calculate – do not type in them)	175.00	113.00

Observations and Recommendations:

Bluffton is a community that values its rich heritage. A prime example is the beautifully restored Bluffton Town Hall.

The first settlers to establish a presence in Bluffton were Swiss immigrants. Their influence is still central to the culture of the community and Swiss Day is celebrated each June by the Swiss Community Historical Society. An open house is held at the fully restored Schumacher House, a Swiss homestead dating to the 1840's. It was interesting to learn a little about the activities of the Historical Society during a casual conversation at dinner at the Sportsmen's Club and to read about this part of your history in the Community Profile. *We recommend that a presentation about the Historical Society and its work be made part of your AIB tour next year. If there exists an informational brochure about the Swiss Community Historical Society, make it available at the Chamber of Commerce, Town Hall, local merchants, and Bluffton University. If no brochure exists, please consider developing one.*

The impressive restoration and adaptive reuse of historical buildings in downtown is laudable. In some instances, it's as if time has stood still. We were enthralled by the Slaw Cutter Factory and fascinated to witness a beautifully utile product being created as it has been since 1915. Many thanks to Bob Sehlhorst; it was our great pleasure to meet you and share your enthusiasm for this fascinating example of living history and the community that embraces it. *We encourage you to enlist a college intern or videographer to make a short video of the history and process of the Slaw Cutter Factory.*

The Bluffton Library is the repository of much of your community's history. Forty-two headstones from the abandoned Shannon Cemetery are currently in storage. *Rubbings of the stones would make for an interesting*

display at the library and hopefully generate thoughtful discussion about the future of the property and the eventual relocation of the headstones.

The headstones that remain in storage could be relocated to a special section of Maple Grove/Bluffton Cemetery and installed together with interpretive signage explaining their origins at Shannon Cemetery.



Bluffton has many handsome historic homes in a broad range of architectural styles. *Consider developing a brochure for a walking tour of historic homes near the downtown area.*

Independent research tells us that an oil-on-canvas New Deal mural is mounted on the wall of your historic post office. *If this is the case, the judges next year would like to see it, so plan to stop in with them.* There is huge interest in these murals today.

There are countless stories that could be told related to the Sportsmen's Club. *Try to interest a student from Bluffton University or an Eagle Scout candidate in doing an oral history project about the club and the honorees listed on the wall.*

Bluffton is justifiably proud of its many initiatives related to its urban forest. *Now is the time to establish an Heritage Tree program to recognize those trees that have a special significance in the community. The first tree on the list should be the majestic white oak in Bluffton/Maple Grove Cemetery. This outstanding specimen has been listed on the international website www.MonumentalTrees.com since 2015. It deserves a little respect in its own back yard. For a good example of a heritage tree program, go to www.saratoga.ca.us and do a search for heritage trees.*

6. Overall Impression

	Max points	Actual Score
Lack of litter and graffiti. Maintenance of public open spaces, medians and boulevard strips, streets, sidewalks, walking and biking trails, curbs, ditches, road shoulders, unattended and vacant lots, buildings, garbage/recycling receptacles; lack of weeds, dog waste policies and receptacles, notices/posters appropriately displayed, vandalism not evident. Maintenance of the hardscape: walls, lamp posts, benches, playgrounds, etc. Appropriate use and placement of sculpture, public art, wayfinding signs, graphic elements such as banners, signs and murals.		
Municipal		
Overall cleanliness	10	8
Maintenance of public roads and shoulders	10	7
Condition of public buildings and properties	10	8
Impact of graphic elements - banners, wayfinding signs, murals, etc.	10	6
Business		
Overall cleanliness	20	15
Condition of buildings and properties	20	15
Residential		
Overall cleanliness	10	7.5
Condition of buildings and properties	10	7.5
Community Involvement		
Participation in clean-up efforts, adopt-a-spot, annual cleanup days, etc.	15	11
Recognition of volunteer efforts	10	5
Total (the fields automatically calculate – do not type in them)	125.00	90.00

Observations and Recommendations:

Bluffton's streets and sidewalks are generally clean and in good repair. \$50,000 is set aside each year as part of a connectivity plan for the community to install sidewalks to connect to existing sidewalks. Public buildings are clean and well-kept.

Overall, residential and commercial property is neat and well-maintained. *The exceptions should be addressed through code enforcement to prevent a negative impact on property values for neighboring structures.*

There is a much-loved downtown public mural commemorating local history by artist Oscar Velasquez. *We noted several other locations that would provide perfect spots for public murals, so begin adding to your collection.* With an artist of the caliber of Mr. Velasquez available to Bluffton, you have built-in encouragement to establish a committee to fund additional artwork.

Bluffton gets high marks for keeping its public schools near the heart of downtown. This adds a sense of energy and excitement to the thriving downtown district. The street art tradition carried on by high school seniors each spring is a wonderful initiative. It gives the students a chance to express their creativity, an outlet for their exuberance, and may even be part of the reason we saw no graffiti in the community.

The Honda Outdoor Sculpture Garden at the Bluffton College is an outstanding initiative. Public art is important to stimulate thought and generate discussion. The absolute wonder of this collection of public art is that each artist expresses their unique vision, but the message of peace is a shared one. It is spoken in the language of the heart.



