



Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy 2022 Annual Performance Report

RESOLUTION NUMBER FY2022-002

RESOLUTION OF THE NORTHEAST OHIO FOUR COUNTY REGIONAL PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATION (NEFCO) GENERAL POLICY BOARD ADOPTING AND AUTHORIZING THE SUBMISSION OF THE *COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY (CEDS) 2022 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT* TO THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

WHEREAS, the NEFCO region is undergoing significant changes in the structure of its economy; and

WHEREAS, the U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration (EDA), has designated the NEFCO region as an Economic Development District (EDD) based on the incidence of unemployment rates and the existence of the CEDS; and

WHEREAS, the NEFCO General Policy Board in conjunction with its 126 local units of government has formulated a regional economic development strategy and incident local place strategies entitled the *CEDS 2022 Annual Performance Report*; and

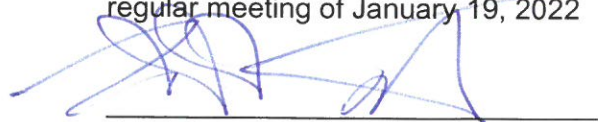
WHEREAS, the EDA requires the submittal of the *CEDS 2022 Annual Performance Report* by January 31, 2022 to maintain Economic Development District designation and eligibility for EDA funding; and

WHEREAS, communities in the Counties of Portage, Stark, Summit, and Wayne have participated in the formulation of the CEDS; and

WHEREAS, the Regional CEDS Committee has reviewed and commented on the *CEDS 2022 Annual Performance Report*;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the NEFCO General Policy Board adopts the *Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) 2022 Annual Performance Report*, its goals, strategies, and action items, and authorizes the submission of the report to the Economic Development Administration.

Certified as action taken by the
NEFCO General Policy Board at its
regular meeting of January 19, 2022



Todd Peetz, Secretary
NEFCO General Policy Board

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Contents	Page
Introduction	3
Adjustments to NEFCO's Strategy	4
A Regional Approach	9
Report on Economic Development Activities	14
Evaluation of Progress on Action Plan and Goals	17
Schedule of Goals for 2021 and Program of Activities	25
2021 Timeline for Goals and Action Items	27
Regional Economic Development News	29

Figures

Figure 1: 24-Month Unemployment Rates for NEFCO Counties	4
Figure 2: 24-Month Unemployment Rates for NEFCO Member Cities	5
Figure 3: Economic Development Administration Investments in NEFCO Region	13

Tables

Table 1: Economic Distress in the NEFCO Region	6
Table 2: 2021 Regional CEDS Committee	7
Table 3: 2021 NEFCO General Policy Board	8

NEFCO Economic Development Staff

Joseph Hadley, Jr., Executive Director
Nick Lautzenheiser, Economic Development Planner
Diane Sheridan, Economic Recovery and Resiliency Coordinator

Acknowledgements

NEFCO staff thanks the NEFCO General Policy Board and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Committee for their assistance in the completion of this report.

This report was prepared in part with Federal funds under award number ED19CHI3020021 from the U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration, and with funds provided by NEFCO's dues-paying members. The statements, findings, conclusions, and recommendations are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the view of the EDA or the U.S. Department of Commerce.

INTRODUCTION

The Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) is evaluated annually by the Northeast Ohio Four County Regional Planning and Development Organization (NEFCO). Progress on the CEDS is reported annually in the annual performance report. The 2022 CEDS Annual Performance Report includes recent trends observed between the issuance of the 2021 CEDS Annual Performance Report and the present time. The 2018 CEDS Plan can be found at NEFCO's website, www.nefcoplanning.org. Preparation of the CEDS and the Annual Performance Report maintains eligibility of the NEFCO region's communities to receive grants from the U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration (EDA).

The CEDS and the annual performance reports describe the region's economic conditions, as well as the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. In 2022, NEFCO continues to analyze the economic health of the region by addressing the following questions: (1) Where are we going? (2) Where do we want to be? and, (3) How do we get there?

The 2022 Annual Performance Report spans the period between February 2021 and January 2022. It describes changing economic conditions in the region, including Portage, Stark, Summit, and Wayne Counties. The report details significant events and issues that have occurred over the past year, which have shaped NEFCO's regional economic development planning work plan.

2021 continued to be dominated by the coronavirus pandemic and its impact around the world. COVID-19 has created unprecedented public health and economic impacts. The past year was marked by the region's response to the pandemic. It is too premature to fully understand the economic impacts of the pandemic, especially as variants of COVID-19 continue to rage throughout the world. Despite a few closures, the region's core economic industries have weathered the pandemic. The health care, information technology, and manufacturing sectors have remained relatively stable, and in many cases, expanded. There was considerable job creation and investment throughout the region. Food suppliers and those industries that were able to adapt and produce personal protective equipment have performed well during this period. 2021 also witnessed significant recoveries around the region. The Hall of Fame Resort and Entertainment Co. continues to be a major focus, not only for the City of Canton, but for the entire NEFCO region. The company is moving forward on the second phase of a nearly \$1 billion Hall of Fame Village development. The other principal cities of Akron, Kent, and Wooster continue to invest in the revitalization of their respective downtowns, while collaborating with their local universities.

The major challenges going into 2022 will be workforce development and training, supply chain complications, and housing issues. The recovery from the pandemic, particularly for small businesses throughout the region, will continue to affect the regional economy. Downtown retailers and small businesses have been hardest hit. The counties and cities across the region have shown an extraordinary collaborative spirit, which has been instrumental in limiting the economic loss. Local governments have utilized portions of their respective Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act revenues to provide recovery grants to small businesses and nonprofit organizations around the region, which has helped provide much-needed relief. The counties and cities are also planning to utilize American Rescue Plan Act monies to provide economic assistance and accelerate recovery. Other challenges include racial and gender equity and inclusion, access to broadband, and developing economic resilience. The region must continue to address these issues to be prosperous, resilient, and economically competitive.

There are numerous opportunities for economic growth and prosperity in the region. The 27 Opportunity Zones offer attractive incentives for development and investment. The region has numerous universities and medical facilities, which continue to anchor economic growth. Regional community and economic

development partnerships such as the Elevate Greater Akron and Strengthening Stark illustrate the region's strong cooperative spirit and holistic approach to planning. Officials in Stark County continue to promote the expansion of U.S. Route 30, which will place the region at an economic advantage for businesses supporting the petrochemical industry.

The future economic strength and resiliency of the region will be dependent on collaboration, public-private partnerships, equity and inclusion, workforce development, and quality of life enhancements. The region is poised to continue in a positive trajectory as it progresses into 2022.

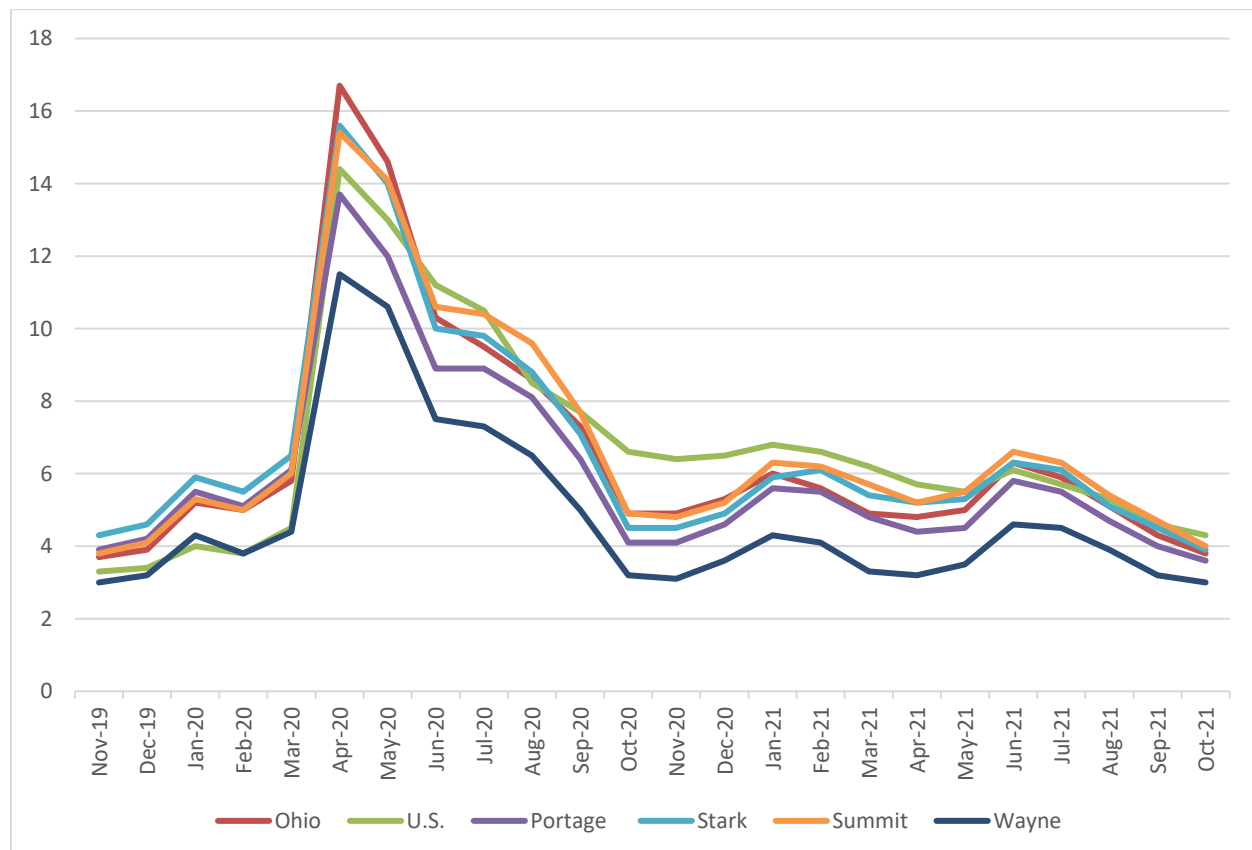
ADJUSTMENTS TO NEFCO'S STRATEGY

Report on Changing Economic Conditions and Adjustments

24-month Unemployment and Per Capita Income in the NEFCO Region

The unemployment pattern over the past two years is dominated by the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic (see Figure 1). The massive spike in unemployment occurred between March and April 2020, when the region's unemployment rate grew by more than 10 points from 5.3% to 15.5%. Stay-at-home mandates shuttered businesses and forced many to lay off workers. The region's unemployment rates match the trend experienced by the state of Ohio and the U.S. As the economy reopened, the unemployment has continued to drop to near pre-pandemic levels.

