

# NEFCO FORUM

April 2021

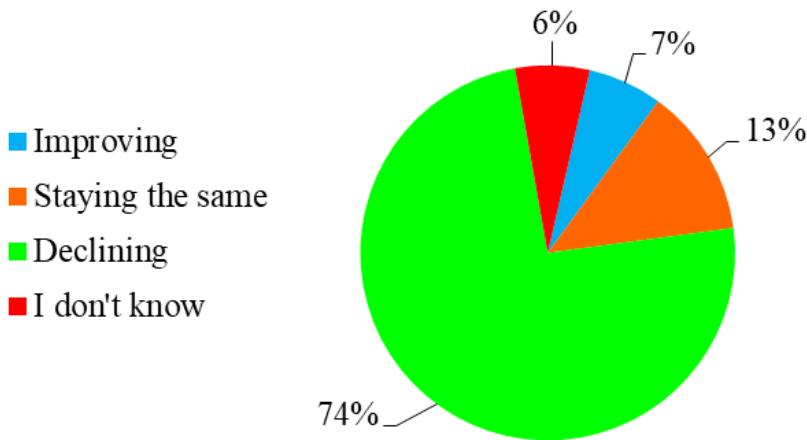
## NEFCO distributes ER&R planning and regional business surveys

NEFCO has prepared and distributed a pair of surveys as part of its economic recovery and resiliency (ER&R) planning process. The ER&R survey was distributed in February to more than 800 individuals throughout the NEFCO region, including local government officials, community and economic development professionals, nonprofit organization representatives, and the private sector. We received 109 total completed surveys. Ninety-eight of those surveys included written responses with additional information. Seventy-four percent of survey respondents indicated general conditions for small businesses have declined when compared with pre-pandemic conditions. Per the survey, the top three economic issues for the region as COVID-19 is eradicated are increasing the quality of jobs, lack of skilled workers, and access to affordable high-speed internet. The top three ways to improve the economic outlook for our region include increasing funding for workforce development, aggressively investing in infrastructure, and increasing wages. Responses from the ten-question survey will help NEFCO assess and analyze the extent of the economic damages caused by the COVID-19 pandemic regionally and establish trends. Aggregate findings will be published on the NEFCO website and included in the ER&R Plan. NEFCO thanks everyone who participated in the survey.



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### Compared with pre-pandemic conditions, general conditions for small businesses are:



Source: NEFCO Economic Recovery & Resiliency Survey, 2021

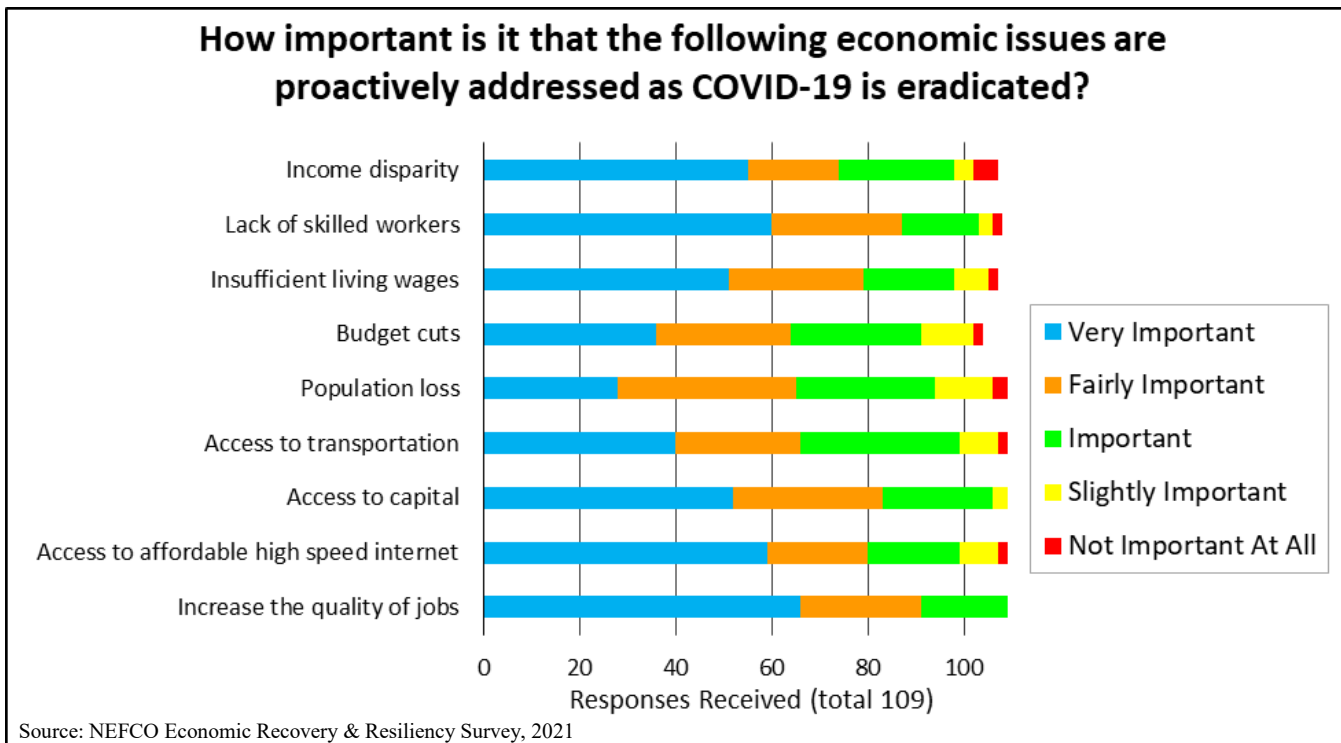
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The regional business survey was distributed to nearly 2,000 contacts in early April. The regional business survey will further assess the impacts of the pandemic, specifically on businesses throughout the NEFCO region. The survey will analyze pandemic-related impacts, issues, obstacles and opportunities. The regional business survey is available on the NEFCO [website](#) and is open through April 30, 2021. NEFCO thanks its partners that have assisted in the distribution of the survey, including the City of Akron, Portage Development Board, Stark Economic Development Board, Streetsboro Chamber of Commerce, Canton Regional Chamber, Alliance Area Development, and the City of Massillon.



