

# Village trying to buy success – and itself

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**GREENHILLS, Ohio** – Like many first-ring Cincinnati suburbs, Greenhills is losing people, businesses and taxes.

But this village – conceived and built by the federal government in 1938 – is trying a radical and risky strategy to reverse that decline: It's buying itself.

In the last decade, the village has invested more than \$6 million to buy 135 homes, reselling them to young families. It's also applying for federal stimulus loans to buy its entire downtown shopping center in the hopes of filling it with artsy coffee shops or an upscale grocery.

Last month the village adopted a new comprehensive plan – the first in seven decades – with the aim of re-making its image. The plan's goals include beautifying the village, trying to get historic landmark status, making municipal buildings more energy-efficient and adding Wi-Fi Internet connections in community parks and facilities.

"It's not everyday that a community literally buys its

downtown – lock, stock and barrel," said municipal manager Jane Berry.

If the plan works, it could set an example for Greater Cincinnati's other aging inner suburbs, which have seen developers and retail move on to newer suburbs.

If it doesn't, the Garden City may become yet another casualty, another shell of a village with no commercial center. Greenhills has lost about 38 percent of its population in the last 40 years and has seen some of the steepest dips in employment in Hamilton County.

The Hamilton County Regional Planning Commission keeps records of the number of employees in Greater Cincinnati by zip code. Their latest numbers – which precedes the country's recent economic meltdown – show that the total number of employees in Greenhills dropped by nearly 31 percent from 1997 to 2007.

The village is not alone. The top dozen or so zip codes with rapidly dropping employment are in the city of Cincinnati or Hamilton

County's first suburbs. In contrast, the areas seeing the biggest increases are in Warren and Butler counties, like Kings Mill and Lebanon.

In light of the staggering statistics, the village is taking control of roles traditionally filled by business and property owners, pouring millions into the investments.

"It's a fairly new trend and there is some risk, but in many cases, it's a very smart move," said Chip Rodgers, senior vice president of Buxton, a Texas-based company that does marketing for municipal governments. "In the past, communities would sit back and hope things happen, but they're finding that they have to take some control of the development to expedite."

"Let's face it. It's not the best economic time for a large financial undertaking, but you've got to be somewhat of a risk-taker," Berry said. "You can either sit back and wait for something that may never happen, or take charge to sustain the future of a community."





File photo

**Greenhills** was first created as a "Greenbelt town" by the federal government in the 1930s.

## Areas with highest drop in employees

AREA (in Hamilton Co.)	ZIP CODE	1997*	2007*	PERCENT CHANGE
West End, Downtown	45203	13,120	7,575	-42.3%
California	45228	187	114	-39.0%
Roselawn, Amberley Village, Golf Manor, Bond Hill	45237	15,471	9,629	-37.8%
Madeira, Kenwood, Indian Hill	45243	4,177	2,764	-33.8%
Greenhills	45218	553	382	-30.9%

\*Number of employees that year  
Source: Hamilton County Regional Planning Commission