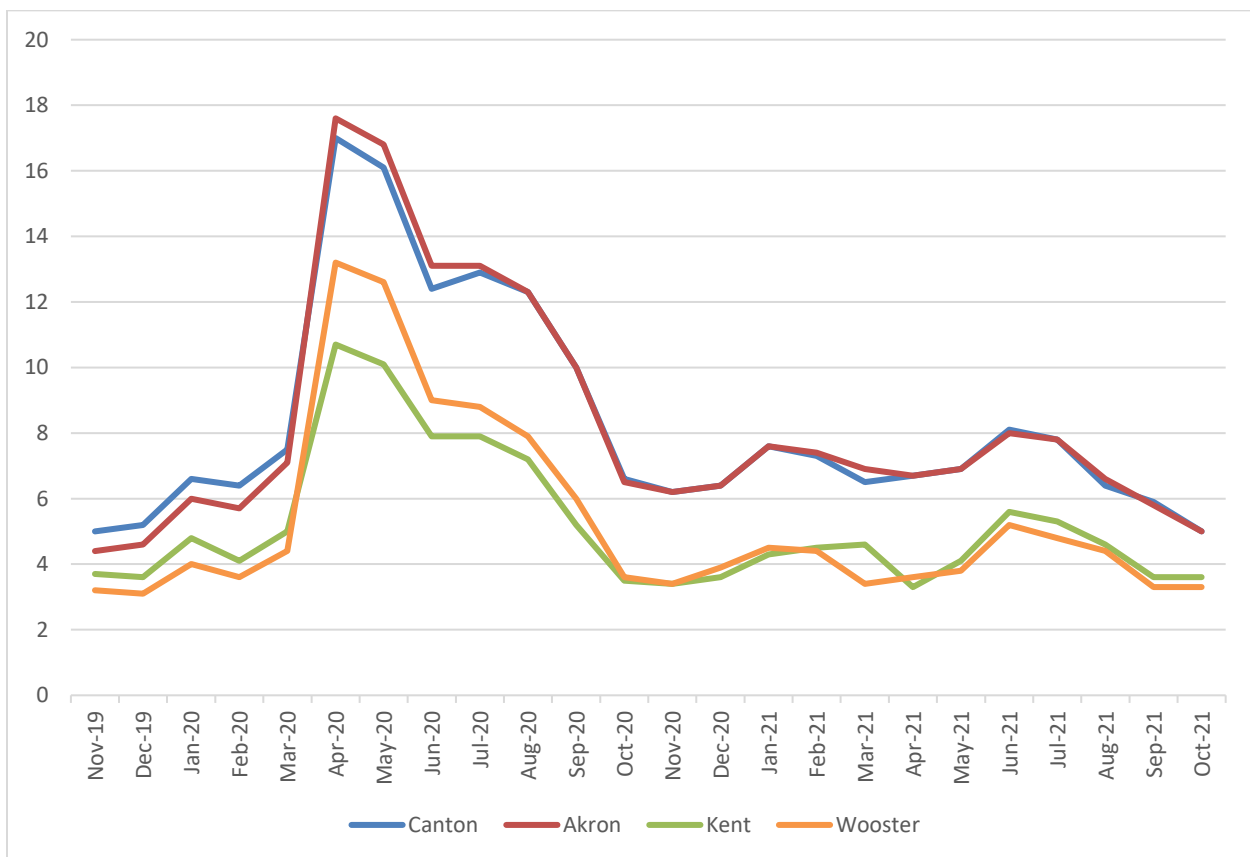
Figure 1: 24-Month Unemployment Rates for NEFCO Counties



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, January 2021

Figure 2 illustrates the unemployment rates over the last 24 months by principal city in the NEFCO region. The patterns are consistent with Figure 1; however, this chart reveals how the pandemic and the associated recovery has affected the largest city in each of the NEFCO counties (member cities) differently. The most noticeable pattern is how Wooster and Kent were not as impacted as Akron and Canton. Although the general month-to-month trends are similar, the unemployment rates are much different. The cities’ monthly unemployment rate mirrors that of their respective counties, as seen in Figure 1. Wayne County and Portage County were not as severely impacted as Stark and Summit County. It should be noted, however, that the unemployment rates for Wooster, Wayne County, Kent, and Portage County were already lower than Canton, Stark County, Akron, and Summit County pre-pandemic. This pattern may be reflected by the employment sectors of each county. For instance, Wayne has the lowest percentage of retail and service-related jobs, which were impacted most severely by the pandemic. All four counties have shown progressive recovery.

Figure 2: 24-Month Unemployment Rates for NEFCO Member Cities



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, January 2021

Table 1 displays calculations of economic distress for counties and select cities and villages in the NEFCO region. Local governments may qualify for EDA assistance based on the economic distress of a census tract or a community’s per capita income. Following the publication of EDA’s notice of funding opportunity for its Public Works/Economic Adjustment Assistance program including the American Rescue Plan Act funding programs, all areas of the country, regardless of unemployment rate or per capita income level became eligible for EDA funding. The pandemic constituted a “special need,” whereby all areas of the country were impacted. It is not known how long this special need will continue; as of the publication of this document, the criterion was still in effect. The data shown in Table 1 were obtained

from the Bureau of Labor Statistics data available in January 2020 and the American Community Survey's estimates of per capita income for a single point in time between 2015 and 2019.

City names in bold denote economically distressed communities per EDA metrics. A community can qualify as economically distressed either by its per capita income or unemployment rate. A community's per capita income must be less than 80% of the U.S. per capita income (\$27,282) or have a 24-month unemployment rate 1% or greater than the national average (7.6%). Cells without data indicate that statistics are not provided at this geographic level by the U.S. Census Bureau. In Portage County, the villages of Hiram and Windham and the cities of Kent and Ravenna have per capita income levels less than 80% of the national average. In Stark County, the cities of Alliance, Canton, and Massillon have per capita income levels less than 80% of the U.S.; Canton and Massillon have 24-month unemployment rates of 7.5% and 6.7%, respectively. In Summit County, the cities of Akron and Barberton and the village of Mogadore have per capita income levels less than 80% of the U.S.; Akron and Barberton have 24-month unemployment rates of 7.3% and 7.0%, respectively. In Wayne County, the City of Rittman has a per capita income level 76.0% of the national average.

Table 1: Economic Distress in the NEFCO Region

Unit of Government	24-month Unemployment % (BLS)*	ACS PCMI 5-yr. est. (2015-2019)	Percentage of U.S. PCMI
<i>Portage County</i>	6.0	\$30,054	88.1%
Village of Hiram	N/A	\$16,541	48.5%
City of Kent	5.2	\$21,485	63.0%
City of Ravenna	N/A	\$23,861	70.0%
Village of Windham	N/A	\$18,527	54.3%
<i>Stark County</i>	6.7	\$29,495	86.5%
City of Alliance	N/A	\$21,094	61.9%
City of Canton	8.3	\$19,967	58.5%
City of Massillon	7.2	\$24,721	72.5%
<i>Summit County</i>	6.8	\$33,606	98.5%
City of Akron	8.3	\$24,688	72.4%
City of Barberton	7.6	\$22,448	65.8%
Village of Mogadore	N/A	\$26,838	78.7%
<i>Wayne County</i>	4.8	\$27,884	81.8%
City of Rittman	N/A	\$21,914	76.0%
NEFCO region	6.4	\$31,281	91.7%
Ohio	6.6	\$31,552	92.5%
United States	6.7	\$34,103	-

Sources: American Community Survey; Bureau of Labor Statistics, December 2020

N/A – not available; statistics not provided at this geographic level

*BLS unemployment rates not seasonally adjusted

Regional CEDS Committee

The Regional CEDS Committee includes representatives from the NEFCO's four counties and largest city in each of the counties, private sector representatives from the various county economic development

boards, a university representative, and a representative from a nonprofit entrepreneurial company (see Table 2). The Regional CEDS Committee is representative of the region's principal economic interests and drives the CEDS planning process.

The Regional CEDS Committee is advisory to the NEFCO General Policy Board. The Regional CEDS Committee and General Policy Board participate in the agency's regional economic development planning program, directing the planning strategy, providing economic development updates, and assessing the progress of the region in implementing the CEDS. The Regional CEDS Committee and General Policy Board also drive the development of the ER&R Plan and ER&R planning process, which will be completed in 2022.

Table 2: 2022 Regional CEDS Committee

Name	Representing	Title	EDA Category
Betty Aylsworth	Ohio Agricultural Research & Development Center	Program Coordinator	Higher Education
Gregg Cramer	Greater Akron Chamber	Vice President, Economic Development	Private Sector
Brad Ehrhart	Portage Development Board	President	Private Sector
Patricia Grospron	JumpStart, Inc.	Senior Partner, Network Management	Private Sector
Ray Hexamer	Stark Economic Development Board	President	Private Sector
Jonathan Millea	City of Wooster	Development Coordinator	Public Sector
Robert Nau	Stark County Regional Planning Commission	Executive Director	Public Sector
Maribeth Burns	Wayne Economic Development Council	President	Private Sector
Dennis Tubbs	Summit County Department of Community and Economic Development	Assistant Director	Public Sector
Scott Wagner	Barberton Community Development Corp.	Executive Director	Private Sector
Pete Wearstler	Wayne County Planning Department	Director	Public Sector
Catey Breck	City of Akron	Director, Department of Integrated Development	Public Sector
Tom Wilke	City of Kent	Economic Development Director	Public Sector
Todd Peetz	Portage County Regional Planning Commission	Director	Public Sector
Vacant	City of Canton		Public Sector

This roster of the 2022 Regional CEDS Committee represents the principal economic interests of the NEFCO region. Note: some updates or changes to this list may occur.

Table 3 shows the composition and affiliations of NEFCO's General Policy Board for 2022. NEFCO's governing board is the decision-making body for the organization. The General Policy Board is broadly representative of the principal environmental and economic interests of the region. There are 40 members

from the counties of Portage, Stark, Summit, and Wayne and the cities of Akron, Canton, Kent, and Wooster. Membership composition is determined by the organization's bylaws. The cities of Canton, Kent, and Wooster each have one member; the City of Akron has seven; Wayne County has three members; Portage County has six; Summit County has nine members; and Stark County has twelve members.

Table 3: 2022 NEFCO General Policy Board

Name	Affiliation	Type
Portage County*		
Allen Fathi	Director, Portage County Water Resources	Public Official
Joe Diorio	Portage County Health Commissioner	Public Official
Tony Badalamenti	Portage County Commissioner	Public Official
Todd Peetz	Director, Portage County Regional Planning Commission	Public Official
Amos Sarfo*	Storm Water Program Supervisor, Portage County Combined General Health District	Public Official
John Zizka	Citizen	Private Sector
City of Kent		
Kathleen Petsko	City of Kent Grants and Neighborhood Programs Coordinator	Public Official
Stark County		
Keith Bennett	Stark County Engineer	Public Official
David Maley	City of Massillon Economic Development Director	Public Official
Keri Burick	President, North Canton Area Chamber of Commerce	Private Sector
Joe Mazzola	City of Alliance Planning Director	Public Official
Richard Regula	Stark County Commissioner	Public Official
Jim Troike	Stark County Sanitary Engineer	Public Official
Bob Nau	Director, Stark County Regional Planning Commission	Public Official
Athena Ebersole	Project Manager for Site Strategy, Stark Economic Development Board	Private Sector
Vacant (4)		
City of Canton		
Dan Moeglin	City of Canton Engineer	Public Official
Summit County		
Alan Brubaker	Summit County Engineer	Public Official
James Balogh	Twinsburg Township Trustee	Public Official
William Judge	City of Barberton Mayor	Public Official
David Kohlmeier	CTI Engineering	Private Sector
Olivia Helander	Summit County Department of Community & Economic Dev.	Public Official
Ilene Shapiro	Summit County Executive	Public Official
Dianne Sumego	dms water solutions, llc.	Private Sector
Michael Vinay	Summit County Sanitary Sewer Services Director	Public Official
Elizabeth Walters	Summit County Council	Public Official
City of Akron*		
Sharon Connor	City of Akron Council member	Public Official
Daniel Horrigan	City of Akron Mayor	Public Official
Chris Ludle	City of Akron Deputy Director Public Service	Public Official
Brad McKittrick	City of Akron Council member	Public Official
Shammas Malik	City of Akron Council member	Public Official
Thomas Tatum	City of Akron Housing & Community Services Manager	Public Official

Name	Affiliation	Type
Helen Tomic	City of Akron Comprehensive Planning Manager	Public Official
Wayne County		
Becky Foster	Wayne County Commissioner	Public Official
Pete Wearstler	Wayne County Planning Director	Public Official
Steve Wheeler	City of Orrville Safety/Service Director	Public Official
City of Wooster		
Bob Breneman	City of Wooster Mayor	Public Official
Ohio EPA (Ex Officio)		
Kurt Princic	Ohio EPA – Northeast District Office Chief	Public Official

*Appointment pending

A REGIONAL APPROACH

As the four-county region's Economic Development District, Areawide Planning Agency (water quality planning organization), and regional council of governments, NEFCO strives to address issues that cross county and watershed boundary lines. Member communities value the regional approach and understand the region is stronger when the counties and cities work together. NEFCO's economic development program is guided by the following questions: Where are we going? Where do we want to be? And, how do we get there?



Pro Football Hall of Fame, Canton

Where are we going?