## NEFCO Board-approved Clean Water Plan Chapter 3 update submitted to Ohio EPA for certification by the governor, next steps

On December 30, 2020, at the request of the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), NEFCO submitted its Board-approved Clean Water Plan (CWP) Chapter 3 update to the agency for state certification. Chapter 3 of the CWP – or 208 Plan – covers *Wastewater Management Facilities Planning*. The products of this 208 Plan update include revised Chapter 3 text and Appendices, which are individual facilities planning area maps and written wastewater treatment prescriptions for specific geographic areas in the NEFCO region, and an interactive online 208 Plan map that enables viewers to pan, zoom, and query any point on the map for 208 Plan information to see how an area of interest is presented in the Plan.

As a next step in the state certification process, Ohio EPA indicated that it would most likely

publish NEFCO’s CWP – or 208 Plan – Chapter 3 update for initial public notice this month along with the 208 Plan updates from the other Areawide planning agencies. After the public notice period, Ohio EPA said that it would submit NEFCO’s 208 Plan Chapter 3 update to the governor for his signature and certification into the state’s water quality management plan, which took about 30 days during the last state certification of the Areawides’ 208 updates. Due to COVID-19 state priorities, this process could take longer. After NEFCO’s 208 Plan Chapter 3 update has been certified by the governor, Ohio EPA will submit to the U.S. EPA for approval NEFCO’s 208 Plan updates and those from the other Areawide Planning Agencies, along with Ohio EPA’s updates for areas that are not within an Areawide’s region.

## NEFCO publishes RFP for website redesign

On March 11, NEFCO published a request for proposals (RFP) to update and redesign the organizational website. NEFCO is seeking to modernize its website to enhance the user experience, simplify content management, and provide streamlined information and customer service to the region, while meeting high standards for design quality and visual appeal. The RFP was posted on the NEFCO [website](#) and had been distributed to several web consultants. The deadline to submit proposals was April 11, 2021 at 5:00pm. NEFCO will review and rank all proposals according to a list of criteria set forth in the RFP. The budget for this project is \$15,000; NEFCO is utilizing U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) CARES Act grant monies for a portion of this cost. Staff will review the results of the proposals and recommend approval of the most responsive vendor at the May 19 General Policy Board meeting. We anticipate the updated website will go live this summer. Please contact Diane Sheridan at [diane@nefcoplanning.org](mailto:diane@nefcoplanning.org) for more details.



## EDA approves NEFCO Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy 2021 Annual Performance Report

The U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) has formally approved NEFCO's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) 2021 Annual Performance Report (APR). Preparation of the CEDS plan and the annual performance reports is required by the EDA, as part of NEFCO's Partnership Planning Grant and maintains the agency's status as an EDA-designated Economic Development District and the region's eligibility for EDA grant funding. The 2021 APR provides an update on the region's economic conditions and priorities, evaluates the NEFCO region's progress on the goals and objectives contained in the 2018 CEDS Update, and details significant events and issues that have occurred since the publication of the 2020 Annual Performance Report. To view the full report, please visit the NEFCO [website](#).



