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Contact: Hanna Greer, Franklin County Commissioners, 614/525-5848
Tyler Lowry, Franklin County Commissioners, 614/525-6630

COMMISSIONERS AID RETAIL REBOUND

A new report out today from the Franklin County Commissioners and the Columbus Chamber of Commerce details the challenges that retail stores in Franklin County have faced in recent years, and growing signs of recovery in the retail industry. Released this morning at the Franklin County Retail Summit, an event held jointly by the Commissioners and the Chamber, the report details challenges to retailers such as a rise in online shopping, the decline of the housing market, and expanding home delivery services. Despite declines in recent years, the number of Central Ohioans employed in retail sales leveled out in 2012, and sales tax revenue from this sector has increased each of the last three years.

“Retail is the engine of our economy,” said John O’Grady, President of the Franklin County Board of Commissioners. “Franklin is the fastest growing county in the state, and has regained all of the jobs it lost during the recession, but many businesses have continued to struggle. We’re focusing today on ways to help new and current local retailers get a jump on the recovery.”

The Franklin County Retail Summit was held this morning at the newly renovated and revitalized Shops at Worthington Place. Speakers included Jim Schimmer of the County’s Economic Development and Planning department, commission president, John O’Grady, Commissioner Paula Brooks, and Michael Dalby and Jung Kim of the Columbus Chamber of Commerce. Local developer Tom Carter, who has had a hand in developing projects such as Easton and the Shops at Worthington Place, independent retailer Robert Mason Grimmert, and marketing consultant Matthew Santone also addressed the group of local businesspeople and community leaders.

“Franklin County is a relatively young community and reflects this in our retail habits,” said County Commissioner Paula Brooks. “By understanding our niche as the fastest growing county in Ohio, we can work with the private sector to help the retail economy continue its central Ohio rebound. The projects in Worthington and Upper Arlington augment with “re-vitalization” what has been great and continuing growth in retail at Easton. “

The Franklin County Retail Report notes that the Home Furnishings, Clothing, Gasoline, and Restaurant sectors of the market are doing particularly well, and that Franklin County retail sales per resident are 21% higher than the average for the 8 counties in the metropolitan area. The vacancy rate for retail properties in Franklin County has declined steadily for several years.

“We’re fortunate in Central Ohio to have a dynamic economy and resilient, financially-optimistic residents,” said County Commissioner Marilyn Brown. “The recession and the rise of online shopping have hurt local businesses, but we know that our innovative retailers have lots of ways to provide service and experience that you can’t get online. I’m very optimistic about the future of retail in Franklin County.”

The report does not include data from some recent and upcoming development that occurred after it was commissioned, such as the revitalization of Kingsdale Shopping Center, the Shops at Worthington Place, or new downtown housing and retail spaces, and notes that retail centers like those and other mixed-use spaces are likely to drive much of future retail development.

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Editors note: The full 2013 Franklin County Retail Report is available [here](#).

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