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the regional economy was relatively stable. The pandemic created unprecedented economic hardship throughout the country and the NEFCO region. 2021 was marked by rebound and recovery. The federal government responded with numerous recovery programs and stimulus packages. Stimulus checks to individuals, increased unemployment benefits, grant and forgiveness programs for businesses, and direct assistance to state and local governments assisted in this recovery. As

businesses reopened, sales tax revenues rebounded. Events and celebrations resumed, though with modifications to improve health and safety.

The Pro Football Hall of Fame festival, enshrinement, and game returned to Stark County and the City of Canton in 2021. The Centennial Celebration had an enormous positive impact on the region.



Centennial Plaza, Canton

Despite the pandemic, community leaders are continuing to work to expand the economic base and improve the region's resiliency. The region's core industries – manufacturing, health care, and information technology – continue to drive the economy and have buoyed the region during the pandemic. Many businesses around the region have grown and expanded during the pandemic. The southeastern part of the region continues to focus on the shale energy industry. With pipeline infrastructure and large ethane cracker plants under construction or proposed along the Ohio River Valley, the region is poised to support petrochemical industries such as plastics manufacturing. The Regional Transportation Improvement Project continues to work to extend the U.S. Route 30 expressway eastward to connect the NEFCO region with these facilities. The northern parts of Summit and Portage Counties continue to be attractive to logistics and transportation companies, given their superior highway accessibility. The region's principal cities – Akron and Canton – are making substantial investments in their downtowns. Akron and Canton have also invested in targeted city planning efforts. Akron's reorganized Office of Integrated Development (OID) combines the planning and economic development divisions, streamlining its development processes.¹ Canton continues to focus on augmenting its six major

¹ City of Akron, Office of Integrated Development, Five-Year Strategic Framework 2019-2024, https://www.akronohio.gov/cms/resource_library/files/be43396d8e913bd0/ocd_akron_book_111119_full_lowres_pages.pdf

community asset regions identified in the city’s Comprehensive Plan, including the Pro Football Hall of Fame, Mercy Medical Center, Aultman Hospital, Downtown, Shorb neighborhood, and Timken.² The completion of Canton’s downtown centerpiece, Centennial Plaza, highlights the city’s commitment to revitalizing its downtown, while connecting the core to the Pro Football Hall of Fame Village development. Major new projects are continuing around Aultman Hospital, including the Timken Family Cancer Center. Kent and Wooster continue to revitalize their downtowns to attract investment, while collaborating with their respective universities.



Water Street, Kent

Where do we want to be?

The NEFCO region strives to be globally competitive and economically resilient. The region envisions vibrant downtowns; a range of housing options at all levels of affordability and life stage; inclusive and equitable opportunities for employment, education, broadband, and transportation; a robust and skilled workforce; excellent quality of life assets, including superior health care facilities, good schools and universities, extensive parks and trails, and numerous cultural and entertainment opportunities; and targeted investment in infrastructure to create living-wage jobs.

How do we get there?

The NEFCO region is poised to effectively address the challenges and capitalize on its numerous strengths and opportunities. The key to future prosperity for the region – especially in the short-term – will be its ability to assess the impacts of the pandemic and effectively plan and develop solutions to foster recovery. The post-COVID economy will demand a skilled workforce, with a particular focus on technology and innovation. The region must work together to boost educational attainment, and

² City of Canton Comprehensive Plan, <http://cantonohio.gov/pdf/CantonFinal%20Draft-03.07.16.pdf>

employers must effectively educate and train employees to respond to new innovations and challenges. Local leaders should also work with organizations and other stakeholders to address the need for a range of housing options – particularly affordable housing – to ensure there is enough stock to support the workforce and retain young talent. The region is fortunate to have strong leadership not only in its local governments, but also in its private sector economic development organizations and nonprofit organizations who are working to create a strong economic ecosystem. In order to maintain the positive momentum and meet the goals of the CEDS, the region must continue the following:

- Continue regional collaborative efforts to foster economic development
- Continue investing in strategic economic development and planning initiatives
- Work on developing a regional economic recovery and resiliency plan that assesses impacts, identifies short-term recovery projects, and formulates long-term resilience strategies
- Focus on regional strengths and target industries
- Identify and address regional economic development deficiencies
- Improve workforce development and training programs
- Facilitate collaboration between regional employers and universities and vocational schools to develop curricula and career programs to meet industry demand
- Remove barriers for underserved populations
- Address racial and gender inequality and improve access to jobs, education, transportation, and childcare
- Improve transportation accessibility for lower income and carless households to employment centers
- Continue to assess and remediate brownfields and other environmentally-challenges sites to create economic reuse
- Address housing issues, particularly affordable housing and range of housing options
- Invest in parks, trails, and other recreational amenities to improve regional quality of life

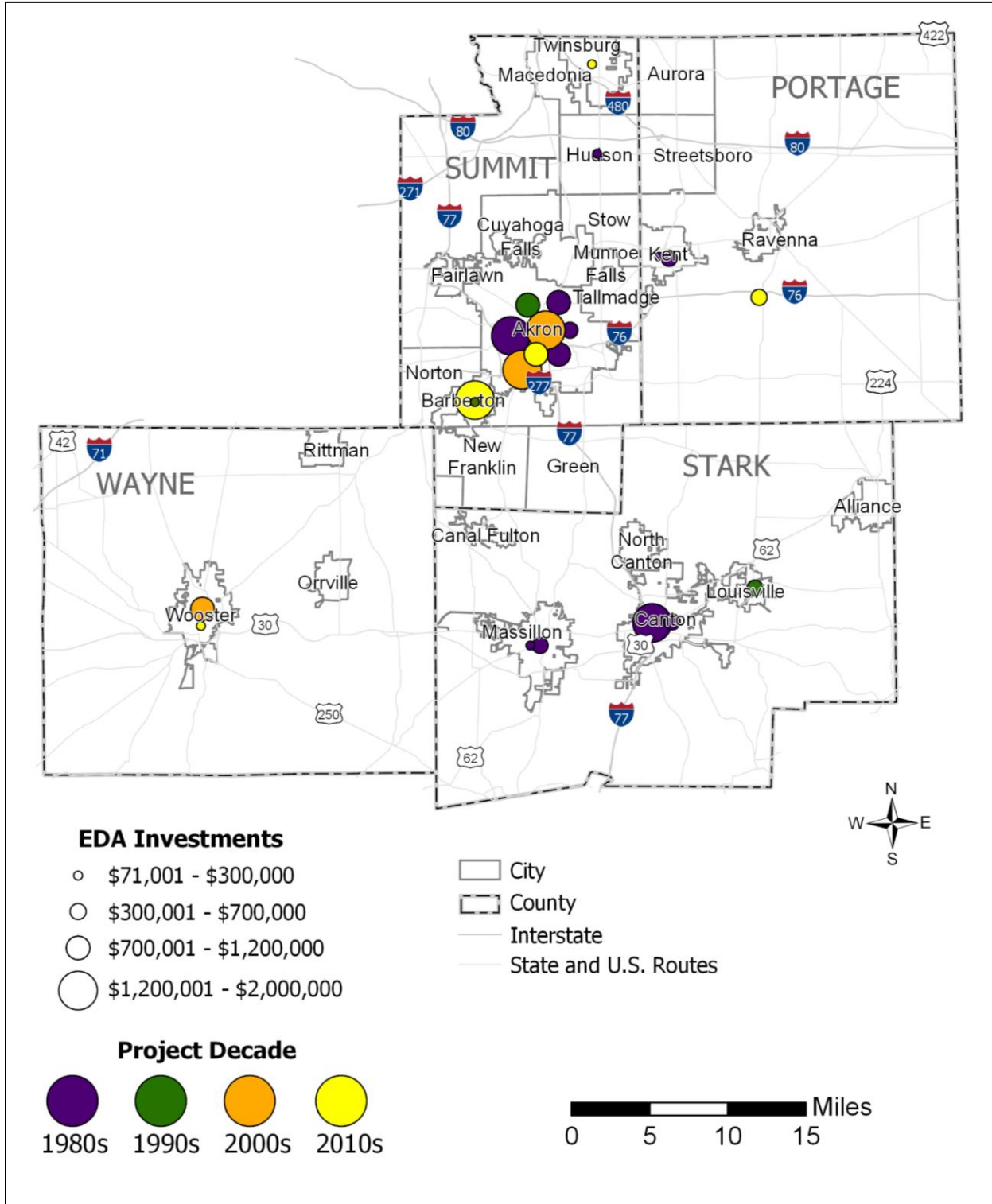
Capacity of Economic Development District to support the CEDS

NEFCO's Economic Development Planner manages the agency's economic development planning program and CEDS planning process. Through the EDA CARES Act Supplemental Assistance grant, NEFCO hired a full-time ER&R Coordinator in October 2020 to coordinate the ER&R planning process. In addition, two other full-time staff members assist with the economic development program, including the NEFCO Executive Director and Administrative Assistant. The economic development program focuses on the CEDS planning process, working collaboratively with communities in the four-county region, and providing technical assistance and authoritative recommendations to communities and organizations around the region with projects, funding opportunities, and grant applications, particularly EDA grant projects. The map on page 13 illustrates the distribution of EDA grant monies invested in the NEFCO region since 1980 (see Figure 4).

The ER&R planning process is focused on helping the region respond to the economic impacts of the pandemic. The proposed ER&R Plan will assess impacts, and through the collaboration with the ER&R subcommittees, the Regional CEDS Committee, the NEFCO General Policy Board, and other stakeholders, formulate an action plan identifying short-term recovery projects and develop long-term resilience strategies.

The NEFCO General Policy Board has committed matching funds to support the economic development program for the current fiscal year through June 2022. The Board has already passed a resolution committing the organization to providing the necessary matching funds as required under the three-year Partnership Planning Grant.

Figure 3: Economic Development Administration Investments in NEFCO Region



Sources: Portage County GIS; Stark County GIS; Summit County GIS; Wayne County GIS; Ohio Department of Transportation; Ohio Department of Natural Resources GIS

REPORT ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES

The following activities were undertaken in 2021 to support and implement NEFCO's 2018 CEDS Update:

Economic Resilience

The NEFCO CEDS 2018 Update addresses economic and environmental resilience; however, the region could never have anticipated a crisis with the magnitude of the COVID-19 pandemic. The impact of the pandemic on the nation and the NEFCO region has been severe. NEFCO and other EDA-designated Economic Development Districts across the country were fortunate to receive supplemental assistance from the EDA to lead regional economic recovery planning efforts through CARES Act funding. NEFCO is currently working with communities and organizations around the region on the development of an Economic Recovery and Resiliency (ER&R) Plan, which will be incorporated into the NEFCO CEDS Plan. The ER&R Plan will include an assessment of the economic impacts of the pandemic, a series of surveys, short-term recovery projects and programs, and long-term resilience strategies. Three ER&R Subcommittees (Community Development, Workforce Development and Entrepreneurship, and Regional Business) are taking deep dives into economic development issues and will drive the development of the ER&R Plan.



Farmers Market, Wooster

NEFCO's Environmental Resources Technical Advisory Committee holds ongoing discussions on various environmental issues. NEFCO is also a member of Summit County's District 8 Technical Advisory Committee, which reviews and recommends projects for funding by the Ohio Public Works Commission. Climate change and its impact on existing and planned infrastructure has been a discussion among the county's city engineers.

Performance Evaluation by EDA

On August 13, 2021, NEFCO participated in the EDA-administered Economic Development District (EDD) peer review evaluation. NEFCO was paired with the Western Michigan Regional Planning Commission, an eight-county EDD including the City of Grand Rapids. Performance evaluations, including the review of management standards, financial accountability and program performance are required at least every three years per the EDA Partnership Planning Grant. The peer review process provides NEFCO an opportunity to share best practices with another EDD. Two members of the NEFCO General Policy Board, including the Board Secretary, participated in the peer review along with NEFCO staff.

NEFCO Region Economic Development Conditions

Staff reviews five area newspapers daily to stay current with economic development news and changes in the region. Significant closures (generally job losses of 100 or greater) are reported to the Economic Development Representative, and, when appropriate, meetings are requested to discuss projects that will assist a community with efforts to address economic challenges. Significant positive economic development stories are also noted.