## Subcommittees being assembled to assist with NEFCO ER&R and CEDS Plan

NEFCO is assembling subcommittees to work on the development of the Economic Recovery & Resiliency (ER&R) Plan and the next Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Plan. NEFCO received a CARES Act grant from the U.S. Economic Development Administration for regional planning efforts focused on responding to the economic impacts of the pandemic by identifying short-term recovery programs and projects and developing long-term resilience strategies. Three subcommittees are being developed as part of this planning process: Workforce Development and Entrepreneurship, Regional Business, and Community Development. If you would like to virtually serve on one of these committees, please email Diane Sheridan at [diane@nefcoplanning.org](mailto:diane@nefcoplanning.org). Thank you to those who have already agreed to participate in our recovery planning process.

## American Rescue Plan includes \$3 billion for EDA

The American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), which was signed into law on March 11, includes \$3 billion in additional funding for the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA). The additional funding will be made available until September 30, 2022. Details on the administration of these monies are not fully known at this time. Per the legislation, up to two percent of these monies shall be used for Federal costs to administer the assistance, and 25 percent shall be for assistance to states and communities that have suffered economic injury as a result of job and gross domestic product losses in the travel, tourism, and outdoor recreation sectors. We will continue to keep the Board apprised of any developments as they become available. After additional details are released, NEFCO will likely schedule a webinar to provide information on the available EDA funding.

## EDA Build to Scale grant applications due April 29

The U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) has released its notice of funding opportunity for the FY2021 Build to Scale (B2S) grant program. The EDA has allocated \$38 million in two funding challenges: the Venture Challenge (\$32M) and the Capital Challenge (\$6M). B2S funds political subdivisions and support organizations like economic development organizations, venture development organizations, and universities. B2S does not fund entrepreneurs, companies, or individuals. The Venture Challenge supports entrepreneurship and accelerates company growth in communities, regions, or combinations of regions. The Venture Challenge provides funds to organizations supporting companies that are scalable by nature, challenge the status quo of markets, commercialize technology, and further job creation. The Capital Challenge increases access to risk capital and supports the formation, launch, or scale of investment funds that seek to invest their capital in scalable startups. The Capital Challenge also supports organizations with a goal to expand capital deployment within a community, region, or regional industry (i.e., angel networks or investor training programs). A 50-percent non-federal match is required. The grant application deadline is April 29. For more information on the B2S program, please contact Nick Lautzenheiser at [nick@necoplanning.org](mailto:nick@necoplanning.org) or visit <https://eda.gov/oie/buildtoscale/>.



### American Jobs Plan offers transformational impacts for the NEFCO region

NEFCO staff continues to follow developments with President Biden's proposed American Jobs Plan. Per the Biden Administration, the plan proposes approximately \$2 trillion in investment over eight years to create millions of good jobs, modernize the nation's infrastructure, address resiliency, combat climate change, and improve broadband access, water quality, and housing. The plan also proposes significant investments in workforce development, American manufacturing and domestic supply chain, and research and development. The President's proposal includes several provisions of particular interest to NEFCO's members, including investments in transportation, water, wastewater, and stormwater infrastructure and programs; monitoring and remediation of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) in drinking water; brownfield remediation; broadband expansion; and additional program investments in the Departments of Commerce, and Housing and Urban Development. NEFCO will monitor the progress of this proposal, particularly the economic and environmental components that could potentially affect counties, communities and organizations in the NEFCO region.

### NEFCO requests legislative support for Ohio Association of Regional Councils state budget amendment to create Regional Broadband Councils

NEFCO continues to participate in the Ohio Association of Regional Councils (OARC)

Broadband Working Group to develop regional strategies and help set legislative priorities addressing the digital divide and expand high-speed internet access to un- and underserved areas of Ohio. The OARC is working with a legislative consultant to help position regional councils as regional broadband councils to coordinate planning and investment of broadband infrastructure.



The OARC continues to develop a \$38.1 million biennium budget proposal for broadband expansion. The proposal includes \$4.5 million in administrative funding for Regional Broadband Councils to provide planning and technical assistance and to coordinate

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## Portage Lakes Management Plan aims to balance water quality and recreational use

The Portage Lakes are a regional recreational and economic resource. The ten-mile radius of the lakes includes Akron, Canton, Barberton, and the surrounding communities. Approximately 300,000 people visit the State Park each year, many of whom come with boats. The lakes are at the center of a thriving community of businesses and thousands of residents. People visit the lakes for their natural beauty, fishing, boating, and swimming. They enjoy frequenting area restaurants and support other local businesses.