Signs that are poorly conceived or maintained deliver a whole other message than that which was intended. The Monarch Waystation at Buckeye Park is a wonderful project, but the identifying signage tacked on a stump below hand lettered instructional signage for fishermen detracts from this quality initiative. While the yellow fishing signs have a certain rustic charm, the waystation sign is unrelated in content and style. *We recommend, at the minimum, moving the Monarch Waystation sign away from the stump and mounting it on a vertical post.*

The sign at the entry to the park is, again, unrelated stylistically to the signs just mentioned, hard to read, and is mounted on a short post with peeling paint. While these issues taken separately may seem of minor consequence, your eye sees them as disparate jarring parts of the whole and they become visual litter. If possible, recreate the park sign and the fishing signs in the same font and color scheme and mount them vertically on a single post at the entry to the park. The Monarch Waystation sign can then be placed near the project planting.



Bluffton is becoming a bicycling community even before your trail system is completed. *Act to make both drivers and cyclists safer by painting bike lanes on streets with sufficient width.* Studies have shown that a residual effect of painting bike lanes is that traffic slows.

This often-mentioned bike/pedestrian pathway system is a project that obviously impresses the judges. It is in sync with a nation-wide movement for connectivity and healthier living. *As progress continues on the trail system, act to provide pet waste receptacles. There are some receptacles available that allow dog owners to exercise the give-a-bag/take-a-bag concept using recycled plastic grocery bags.* This cuts down on the expense to the village for furnishing the plastic bags. It also provides a way to re-use the ubiquitous plastic bags, and lets man take his best friend out for a walk without leaving a nasty little surprise for the next pedestrian.

It is going to be increasingly urgent for you to address wayfinding signage. *Establish a committee to analyze projected needs and develop an appealing and appropriate design. Again, it is important to standardize attractive signage for a consistent, coherent look.*

A group of three friends banded together to pick up litter on creek banks and in parks. Using social media (the Bluffton Cleanup Facebook page), the group has attracted help from boy scouts and other volunteers. *We urge you to build upon this success by creating an adopt-a-spot program to enhance the efforts of the hard-working village maintenance department.* Ask individuals and groups to sign up for designated areas of responsibility. One AIB community directs volunteers to devote just one hour each week to the effort and are amazed at the outcome.

The bottom line in Bluffton is that you're a community that is already achieving success through your joint efforts. That's just your way. It's the America in Bloom way.

Checklist:

Yes	No	N/A	
X			Were the judges given a Community Profile, Evaluation Tour Itinerary, and map prior to their arrival?
X			Did the Evaluation Tour Itinerary provide for experiencing a representative cross-section of the community?
X			Were the guides knowledgeable about the community and horticultural aspects?
X			Were the judges able to modify the schedule if needed?
X			Did the judges meet with the media?
X			Did the judges meet with municipal leaders?
X			Were the judges asked to give presentations?
X			Were the judges able to meet with and talk to volunteers?
X			Was enough time allotted to complete the Evaluation Report in a quiet place?
X			Were you informed about pollinator gardens? How many? (Please use comments section to add details if necessary.)
X			Was there a wrap-up session at the end of the tour?

DEFINITIONS (determined by who owns and/or manages the property):

Municipal - city hall and other municipal properties, parks and open spaces, roads, roadsides, sidewalks, public cemeteries, public schools/universities/colleges, sports facilities, empty lots and brownfields, libraries, hospitals, public railway and bus stations

Business - commercial and industrial sectors, shopping centers, stores, office buildings, restaurants, mixed use developments, service stations, private railway and bus stations, plant nurseries, garden centers, assisted living/nursing home/graduated care facilities, apartment buildings, hotels, private hospitals, churches, not for profit/civic organizations, private cemeteries, private schools/universities/colleges, residential common areas managed by associations

Residential - single family residences, town houses, individual homes in planned/gated/manufactured home communities, residential neighborhoods or developments

Community Involvement - volunteer efforts by individuals, clubs, youth groups, church groups, civic organizations, volunteer municipal boards, and social clubs for community enhancement

DISCLAIMER:

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COMMENTS:



2017 Community Recognitions

Community: Bluffton, OH

Recognized Criterion: Floral Displays

Bluffton, Ohio is a rainbow of blooms thanks in large part to Stratton Greenhouses, the catalyst for and creators of floral fireworks like you don't often see. This town and gown community is bursting at the seams with voluptuous hanging baskets and planters boiling over with color along Main Street. Bluffton University and the Mennonite Memorial Home add to the show with flowering shrubs, a bounty of perennials and annuals simply everywhere. Talented home gardeners use their green thumbs to turn their private Eden's into irresistible temptations for the hungry eye. The floral displays in Bluffton draw carloads of visitors who cruise through the downtown retail district to look, then turn around and park in order to get out of their cars and get up close and personal with the downtown drama. Even the bees and butterflies think Bluffton's floral displays are a flower lover's fantasy.

Noteworthy Project or Initiative: Arboretum Tree Mapping by Girl Scouts

Bluffton Girl Scouts brought new energy and enthusiasm to the community's arboretum. Working with the Mayor and the Tree Commission, they identified and tagged forty-two species of trees. They researched interesting facts about each species and delivered their material to the Tree Board for compilation into an informative brochure.

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