Canal Park Stadium, Akron

Involvement on Regional Committees

During 2022, NEFCO's Executive Director will continue to serve as a member of the Akron Metropolitan Area Transportation Study (AMATS) Technical Advisory Committee (TAC). NEFCO's Economic Development Planner serves on the AMATS Connecting Communities Committee, which evaluates bicycle, pedestrian, and transit facility projects and plans. Additionally, the Executive Director serves as a TAC member of Summit County's District 8 Public Works Integrating Committee, which recommends public infrastructure projects for funding through the Ohio Public Works Commission.

In 2010, NEFCO became part of a 12-county study to examine the effects of various future land use development patterns. A vision framework and list of recommendations were adopted in 2014 by the Northeast Ohio Sustainable Communities Consortium Board of Directors. Since that time, a Launch

Board was formed and convenes quarterly meetings to advance the plan, Vibrant NEO 2040.³ NEFCO's Executive Director serves as the 2nd Vice Chair. 2021 marked the fourth year of the Vibrant NEO Champions awards. These awards were given to organizations and individuals demonstrating exceptional leadership in the advancement of the Vibrant NEO Vision. NEFCO served on the award selection committee.

Updates and Communication

Each month, NEFCO staff communicates opportunities and provides updates to its members on issues that affect the region. NEFCO's monthly General Policy Board meetings provide a forum for this communication. Time-sensitive information on new initiatives and other information are e-mailed to economic development professionals. NEFCO utilizes its website to communicate public events, important meetings, and dates of the public General Policy Board, Environmental Resources Technical Advisory Committee and Regional CEDS Committee meetings. NEFCO's General Policy Board meetings also occasionally feature speakers on topics selected by staff and/or requested by Board members. The NEFCO *Forum* newsletter provides additional information and key updates on regional environmental and economic development planning activities. NEFCO issued newsletters in April, August, and December 2021.

Planning Assistance

NEFCO staff assisted area officials, community leaders, and professionals with various projects of importance to local communities. With the abundance of available EDA grant funding through the CARES Act and American Rescue Plan Act programs, there was unprecedented interest in grant projects from around the NEFCO region. In 2021, NEFCO met with or assisted the following communities and organizations with projects: the communities of Akron, Barberton, Canton, County of Summit, Green, Hudson, Orrville, Peninsula, Ravenna, Rootstown Township, Sugar Bush Knolls, and Wooster; regional community and economic development organizations, including the Bounce Innovation Hub, Regional Transportation Improvement Program US-30, Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad, Ohio and Erie Canalway Coalition, Greater Akron Chamber, Stark Economic Development Board, Strengthening Stark; Barberton Community Foundation; Neighborhood Development Services, and the United Way of Greater Stark County. NEFCO staff provides technical assistance and authoritative recommendations to communities and organizations throughout the region on prospective projects and grant applications, particularly EDA grant applications.

Implementation Assistance

NEFCO has provided technical assistance, authoritative recommendations on projects and EDA grant applications, and letters of support to communities and organizations around the region for projects that further the goals and objectives of the NEFCO CEDS Plan. NEFCO staff worked closely with these EDA grant applicants to ensure project applications are as competitive as possible. Staff also acts as liaison between prospective applicants and the EDA. In 2021, the NEFCO General Policy Board provided letters of support to the Center for Economic Development at Cleveland State University, the City of Akron, the City of Green, and the Manufacturing and Growth Network for EDA grant project applications.

Staff continues to assist local governments with the implementation of infrastructure investments and programs. In 2021, NEFCO participated in the Ohio Public Works Commission infrastructure project program (Program Year 36) as a member of the six-person Technical Advisory Committee of Summit County's District 8 Public Works Integrating Committee.

³ Northeast Ohio Sustainable Communities Consortium, Vibrant NEO 2040, <http://vibrantneo.org/vibrantneo-2040/vneo-2040-full-report/>

Technical Assistance

NEFCO staff provides information to the public and private sectors on critical issues affecting the region, including Census data updates, federal and state legislative updates, and funding notices. NEFCO's administration of two U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)-funded brownfields assessment grants has made the agency a critical resource for brownfields redevelopment planning. Additionally, staff's close relationship with the U.S. EPA and the Ohio EPA allows NEFCO to assist its members in obtaining quick answers to questions on environmental issues.

EVALUATION OF PROGRESS ON ACTION PLAN AND GOALS

1. Support programs that diversify local and regional economies and which build a strong regional economy capable of recovering from natural disasters and economic setbacks.

The COVID-19 pandemic has created unprecedented economic hardship to the nation and the NEFCO region. Communities and organizations throughout the region provided a number of great resources to help respond to the impacts of the pandemic. Many organizations, including all four county private nonprofit economic development organizations, hosted online COVID-19 resource centers to assist businesses and organizations. Communities across the region utilized federal CARES Act allocations to provide small business recovery grants. Communities are now looking to utilize American Rescue Plan Act funding to help foster recovery and fortify resilience. The City of Akron has outlined a robust program providing funding for small business assistance, lead abatement in water pipes, assistance for water and sewer customers, housing rehabilitation, new housing construction, neighborhood safety, and programs to curb youth violence. Summit County is using a portion of its recovery funds to expand its fiber infrastructure around the county to provide future high-speed internet accessibility to underserved areas.

NEFCO provided technical assistance to the City of Green in the development of an EDA Economic Adjustment Assistance grant application. The Town Park Boulevard Extension is a \$13-15 million project including new roadway, water, storm sewer, sanitary sewer, and other utilities. The project will help retain 1,100 existing jobs and create 100 new jobs. The project would preserve \$65 million in annual payroll and promote \$55 million in new private investment. The project would also make available 200 acres for future development, attracting manufacturing, healthcare, and information technology entities to the region. The project would diversify and strengthen the local and regional economy, build resilience, and support recovery. The City of Green is working with both its public and private partners on the development of this project. A commercial realtor has cooperated with the City of Green to facilitate the dedication of the right-of-way.

Encourage programs and projects that create and retain jobs

The City of Akron and its partners have developed numerous programs that have helped create and retain jobs. Through the Elevate Greater Akron program, the City of Akron works closely with Summit County, the Greater Akron Chamber, and Team NEO on business retention and expansion (BR&E). In 2021, the partners conducted 295 BR&E visits with Summit County businesses. The visitations helped create over \$39.8 million in new payroll, over \$56.5 million in capital investment, the creation of 812 new jobs, and the retention of 711 existing jobs. Elevate Greater Akron targets mid-sized business growth through a five-tier strategy: economic inclusion and opportunity; talent and skill development; downtown and job hub development; innovation and high potential start-ups; and connect and leverage resources to support business growth.⁴ The City of Akron's Rubber City Match program⁵ aims to lower the barrier to entry for small businesses, creating a more inclusive

⁴ Greater Akron Chamber, Elevate Greater Akron, <https://greaterakronchamber.org/about-the-chamber/elevate-greater-akron>

⁵ City of Akron, Rubber City Match, <https://www.rubbercitymatch.com/>

economy and continues to activate Akron's neighborhood districts. Rubber City Match pairs new and expanding businesses with Akron's top real estate opportunities, providing funding and technical assistance. Entrepreneurs, with a new or expanding business, may apply for grant funding for technical assistance, design and architectural services as well as capital.

The Portage Development Board (PDB) hosts monthly meetings with economic development professionals around Portage County to review updates on project and programs. The PDB aids industrial realtors, builders, local industries, and local communities to maintain and improve the economic base in Portage County. In 2021, the PDB conducted 162 BR&E visits with Portage County businesses. Through these visits, the PDB and its community partners were able to commit 249 new jobs, retain 435 existing jobs, and over \$34.5 million in new investment (payroll and capital expenditures). The Small Business Development Center (SBDC), which is managed under the Ohio Development Services Agency, provides seminars, workshops, and one-on-one consulting with businesses. Ohio Means Jobs (OMJ) Portage County, a division of the Portage County Job and Family Services, supports economic expansion and workforce development. OMJ Portage County conducts a Manufacturing Internship Program, workshops, job fairs, re-entry programs, and provides free services to Portage County employers.

The Wayne Economic Development Council (WEDC) is Wayne County's economic development entity progressively promoting and facilitating business retention and strategic business growth. The WEDC's priorities include strengthen and retain business, attract quality business, pursue sustainable and balanced new business growth, coordinate and collaborate with community and regional partners, deliver progressive product offerings and incentives; and delivering high-quality professional economic development services. The WEDC has a robust BR&E Program focusing on strengthening and retaining existing business. In 2021, with 15 project wins, Wayne County saw more than 240 jobs created, \$7.3 million added in payroll, and \$65.4 million in capital investments.

The Stark Economic Development Board (SEDB) has developed an extensive BR&E program with its local government partners. In 2021, the SEDB visited 202 companies. Through these visits, the SEDB and its partners were able to commit 1,306 new jobs, over \$52 million in new annual payroll, and over \$146 million in capital expenditures.

Support entrepreneurial, innovative, and technological development

NEFCO provided technical assistance and authoritative recommendations to Summit County for its EDA CARES grant application, FairlawnGig Expansion Planning Project (FEPP). The FEPP is a feasibility study on the potential expansion of the region's existing FairlawnGig high-speed fiber-optic network to new Opportunity Zones and Job Hubs in Akron and Barberton. The FairlawnGig is a municipally owned broadband utility, which offers wireless and gigabit fiber optic internet services. The FEPP – a collaboration between the County of Summit, the City of Akron, the City of Fairlawn, and the Greater Akron Chamber – aims to analyze the viability of expanding fiber infrastructure to expand economic opportunity, spur job growth, and foster private investment, particularly in areas of economic distress. The County of Summit was awarded a \$250,000 grant from the EDA in March for the FEPP.

NEFCO provided technical assistance to the City of Akron and the Bounce Innovation Hub in the development of an EDA Economic Adjustment Assistance grant application. The Bounce Innovation Hub Expansion and Renovation Project – a collaboration between the City of Akron and the Bounce Innovation Hub – is a \$3.1 million project that will activate over 20,000 square feet of unused space at the Bounce facility. The expansion will allow for additional offices for early-stage companies and additional common areas, including conference rooms, workshop space, and classrooms. The project

will greatly expand Bounce’s incubator space and augment its ability to provide entrepreneurial support and development to startups.

NEFCO provided technical assistance to JumpStart in the development of the Resilient Together EDA SPRINT Challenge grant application. The 18-month project – a collaboration between the Manufacturing Advocacy and Growth Network (MAGNET), JumpStart, the Youngstown Business Incubator, and Team NEO – will enhance the overall innovation capacity of seven target counties in Northeast Ohio, including all four NEFCO counties, as well as Opportunity Zones and HubZones. Resilient NEO will build the region’s resilience by facilitating more connections between industries, promoting innovation, and advancing “smart” manufacturing. The total estimated project investment is \$879,222. MAGNET was awarded a \$703,378 EDA SPRINT Challenge grant for the Resilient NEO project in April 2021. NEFCO provided initial technical support as well as a letter of support to accompany the EDA grant application.

MAGNET was also one of 60 EDA Build Back Better Regional Challenge \$500,000 Phase 1 planning grant awardees and the only recipient from Ohio. The coalition, led by MAGNET, aims to grow a smart manufacturing and advanced materials cluster in Northeast Ohio – including all counties in the NEFCO region. According to MAGNET, the cluster encompasses an estimated 700 firms, 45,000 workers, and \$12 billion gross regional product. The coalition's proposed projects aim to bring innovation to the region, especially around smart and advanced technologies, while encouraging workforce development. MAGNET now will assemble a proposal and compete for a Phase 2 BBBRC grant of up to \$100 million to implement three to eight projects supporting and advancing the smart manufacturing and advanced materials cluster. If provided an implementation grant, the coalition proposes to execute component projects that expand the applications of cluster technologies into specialized market segments and improve the region's supply chain through entrepreneurship and capitalization, infrastructure, and workforce pillars. NEFCO provided a letter of support for Phase 1 of this project and is identified as a partner in the project narrative summary.