The Portage Lakes are more than a park, or a neighborhood feature. They are a complex natural system that is intensely used, and also manipulated for flood control and flow. Sustaining multi-use lakes is a challenge. It requires considering – and managing – the impacts of the natural and human systems on each other, within the lakes and watershed. For the past five years, with funding from the Ohio EPA and NEFCO’s dues-paying members, NEFCO has been



*\* How can the uses of the lakes by residents, visitors, and businesses be accommodated while protecting the health and water quality of the lakes that are so essential to the uses?*

developing a management plan that characterizes the lakes communities, natural system, areas of concern, and existing and potential management measures. The Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), with its lake scientists, representatives of the communities, the Portage Lakes Advisory Council (PLAC), and local and state agencies, has provided valuable context and expertise.

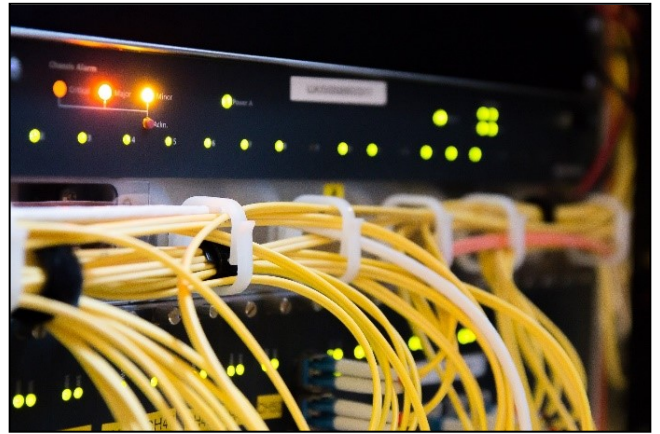
In the extensive shallow areas of the lakes, the aquatic plants are a prominent feature. They provide important benefits for habitat and water quality but can be a nuisance for boaters and property owners. The dense growth of aquatic plants results from over-abundant phosphorus in the lakes. This occurs on many Ohio lakes and is a result of decades of development and use in the 67 square mile watershed – phosphorus enters from the watershed but recycles for years within the lakes. There are many efforts already underway by lakers, agencies, communities, and the PLAC. The Portage Lakes TAC members have expressed interest in continuing as a lakes partnership. With coordination, adequate resources, and support, uses and lake health can be balanced, sustaining the lakes over the long term.

The aquatic plants in the Portage Lakes are essential for the continued health and use of the lakes: the plants compete with the organisms that cause toxic harmful algal blooms (HABs), which can shut down activity on a lake. Experience on other lakes has shown that it is extremely costly and difficult to return HABs-infested lakes to a healthy state, with rooted aquatic plants. Meanwhile, HABs-infested lakes are not suitable for contact recreation, can harm animals, and severely impact the surrounding communities.

In the next few weeks, the TAC will be reviewing the draft management plan. NEFCO will continue developing the groundwork for future efforts to monitor the lakes and aquatic plants and increase understanding of the lakes and community priorities. For more information, please contact Maia Peck at [mpeck@nefcoplanning.org](mailto:mpeck@nefcoplanning.org).

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with local governments in their respective regions to submit the most regionally important projects; \$30 million to local governments and nonprofit organizations for the broadband projects prioritized and generated through the Regional Broadband Councils; and \$3.6 million to create a subsidy program supporting 15,000 low-income households. The funding could leverage up to \$200 million in federal funding annually for broadband infrastructure across Ohio. Grants would help entice broadband carriers to invest in infrastructure in areas strategically important to local governments, rather than in areas most profitable to carriers.



The OARC effort is concurrent with Ohio HB2 and SB8, both of which have passed their respective chambers and are currently being considered by the opposite chamber. HB2 and SB8 are proposing \$20 million to establish an Ohio Residential Broadband Expansion grant program, to be administered by the Ohio Development Services Agency (DSA). Per HB2 and SB8, the DSA would establish a Broadband Expansion Program Authority to review and award grants to broadband providers for broadband expansion projects. Broadband providers could apply for grants to help finance the last mile build-out of “tier one” (10-25 Mbps download/1-3 Mbps upload) and “tier two” (≥25 Mbps download/≥3 Mbps upload) residential broadband service. Governor DeWine’s biennial budget proposal includes \$250 million for broadband expansion.

NEFCO has sent letters to its 11 state representatives and four state senators requesting support for OARC’s budget amendment to designate and fund the 20 Ohio-based members (including NEFCO) of OARC as “Regional Broadband Councils” that would work with BroadbandOhio to coordinate broadband deployment, communicate local areas of need to the state, and provide technical support to local entities in their areas at the regional level.

## NEFCO FORUM

The *NEFCO Forum* is published by the Northeast Ohio Four County Regional Planning and Development Organization  
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### MISSION STATEMENT

*To improve the region's quality of life, through collaborative planning efforts with NEFCO's area governments, in order to ensure environmental quality, orderly growth, and economic and community development*