STATUS: MAKING PROGRESS

2. Encourage the development of industries that support Northeast Ohio’s economic clusters

The NEFCO region’s three main industries include health care, information technology, and manufacturing. Manufacturers, logistical companies, hospitals throughout the region made or committed significant investments in 2021.

In Portage County, major projects and investments occurred in Aurora, Brimfield Township, Kent, Ravenna, Shalersville Township, and Streetsboro. LayerZero Power Systems will construct a \$2.8 million, 44,000-square-foot expansion in Aurora, which will create 30 to 40 new jobs and \$1.32 in new annual payroll. Martin Wheel is building a new \$10 million facility in Brimfield Township, which will create 24 new jobs. Hamrick Packaging Systems will move to the Maplecrest Industrial Park in Brimfield Township, adding 15 full-time jobs. Davey Tree Expert Company is constructing a new \$14 million, 38,400-square-foot addition to its headquarters in Kent, which will create 35 new jobs and nearly \$1.8 million in new annual payroll. LG Chem America Inc. will move into the former GE building in the Chestnut Commerce Center in Ravenna, which will create 72 new jobs and \$4.7 million in new annual payroll. Shalersville Township will have 470 acres of industrial development, just north of Ohio Turnpike. Plans for speculative building development (250,000 to 1.2 million square feet) for manufacturing and distribution end users. Waltco announced it will add 100 new jobs to accommodate demand for its truck lift gates and new Moffett M8 forklifts at its Streetsboro facility.

Many new manufacturing, health care, and logistics projects were announced or completed in Stark County. AmbaFlex Manufacturing Inc. is expanding in Canton with new \$10.5 million, 50,000-square-foot building, which will create 35 new jobs and \$1.75 million in new payroll. Aultman Health Foundation successfully reached its \$28 million fundraising goal to finance the new Timken Family Cancer Center at Aultman Hospital, which it commenced construction on in May 2021. The 77,600-square-foot center, which includes a 45,000-square-foot addition to Aultman Hospital, is designed to transform cancer care in the region. Canton's Mercy Medical Center became a member of the Cleveland Clinic health system in 2021. The former Affinity Medical Center in Massillon was purchased by MediShield Solutions, which aims to repurpose the building and provide multiple medical services. The Hall of Fame Village Center for Performance will focus on sports medicine and research. Amazon announced it will hire 1,000 people for its new fulfillment center, planned for the former Skyland Pines Golf Course in Canton.

Summit County saw major health care, manufacturing, and logistics projects in 2021. Summa Health is constructing a new seven-story, 60-bed behavioral health facility on Akron City Hospital's campus, part of the hospital's \$80 million Phase 2 construction campaign. The Crystal Clinic Orthopaedic Hospital opened its \$100 million, 165,000-square-foot facility in Fairlawn. Jetpack is renovating the former 83,000-square-foot Waltco building in Tallmadge to house its manufacturing, distribution and fulfillment operations. Jetpack purchased the vacant building in July and committed to bringing 141 full-time jobs and a \$2.5 million in annual payroll to the city. The company also had plans to add 60 full time jobs later this year, bringing their payroll up to \$4 million. The new Bridgestone Americas tire test track facility is set to open in 2022. Athersys Inc. has committed to occupying a 210,000-square-foot building in the Fogg Corporate Properties Season Business Park in Stow, which will create 400 new jobs and \$34.8 million in new annual payroll. Industrial Commercial Properties will invest up to \$20 million to convert the former Chapel Hill Mall into a multi-use business park. Allegiant Air is returning to Akron-Canton airport (CAK), and Breeze Airways is locating to CAK.

Wayne County saw several major projects in 2021. With 15 project wins resulting in more than 240 jobs created, \$7.3 million added in payroll, and \$65.4 million in capital investments. These projects include Wooster's oldest manufacturer, The Wooster Brush Company adding their third expansion at 600,000 sq ft in the new Wooster Innovation Park Site. Other Wooster project wins include E-Pak manufacturing expanding their current footprint, Scannell Properties building an expansion for Frito-Lay, Stahl Truck Bodies adding the Arbortech line, and Centerra Co-Op adding a retail storefront reinvesting in a downtown building. The City of Orrville had a long-standing company, McElroy packaging break ground on an expansion in at their downtown facility. The Village of Dalton added Wayne County's STEAM Playlab for the community to be opened in 2022. The Village of Kidron had new lines added VT Hackney. Finally, a Burbank company, Sports Haven, expanded their manufacturing facility for their boat trailers. Wayne County has also had two sites SiteOhio Authenticated including, the 73-acre Rittman Industrial Site and the 61-acre Wooster Innovation Site.

STATUS: MAKING PROGRESS

3. Build intergovernmental and public-private partnerships that place a high value on working cooperatively to address the region's needs

NEFCO's General Policy Board and Regional CEDS Committee represent the collaboration between public and private sectors within the region as they make decisions affecting the regional economy. The majority of the 13-member committee is employed in the private sector. Both the General Policy Board and the Regional CEDS Committee drive the economic development strategy and work plan of NEFCO.

There are a number of strong public-private partnerships that have helped the region respond to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and promote recovery. All counties work closely with their respective private economic development board: Portage Development Board, Stark Economic Development Board, Greater Akron Chamber, Wayne Economic Development Council. Elevate Greater Akron is a strategic and inclusive economic development partnership between the City of Akron, Summit County and the Greater Akron Chamber. Elevate Greater Akron is a regional economic development plan that involves collaboration and support from business, community, non-profit and civic leaders. Elevate Greater Akron focuses on supporting small and mid-sized business growth, inclusion and opportunity, workforce talent development, downtown and job hub development, innovation, and high potential start-ups, and leveraging resources to support business growth. The Wayne Economic Development Council collaborates with Wayne County and the cities of Wooster, Orrville, and Rittman to attract business growth. Strengthening Stark – a collaboration between the Stark Economic Development Board, the Canton Regional Chamber of Commerce, the Stark Community Foundation, and communities in Stark County – is a community, economic, and social development plan for Stark County.⁶

The Ohio State University, Wooster Campus has aggressively pursued partnerships with business and industry. Industry contributed equipment, products and services are used extensively to enhance student hands-on experience. In turn, these strategic partners leverage the extensive land base and modern facilities towards lifespan learning activities such as corporate employee and dealer trainings and/or targeted customer engagement events. Corporate partners such as CNHi, John Deere, Kubota and Trimble are now sponsoring research or conducting prototype evaluations on campus.

The Ag Success Team of Wayne County is a networked group of local government, nongovernmental organizations, education institutions, and businesses, which meets monthly to foster collaboration on issues of common concern. Over the last 15 years, the group has addressed industrial infrastructure, processing plant attraction, and farmland preservation.

There are several multi-county collaborative efforts afoot in the NEFCO region. Community leaders in both Summit and Stark Counties are working to support the continued success of the Akron-Canton Regional Airport. Both chambers and Strengthening Stark are also working to market the Akron-Canton region to the petrochemical and plastics industries. This effort is strengthened by the region's efforts to expand the US-30 expressway in Stark County, which will spur economic development and connect the NEFCO region to the shale energy region in the Ohio River Valley.

STATUS: SUCCESSFULLY MET GOAL

4. Promote the redevelopment of blighted, underused, or vacant, and environmentally challenged sites with high market potential

NEFCO has been involved in numerous activities that directly address this goal. Vibrant NEO identified the remediation and reuse of vacant industrial sites as one of its priorities. NEFCO has completed two U.S. EPA Brownfields Assessment grants. Several assessed properties have been redeveloped, including the former Rolling Acres Mall site in Akron, which has become a new Amazon Fulfillment Center employing 1,500. Staff also provides technical assistance to its members and to others in Northeast Ohio, informing the public and private sector of how these EPA grants can help foster redevelopment. To date, no projects have led to applications for EDA grants; however, it is still relatively early since NEFCO's involvement precedes remediation. NEFCO will continue outreach efforts to inform Summit County communities of the opportunity to consider brownfields

⁶ Stark Community Foundation, Strengthening Stark, <https://www.starkcf.org/files/publications/strengtheningstark2017-lowres.pdf>

redevelopment and the promotion of sustainable development through the reuse of existing underused properties and facilities. To date, NEFCO has been actively involved in the environmental assessment of over 30 properties, leading to the generation of over \$141 million in private investment and the creation of nearly 2,000 jobs. The Amazon Fulfillment Center alone created over \$100 million in investment and 1,500 jobs.

The city of Akron continues to actively redevelop its downtown. Major projects include the Bowery redevelopment, CitiCenter, Former Cascade Hotel, Law Building, and Mayflower Building. Additional residential development projects announced in 2021 include a \$31.6 million redevelopment of the former Beacon Journal Building and a \$40 million residential redevelopment of the former B.F. Goodrich factory into 139 apartments. The city is revitalizing these vacant and underused buildings into luxury apartments, offices, and retail space. Akron is promoting downtown living to complement its \$31 million Main Street Promenade project, which will include a cycle track, widened pedestrian pathways, green infrastructure, storm water management, and public transit improvements.

In December 2021, the Ohio Department of Development announced the guidelines on its \$500 million brownfields programs. The Brownfield Remediation Program allocates \$350 million to remediate brownfield conditions statewide. \$1 million has been set aside for each of Ohio's 88 counties. The Building Demolition and Site Revitalization Program allocates \$150 million to demolish commercial and residential buildings statewide and to revitalize adjacent, non-brownfield properties. \$500,000 has been set aside for each of Ohio's 88 counties. Portage, Stark, Summit and Wayne Counties all have active land banks that work to eliminate blight and prepare properties for reuse. Communities are poised to work collaboratively with their respective land banks for both grant programs.

STATUS: SUCCESSFULLY MET GOAL

5. Support existing programs that build human capital

NEFCO continues to assist its communities with obtaining assistance to create and retain jobs and strengthen the regional economy through diversification and innovation. During 2021, NEFCO provided technical assistance to several communities exploring potential EDA grant opportunities addressing workforce development projects.

Perhaps the most significant economic development issue around the region (and the nation) is addressing workforce development. Through numerous meetings with communities and organizations, the Regional CEDS Committee, and the various subcommittees of the ER&R planning process, the issues relative to workforce development will continue to affect the region. NEFCO is meeting with its members to better understand how the various communities in the region work with public workforce entities and private development agencies on training and retaining its workforce for current and future job demands. NEFCO will need to continue to gain a better understanding of how the region's programs and resources for workforce development are addressing the needs of the area's companies.

Many challenges remain. Addressing the workforce skills gap continues to be one of region's chief economic weaknesses. Community officials and employers will need to continue to collaborate with high schools, vocational schools, and colleges. There are many opportunities around the region. Internships, apprenticeships, and job shadowing are being used in local high schools. The Four Cities Compact has started new pharmaceutical science and medical technology programs. Barberton High School has launched a new cyber security program. High schools and vocational schools have recognized the need to develop outreach programs for recently graduated, non-college-bound

individuals to assist with career and job opportunities. There's a real need to target the 18 to 24-year-old population cohort to secure employment or better employment. The Akron Urban League is developing a certification in manufacturing program. The Maplewood Career Center in Portage County provides adult education opportunities.

Transportation deficiencies continue to be a problem for the workforce, especially lower-income residents and carless households. Public transportation options are limited and hamper the ability of some residents to secure employment. Many of these issues have been exacerbated by the pandemic, and some communities and demographics have been impacted more severely than others. Akron METRO is conducting a feasibility study on transit-oriented development (TOD). TOD aims to reduce transportation barriers.

NEFCO will need to continue to partner with workforce development agencies, universities and technical colleges, and nonprofit organizations throughout the region to help address these issues. Where applicable, NEFCO can assist the various partners who are pursuing EDA grant funding opportunities. The Good Jobs Challenge (GJC) and the Economic Adjustment Assistance programs through the EDA directly address workforce development issues, including infrastructure, planning, technical assistance, and – through the GJC – fund wrap-around services needed to help individuals succeed economically.

STATUS: MAKING PROGRESS

6. To the extent possible, promote the integration of the CEDS with other regional plans

NEFCO enjoys an excellent working relationship with its two metropolitan planning organizations in the region: the Akron Metropolitan Area Transportation Study (AMATS) and the Stark County Area Transportation Study (SCATS). These agencies are responsible for transportation planning and are required to produce transportation plans every four years. Covering similar geographic areas, NEFCO, AMATS, and SCATS share population, land use, and other data for planning purposes and report production. AMATS and SCATS share their transportation plans with NEFCO, and NEFCO shares its water quality management plan (208 Clean Water Plan) and economic development plan (CEDS). NEFCO is a member of the AMATS Technical Advisory Committee, which provides technical recommendations to the AMATS governing board.

NEFCO is also focused on ensuring its 208 Plan and CEDS Plan are consistent with other regional plans, including county and community comprehensive plans, Strengthening Stark, and other local plans. The City of Wooster completed an economic development strategic plan. The Portage County Regional Planning Commission is working on a new comprehensive plan. NEFCO will work with these communities to ensure that the CEDS and the 208 Water Quality Management Plan are integrated into these comprehensive plans to the greatest extent feasible.

STATUS: MAKING PROGRESS

7. Promote programs that support sustainability and quality of life for the region

The NEFCO Executive Director serves as a Board officer for the Vibrant NEO Launch Board, which aims to plan for a sustainable, resilient region. NEFCO staff sits on the AMATS and Summit County District 8 technical advisory committees, recommending transportation and public infrastructure projects. NEFCO is also an active member of the Cuyahoga River Area of Concern Advisory Committee, which has developed a remedial action plan to improve water quality. NEFCO and its partners removed the Canal Diversion Dam on the Cuyahoga River in part through an \$800,000 grant awarded to NEFCO by the U.S. EPA. The dam removal improves water quality, habitat, and recreational accessibility.

The region is embracing active transportation and recreational amenities. AMATS has published its Active Transportation Plan, which aims to enhance safety and transportation options for pedestrians and bicyclists.⁷ The City of Canton has also completed an Active Transportation Plan.⁸ Kent State University and the University of Akron have developed bike share programs. The Portage Park District, Stark Parks, Summit Metro Parks, and numerous cities around the region continue to expand trails and parks. These quality-of-life improvements are important for regional economic growth.

The City of Akron has continued to invest in neighborhood improvements and its downtown. The ongoing redevelopment of downtown Akron includes several major residential and commercial projects. Akron has been aggressive with residential development and housing projects. The city is looking to grow its population over 200,000 residents. Over 1,000 units of housing are currently in development or under construction. Akron completed Phase I of its \$31 million Main Street Promenade. The city is also investing heavily in the planning and development of Lock 3 Park in downtown and recreational amenities in and around Summit Lake.

In Stark County, the City of Canton has also aggressively redeveloped its downtown. The \$12.3 million Centennial Plaza, which was completed at the end of 2020, features a café, public event space for 5,000 guests, stage, pavilion, high-definition video screen, and monuments recognizing National Football League players over the last 100 years. The city is also focusing planning efforts in the Shorb area neighborhood and around Court Avenue. The City of North Canton is embarking on a new downtown revitalization plan. The City of Massillon completed the redesign of Duncan Plaza, which has helped transform their downtown.

STATUS: SUCCESSFULLY MET GOAL

8. Develop an economic recovery and resiliency plan to help region respond to the impacts of the pandemic

NEFCO was awarded an EDA CARES Act supplemental assistance grant to plan for regional recovery and resiliency. Through the grant award, NEFCO increased capacity by hiring an Economic Recovery and Resiliency Coordinator, who will coordinate the ER&R planning process. The ER&R planning process includes a robust series of surveys and one-on-one interviews with communities and organizations to understand the impacts of the pandemic. NEFCO has assembled three ER&R subcommittees – Community Development, Regional Business, and Workforce Development and Entrepreneurship – to take deeper dives into areas affecting regional recovery and resiliency. The subcommittees will be working with NEFCO staff in early 2022 to develop an action plan of short-term recovery projects and programs and long-term resiliency strategies. The final ER&R Plan will be incorporated into the NEFCO CEDS Plan.

STATUS: IN PROGRESS

9. Support efforts to bring affordable, high-speed, reliable broadband to unserved and underserved areas of NEFCO region

NEFCO staff provided technical assistance and authoritative recommendations to Summit County for its EDA CARES grant application, FairlawnGig Expansion Planning Project (FEPP), which was submitted to the EDA in October 2020. The FEPP is a feasibility study on the potential expansion of

⁷ Akron Metropolitan Area Transportation Study, Active Transportation Plan, <http://amatsplanning.org/wp-content/uploads/2019-Active-Transportation-Plan-Final.pdf>

⁸ City of Canton Active Transportation Map, <https://www.cantonohio.gov/DocumentCenter/View/2261/Canton-Active-Transportation-Map-PDF>

the region's existing FairlawnGig high-speed fiber-optic network to new Opportunity Zones and Job Hubs in Akron and Barberton. The FairlawnGig is a municipally owned broadband utility, which offers wireless and gigabit fiber optic internet services. The FEPP – a collaboration between the County of Summit, the City of Akron, the City of Fairlawn, and the Greater Akron Chamber – aims to analyze the viability of expanding fiber infrastructure to expand economic opportunity, spur job growth, and foster private investment, particularly in areas of economic distress. The County of Summit was awarded a \$250,000 grant from the EDA in March for the FEPP.

NEFCO also participates in the Ohio Association of Regional Councils (OARC) Broadband Working Group. The committee includes representatives from councils of government from around the state and is focused on developing regional strategies and setting legislative priorities addressing the digital divide and expanding 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. OARC worked closely with legislators and agency staff to ensure significant funding was available for broadband infrastructure. Although OARC's goal of establishing regional broadband councils to provide planning and technical assistance and to coordinate with local governments in their respective regions was not adopted, the association, along with communities and organizations around the state, helped reinstate state budget funding for broadband.

STATUS: MAKING PROGRESS

SCHEDULE OF GOALS FOR 2022 AND PROGRAM OF ACTIVITIES

2022 Goals and Objectives

The following goals and objectives have been reviewed and approved by the NEFCO General Policy Board.

Support programs that diversify local and regional economies and which build a strong regional economy capable of recovering from natural disasters and economic setbacks.

Objectives:

- Encourage programs and projects that create and retain jobs
- Support entrepreneurial, innovative, and technological development
- Support efforts that will make the region more globally competitive
- Support efforts to improve financial literacy for small businesses

Encourage the development of industries that support Northeast Ohio's economic clusters

Objectives:

- Support projects that contribute toward strengthening the region's targeted industries, including those in manufacturing, health care, and information technology
- Support activities that complement the targeted as well as other existing industries in the region

Build intergovernmental and public-private partnerships that place a high value on collaboration by working cooperatively to address the region's needs.

Objectives:

- Support projects that are consistent with the general plan of the appropriate unit of government
- Encourage collaborative efforts to reduce duplication in government services and resources
- Explore opportunities to collaborate with private economic development entities

Promote the redevelopment of blighted, underused, or vacant and environmentally challenged sites with high market potential.Objectives:

- Encourage programs that support and pursue state and federal brownfields grant programs
- Encourage counties and local governments to identify potential sites for brownfield assessments and cleanups
- Support projects that preserve greenspace, either through innovative design or through measures taken to ensure more compact development

Support existing programs that build human capitalObjectives:

- Gain an understanding of how the region's programs and resources for workforce development are addressing the needs of the area's companies
- Support the continued growth and success of programs that train or develop workers and entrepreneurs

To the extent possible, promote the integration of the CEDS with other regional plansObjectives:

- Identify existing regional plans
- Identify common themes, goals, aspects, etc. that the plans share
- Hold for discussion major aspects of the plans that appear to be inconsistent or in conflict

Promote programs that support sustainability and quality of life in the regionObjectives:

- Support economic development possibilities tied to the local food industry and activities that improve the local food infrastructure
- Explore regional solutions for identified problems/challenges impeding the success of local food efforts
- Continue involvement with Vibrant NEO and assist, as resources allow, in implementing measures recommended by Vibrant NEO to move toward a more sustainable region

Develop an economic recovery and resiliency plan to help region respond to the impacts of the pandemicObjectives:

- Understand impacts of pandemic on communities and organizations in the NEFCO region
- Identify short-term recovery projects and programs
- Develop long-term resilience strategies

Support efforts to bring affordable, high-speed, reliable broadband to unserved and underserved areas of NEFCO regionObjectives:

- Participate in the OARC Broadband Working Group
- Support federal, state, and regional initiatives aimed at expanding broadband access
- Support local efforts to extend fiber and create municipal fiber utilities

Support efforts to address affordable housing and increase housing optionsObjectives:

- Develop subcommittee of the Regional CEDS Committee to formulate strategies
- Support efforts to develop affordable rental and other housing options

- Support efforts to retain recent high school and college graduates within the region

2022 TIMELINE FOR GOALS AND ACTION ITEMS

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Goal 1: Support programs that diversify local and regional economies and which build a strong regional economy capable of recovering from natural disasters and economic setbacks.												
Vibrant NEO participation												
Monitor changes in regional economy												
Assist communities responding to economic restructuring and layoffs												
Identify communities facing economic distress and notify those eligible for EDA assistance												
Goal 2: Encourage the development of industries that support Northeast Ohio’s economic clusters												
Attend meetings that support technology/entrepreneurial development												
Identify communities facing economic distress and notify those eligible for EDA assistance												
Share Census Bureau information and updates												
Goal 3: Build intergovernmental and public-private partnerships that place a high value on collaboration by working cooperatively to address the region’s needs												
Identify communities facing economic distress and notify those eligible for EDA and other grant assistance												
Convene Regional CEDS Committee meetings												
Meet with community and regional economic development partners												
Publish NEFCO Forum Newsletters												
Goal 4: Promote the redevelopment of blighted, underused, or vacant and environmentally challenged sites with high market potential.												
Pursue grant opportunities for brownfield assessment and cleanup												
Provide information or assist communities with ODOD Brownfield Remediation and Building Demolition and Site Revitalization Program												
Support local and regional brownfields redevelopment initiatives												

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Identify communities facing economic distress and notify those eligible for EDA and other grant assistance												
Goal 5: Support existing programs that build human capital												
Meet and network with region's workforce development agencies and colleges/universities												
Notify communities, universities, and organizations of EDA and other grant opportunities												
Goal 6: To the extent possible, promote the integration of the CEDS with other regional plans												
Support community comprehensive planning efforts in NEFCO region												
Participate in Summit County's District 8 Technical Advisory Committee												
Participate in AMATS Technical Advisory Committee												
Identify/notify communities and organizations eligible for EDA and other grant assistance												
Goal 7: Promote programs that support sustainability and quality of life in the region												
Vibrant NEO participation												
Support economic development initiatives for local foods and related infrastructure												
Identify/notify communities and organizations eligible for local food program development grant assistance												
Support local and regional bicycle and pedestrian planning initiatives												
Support recreational and open space planning and development												
Goal 8: Develop an economic recovery and resiliency plan to help region respond to the impacts of the pandemic												
Convene ER&R subcommittee meetings												
Develop ER&R Action Plan												
Convene Regional CEDS Committee												
Prepare draft ER&R plan for review by Regional CEDS Committee and General Policy Board												

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Submit final ER&R Plan to the EDA												
Incorporate ER&R Plan into CEDS Plan												
Goal 9: Support efforts to bring affordable, high-speed, reliable broadband to unserved and underserved areas of NEFCO region												
Participate in OARC Broadband Working Group												
Support federal, state, and regional initiatives aimed at expanding broadband access												
Support local efforts to extend fiber and create municipal fiber utilities												
Goal 10: Support efforts to address affordable housing and increase housing options												
Develop subcommittee of the Regional CEDS Committee to formulate strategies												
Support federal, state, and regional initiatives aimed at expanding affordable housing options												
Support efforts to retain recent high school and college graduates within the region												

REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT NEWS

The following regional economic development news items were reported and distributed to NEFCO communities and General Policy Board members in 2021. Dates of the news items are provided in parentheses.

2020 Census could push Lakemore to city status (January 2021)

Depending on final numbers from the 2020 Census, the Village of Lakemore could jump to city status. Per the 2010 Census, Lakemore's population was 3,068. Since then, the village has seen hundreds of new condominiums and homes constructed. Per the Ohio Revised Code, a city must have a population of 5,000. With the city status comes addition funding, eligibility for certain federal and state grants, and the positive image of growth and vitality. Village officials are optimistic Lakemore will achieve city status.

B&W Enterprises seeks to sublease part of Akron headquarters one year after moving in (January 2021)

Babcock & Wilcox (B&W) Enterprises, which moved last year into its new headquarters in Akron's East End development, is looking to sublease at least some of its space there. B&W plans to sublease about 175,000 square feet of office space in its 440,000-square-foot East End building. B&W designs, services, and manufactures coal-fired boilers, pollution control equipment, renewable energy technology, and more for electric utilities and industrial uses around the world.

Hudson looks at ways to aid downtown businesses (January 2021)

The City of Hudson is considering ways to assist its downtown businesses. City Council has considered installing infrared heaters, firepits, adding public restrooms, and providing free WiFi to draw more people

downtown. The city does have outdoor dining areas and a designated outdoor refreshment area. Free WiFi in the downtown and parks could be provided by the city's internet service, Velocity Broadband.

Davey Tree seeks tax exemption for \$14 million expansion in Kent (January 2021)

The Davey Tree Expert Co. is seeking an enterprise zone agreement with the City of Kent for a new expansion planned for construction in March. Davey is requesting a 10-year, 75% real estate tax exemption on the assessed value of the new construction of its \$14 million, 38,400-square-foot addition to its headquarters. Per the proposed enterprise zone agreement, Davey would commit to creating 35 new jobs over the first three years at the project site. Those jobs would generate a projected \$1,786,000 in new annual payroll by the end of the third year. The proposed agreement will be considered at Kent City Council's next meeting; if approved, the item would next be considered by the Portage County Commissioners.

New two-story Crystal Clinic facility planned at site of former circular building in Cuyahoga Falls (January 2021)

A two-story medical office building is planned on Portage Trail next to the city's Fire Station 3 where a distinctive four-story circular building once stood. The \$3 million, 12,120-square-foot Crystal Clinic medical office and physical therapy facility will bring an estimated 16 new jobs and \$1.5 million in annual payroll after three years. The former circular medical office building on Portage Trail in Cuyahoga Falls was torn down in 2019. Construction of the new building is anticipated to start in March or April and be completed by early 2022.

Lordstown Motors says it has 100,000 pre-orders for all-electric pickup (January 2021)

Lordstown Motors Corp. has received more than 100,000 pre-orders from commercial fleets for the Lordstown Endurance, its all-electric pickup truck. The company says the average order size is nearly 600 vehicles per fleet. The Endurance is a full-size, all-electric pickup that has a range of 250 miles, the equivalent of 600hp and can tow up to 7,500 pounds. Production is expected to begin in September. The Endurance is priced at \$45,000 after a federal rebate.

Massillon's Affinity sale to close by Jan. 19 (January 2021)

The sale of the former Affinity Medical Center sale is set to close on January 19. The new owners must pay the remaining acquisition costs (\$397,375) to the Massillon Community Improvement Corporation, the city's agent. The former hospital was purchased at the November 18 auction by Daniel Beers and Brandon Fabris for \$467,500. The ownership group, MediShield Solutions, aims to provide multiple medical services at the site.

Centennial Plaza to open Dec. 30 (January 2021)

Canton's Centennial Plaza officially opened on December 30, 2020. The \$12.3 million, football-themed public space includes a stage, video screen, café, commemorative National Football League steles, a unique Canton sign, and impressive stainless steel arches in the shape of a football. The plaza celebrates the 100th anniversary of the NFL.

Aultman begins work on new Timken Family Cancer Center (January 2021)

The Aultman Health Foundation has started work on its new \$28 million cancer center. The Timken Family Cancer Center -- a 58,270-square-foot center for comprehensive cancer-related services at Aultman Hospital -- is set to open in 2022. The project includes renovating 13,270 square-feet of existing space and building a 45,000 square-foot addition. Renovations began December 14, and construction on the addition is expected to begin in 2021. The Aultman Foundation launched the public donation portion of the project last month. The foundation has already secured about 90% of the funding, including \$10 million from the foundation, \$5 million raised by the Aultman Women's Board and a \$3 million donation from the Timken Foundation.

Athersys' proposed expansion could bring big bucks to Stow (January 2021)

The City of Stow is poised to see a significant increase in its annual income taxes with the proposed expansion of Cleveland-based biotechnology company, Athersys. Athersys develops therapeutic products and has recently teamed up with University Hospitals Cleveland Medical Center to provide COVID-19 research on acute respiratory distress syndrome. Athersys is expected to move into a large industrial building in the Fogg Corporate Properties' Seasons Business Park. Athersys would create 400 full-time positions, generating \$34.8 million in new annual payroll while maintaining \$10.8 million in existing payroll. Stow's current largest industrial company has a payroll of \$12 million.

TimkenSteel will idle its melt and cast operations at the Harrison Steel Mill in a move that could affect as many as 100 jobs (February 2021)

The mill will be idled by the end of March. TimkenSteel plans to move all steel melting and casting activities to the Faircrest Steel Mill, which has seen upgrades in recent years. Finishing operations and rolling mills will continue at the Harrison plant. It is not known at this point how many workers will be affected. TimkenSteel employs over 1,200 union steelworkers at its three mills.

Hall of Fame Village celebrates final steel beam being placed on new center (February 2021)

The Constellation Center for Excellence at the Hall of Fame Village is one step closer to completion. The final steel beam is in place. The 75,000-square-foot Center is part of a \$300 million second phase of construction at the Village and will house offices for the NFL Alumni Association, a research partnership involving Aultman Health Foundation, and other organizations. Construction began in September, and work is projected to take 18 months. Other phase two components include the remodeling of the DoubleTree by Hilton hotel in downtown Canton (completed last November), work on a plaza at the stadium's east end, retail promenade, 180-room hotel, water park, and other buildings.

Canton commits \$25,000 to entice new air carrier to Akron-Canton Airport (February 2021)

The City of Canton will provide \$25,000 to the Akron-Canton Airport (CAK) as part of the JobsOhio commercial air service restoration program to attract new carriers and routes. The program offers a four-to-one match of local funds. Canton joins several other local governments and agencies in Stark and Summit Counties that have already committed \$250,000 collectively to CAK. Community support is important in restoring old and securing new airline service. If an agreement for a new airline is reached, the fund could act as a backstop on any initial losses or startup costs for a new route. If an airline – like Delta Airlines – restores or establishes service at Akron-Canton, it would get money from the fund only up to a negotiated amount each month if it lost money on the route. Due to the abrupt decline in air travel due to the pandemic, Delta eliminated its nonstop service from Akron-Canton to Atlanta in May and consolidated its operations at Cleveland Hopkins International Airport. CAK passenger traffic is roughly at 30% what it was a year ago.

Deal reached for Chapel Hill Mall to gain new owner (February 2021)

Industrial Commercial Properties LLC (ICP), a Cleveland-area development firm, is negotiating to buy the Chapel Hill Mall in Akron and expecting to close on the property in early March. ICP already owns the former Sears building at the mall and has said it is looking to place a cabinet-making business inside. The transaction will be reviewed by the Akron Planning Commission on February 19. The city is being asked to be part in the chain of title as part of the transfer process, which would allow for the use of tax increment financing for renovations. The city is also considering rezoning the property to allow for additional commercial uses and light manufacturing. ICP specializes in commercial and industrial rehabilitation, build-to-suits and economic redevelopment. ICP projects and joint ventures in Northeast Ohio include the East End redevelopment of the former Goodyear headquarters campus and the redevelopment of the former Geauga Lake amusement park into a mixed-use housing and commercial

development. ICP also owns and manages other large commercial and industrial properties in the Greater Akron Area.

Pandemic leads to massive growth, new jobs at Akron-based maker GOJO (February 2021)

GOJO has experienced massive growth since the onset of the pandemic. Researchers indicate hand sanitizer sales have increased by about 600%; GOJO's Purell commands about 25% of all hand sanitizer sales. To keep up with demand, GOJO ramped up production to three shifts, seven days a week at its plants in Cuyahoga Falls and Wooster. The company then opened distribution facilities in Navarre and Maple Heights and rented storage space in the I-X Center in Cleveland. GOJO will soon open a new storage and distribution center in Ashland. GOJO added about 500 employees since the pandemic and produces three times as much Purell monthly. GOJO's success has helped the region, particularly Wayne County economically weather the pandemic. It added 270 employees to its Wooster facility since last March.

Stow approves tax abatement for Seasons Business Center 5 (February 2021)

Stow City Council has approved a 15-year, 100% tax abatement for the upcoming Seasons Business Center 5 at the corner of Route 8 and Seasons Road. The developer, Fogg, intends to build a \$13.65 million, 247,000-square-foot speculative industrial building. Fogg indicates the building would generate \$2 million in payroll by the end of the third year, per its community reinvestment area application, amounting to \$40,000 in new income tax. Fogg has a similar abatement on Seasons Business Centers 1-4, all of which were built on speculation. Construction is expected to begin this spring.

\$1 million donation gets Lock 3 project to the halfway mark in fundraising campaign (February 2021)

The Richard S. and Alita Rogers Family Foundation is committing \$1 million to the Lock 3 revitalization project in downtown Akron. The first phase of the \$10 million renovation of Lock 3 includes additional landscaping and seating, reorientation of the stage, and new steps and access points to Main Street. The project complements the other revitalization projects in Akron, including the reconstruction of Main Street, the renovation of multiple downtown buildings into residential units, and planned improvements around Summit Lake.

LayerZero's \$2.8M expansion could bring 30-40 jobs to Aurora (February 2021)

Aurora-based LayerZero Power Systems is seeking a 15-year, 100% tax abatement for a 44,000-square-foot, \$2.8 million expansion addition and \$1.8 million equipment acquisition. The expansion will create 30 to 40 new full-time jobs for Aurora by the end of 2024 and add \$1.32 million in annual payroll. LayerZero Power Systems designs power distribution and power quality monitoring products for the information technology, communications, and financial sectors.

What does a \$290 million broadband investment mean for Ohio? (February 2021)

Governor DeWine has recommended that the legislature spend \$290 million toward broadband expansion — the largest state investment in internet infrastructure — in the next two-year state budget. The investment will establish a one-time, \$250 million initiative, the Ohio Residential Broadband Grant Program, to expand access across the state in 2022 and 2023. The proposed program would allocate \$125 million for both 2022 and 2023. Additionally, \$20 million would be allocated annually for residential broadband expansion grants in 2022 and 2023. Approximately 1 million Ohioans live without internet access, primarily in rural areas. Internet access is essential for participation in the modern economy, for education, employment, and health care services. The broadband grants will target access and affordability, issues particularly problematic in rural southern and eastern Ohio. The state monies would help leverage federal dollars targeted for broadband, notably the \$170 million investment from the Federal Communications Commission. Proponents of the Governor's proposal believe Ohio would be more competitive for future federal grants with its passage. Federal agencies like the National

Telecommunications and Information Administration, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and Appalachian Regional Commission require local communities to match anywhere between 25% and 40% of a grant, which is extremely difficult.

Mercy officially becomes part of the Cleveland Clinic (February 2021)

Mercy Medical Center in Canton officially joined the Cleveland Clinic System on February 1. The newly named Cleveland Clinic Mercy Hospital will soon have access to expanded services, improved technology, more opportunities for physician collaboration, and more investment and support in addressing community needs, according to the Cleveland Clinic. The Cleveland Clinic indicated it will invest millions in Mercy, including extensive technology upgrades.

Stark County's 2020 finances largely recovered from pandemic effects (February 2021)

Most categories of Stark County government revenues recovered at the end of 2020. The impact of the pandemic was not as severe as initially forecasted. Monthly sales tax revenue in March 2020 was down about 15% from 2019. Sales tax revenues rebounded in June 2020 through the fall, surpassing comparative monthly revenues from 2019. County general fund revenue for 2020 rose nearly 4% to \$46.11 million. Property tax revenue rose 2.4% due to higher property valuations. The general fund was also bolstered by higher collections of recorder fees and conveyance fees from an active real estate market. County investment income declined by nearly 9%. Despite the recovery, county agencies are exercising caution with spending. County agencies funded by the general fund and sales tax fund kept their expenses to about 88% of what was appropriated for 2020. Due to the uncertainties about the future course of the pandemic, the Commissioners last month appropriated half of the 2020 appropriations to county agencies as part of a temporary budget. They will consider how much to fund the rest of the year by March 10.

Ohio loses 11,500 jobs in December; first decrease since April (February 2021)

Ohio lost 11,500 jobs in December, according to the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services. This was the first monthly decrease since April 2020, during the early days of the pandemic. The job losses mirror national patterns, with the U.S. losing 140,000 jobs in December, most notably in the leisure and hospitality sector. Ohio lost 9,200 leisure and hospitality jobs last month and 125,400 over the past year. More than a third of all jobs lost over the last year have come from this sector. Despite the job loss, the state unemployment rate continues to fall, dropping to 5.5% in December from 5.7% in November. The rate peaked at 17.3% in April. Ohio's unemployment rate stands well below the U.S. rate of 6.7%.

Record new business filings marked second half of 2020 (February 2021)

Ohio saw a record number of new businesses filed with the Ohio Secretary of State's office in 2020. Every month from April to December broke monthly records for filings, according to Secretary of State LaRose's office. Data from the U.S. Census Bureau's Business Formation Statistics indicate Portage County experienced an increase of 8.2% more new business filings in 2020 than in 2019. The data are positive and speak to the strong spirit of entrepreneurs, despite the economic concerns of the pandemic.

Alliance City Council moves forward with plans to redevelop Carnation City Mall (February 2021)

The City of Alliance is proceeding with plans to redevelop Carnation City Mall. Alliance intends to put the mall property into a tax incremental financing program (TIF) that would exempt the property owners from 100% of real property taxes for 30 years. Under the proposal, the city would take temporary ownership of the property before transferring it to Fairmount Properties. Fairmount plans to redevelop the mall into a large retail facility. City Council passed an ordinance on January 19 to execute an agreement between the city and Marlington Local Schools whereby the district will receive an amount equal to 25% of what it would have received from property taxes, if not for the TIF.

Akron Airdock sale approved; landmark closer to starting airship production (March 2021)

The Development Finance Authority of Summit County, which has owned the Akron Airdock since 2006, authorized selling the airdock to defense contractor Lockheed Martin for an undisclosed sum at its monthly board meeting. Lockheed Martin has been leasing the airdock and using it to develop airship and laser technologies. The authority also approved an agreement that would allow Lockheed Martin to sublease the airdock to the airship-building company, LTA Research. Both the sale and sublease need to be approved by the Environmental Protection Agency. No closing date has been set for the airdock. The sale price will not be disclosed until the property is sold.

Akron Airdock to build airships again (March 2021)

LTA Research and Exploration, a company created by Google co-founder and billionaire Sergey Brin, is partnering with the University of Akron to use the historic Akron Airdock to develop state-of-the-art, electric-powered zero emission airships. As part of the project, LTA (Lighter Than Air) plans to sublease the airdock with help from the Development Finance Authority of Summit County, which since 2006 has owned the airdock and leased it to defense contractor Lockheed Martin. The authority plans to vote on selling the airdock to Lockheed Martin for an undisclosed price; the company then would sublease to LTA. Lockheed Martin largely pulled out of the airdock campus by 2015 with the loss of 500 local jobs as part of a consolidation of its nationwide facilities. About 35 Lockheed Martin employees, primarily engaged in laser research, remain on the campus. The sublease and sale will require additional approvals involving the Environmental Protection Agency. The number of jobs this new venture will create was not announced. The LTA airship being designed apparently will use nonflammable helium to provide lift, while hydrogen fuel cells will provide power to the craft's electric motors and allow it to go on sustained flights. The airdock traces its roots back to Goodyear, which used the mammoth building to build blimps and rigid airships, including the USS Akron and USS Macon, going back to the structure's completion in 1929. Goodyear now builds its iconic blimps at its Wingfoot Lake hangar in nearby Suffield Township.

Akron, Cuyahoga Falls forming master plan for Merriman Valley (March 2021)

Akron and Cuyahoga Falls have officially launched a joint planning process to steer future development in the Merriman Valley and Schumacher areas. The master plan will begin with a study that includes analysis of the Merriman Road, Portage Path/Akron-Peninsula and Portage Trail/Northampton corridors. Once created, the plan will focus on land use and development, including zoning, urban design, transportation, environmental concerns and economic development components, while acknowledging the recreational and hospitality opportunities in the Merriman Valley. The cities will hire Farr Associates, an architecture and planning firm, to assist in developing the master plan. Each city has committed up to \$100,000 to the planning costs. Opportunities for residents, businesses and other stakeholders to engage, both online and in-person, will be made available. It is expected the process will begin this spring and conclude in early 2022. Community leaders say residential, retail and industrial development has occurred over the past several decades without an integrated plan for land use and development.

Smithers cancels plans for new Downtown Akron HQ, cites COVID in reasoning (March 2021)

Smithers has canceled its plan to move to a new downtown location that both the city and county were helping to fund. The company, which provides lab and testing services in a variety of fields, had been planning since 2019 to move its headquarters to the former Austen BioInnovation Institute (ABIA) at 47 N. Main St. The company said COVID-19 impacted the financial arrangements established as part of the project. According to documents from Summit County, Smithers was putting forth a \$7.1 million contribution to the \$17.7 million project and borrowing \$5.7 million more. The Summit County Development Finance Authority was set to lend Smithers \$5.7 million and lend the county \$6.5 million to settle old debt related to the founding of ABIA. The city of Akron was putting forth \$2 million to help with the project. JobsOhio was also providing \$1.6 million in grants, and FirstEnergy kicked in another \$150,000 grant. The company said it would continue to look for a new campus. The move was supposed to revitalize the home of a struggling nonprofit medical research development center. Smithers was

supposed to renovate and use the top three floors of the building. Close to 200 employees were slated to be in the new building, and Smithers planned to make more hires as part of the move.

For second straight year, Ohio tops nation in economic development report (March 2021)

For the second straight year, Ohio finished first in the country in the annual Site Selection magazine Governor's Cup ranking. The ranking measures the number of economic development projects per person. Georgia was second and Kentucky was third. In terms of total projects, Ohio finished a distant second to Texas for the ninth straight year with 419 projects in 2020 to 781 for Texas. Qualifying projects are those meeting one or more of Site Selection's criteria for inclusion in the Conway Projects Database: a minimum investment of \$1 million, creation of 20 or more new jobs, or 20,000 square feet or more of new space. Ohio cities large and small scored well in the Site Selection report. Among big metro areas with a population of at least 1 million, Cincinnati came in seventh, Cleveland ninth and Columbus tenth in terms of projects per person. Toledo finished fifth in terms of projects per person. 25 small cities in Ohio also showed up in the report, led by Findlay, which finished first for the seventh straight year.

Chapel Hill will get \$6 million makeover (March 2021)

Industrial Commercial Properties (ICP) is expected to invest as much as \$20 million into the 60-plus acre Chapel Hill mall site as part of the sale, with construction expected to start this spring. The struggling and largely vacant mall property is now in foreclosure and ICP expects to repurpose the site from retail into more diverse uses, including light industrial businesses. Akron City Council's planning committee unanimously approved that Council authorize a development agreement for the mall. The agreement calls for the purchase of the mall from current owner Kohan Real Estate Investment Group, with the city temporarily taking title to the property and then transferring ownership to ICP. That will allow the use of \$1.5 million in tax increment financing to support property improvements. The development agreement calls for a closing date of no later than April 1, unless both the city and ICP mutually agree to push the closing back even later. The agreement also calls for the developer to make \$6 million in exterior facade, landscaping and interior renovations starting within six months of the closing.

Habitat for Humanity, Strengthening Stark join forces (March 2021)

Habitat for Humanity and Strengthening Stark have created a formal partnership, with Strengthening Stark expected to seek joint funding and grants, identify minority-owned businesses for Habitat, and connect homeowners to career services. Habitat has planned Renewal Projects in southeast Canton and southwest Massillon as an extension of its first, four-year Renewal Project in northeast Canton. The work involves new construction, renovations, demolitions and neighborhood cleanups. Habitat has raised \$1.8 million for the \$3 million southeast Canton project and \$2.3 million for the \$2.5 million southwest Massillon project. The collaborative also will be involved in creating landmark gateways for the Renewal Project neighborhoods.

Aultman to break ground on new Timken Family Cancer Center (March 2021)

Aultman is preparing to break ground on the \$28 million, 45,000-square-foot Timken Family Cancer Center on March 1. Renovation on 13,270 square feet in the existing hospital began several months ago. The cancer center is slated to open in 2022 and include clinical care and patient and community services.

Smucker plans to lay off workers as consumer habits change during pandemic (March 2021)

The J.M. Smucker Co. will lay off an unspecified number of North American employees as the Orrville-based food company adjusts to changing consumer habits during the age of coronavirus. The company is restructuring and reshaping its brands. Last year, Smucker sold its dog and cat food brand Natural Balance and its Crisco shortening and oils business for \$50 million and \$550 million, respectively. last year. The company is focusing on coffee, pet food, jams, jellies and peanut butter. Smucker has more than 7,000 employees and 30 manufacturing facilities.

Summit County CDBG grant supports Bounce's MORTAR program (March 2021)

Summit County awarded a \$40,000 Community Development Block Grant to the Bounce Innovation Hub to support its MORTAR program. MORTAR supports disadvantaged entrepreneurs, like women and minorities. The funding provided free tuition for four entrepreneurs and supported the overall administration of the program. The MORTAR program provides culturally competent curriculum and materials, a cohort model for driven entrepreneurs to support each other, access to legal support and one-on-one mentorship to offer guidance throughout the course. Bounce also facilitates opportunities to pitch ideas to potential investors and ongoing support following course completion.

Route 30 extension project inches forward, but without full funding (March 2021)

The 3-mile extension of the U.S. 30 expressway from Trump Avenue to State Route 44 still needs \$100 million, before an \$18 million federal grant expires in October 2022. Project supporters are targeting at least four strategies. The first is funding from a much-discussed federal infrastructure bill. The second is from additional TRAC funding from ODOT. The third is seeking mine remediation funding from the Ohio Department of Natural Resources as contractors will have to fill abandoned underground mines along the proposed route. And the fourth is legislation sponsored by State Sen. Kirk Schuring that would allow companies to make tax-deductible contributions through their property tax bills to the project. The segment is part of a larger \$1 billion U.S. 30 extension to State Route 11 in Columbiana County.

Goodyear buying Cooper Tire in \$2.8 billion deal (March 2021)

The Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co. is buying Findlay-based Cooper Tire & Rubber Co. in a deal valued at \$2.8 billion. Goodyear said the acquisition will combine two portfolios of complementary brands and solidify its position as the third largest global tire manufacturer based on revenue (behind Bridgestone and Michelin). The deal is expected to close in the second half of the year, subject to regulatory and shareholder approvals. The company has about 10,000 employees around the world and 10 factories. The combined company will have about 72,000 employees and 56 factories around the world. Goodyear indicated the combined company will be headquartered in Akron but expects to maintain a presence in Findlay.

Cuyahoga Falls City Council rezones land for mixed-use plan on Wyoga Lake Road (March 2021)

Cuyahoga Falls City Council unanimously approved rezoning nearly 37 acres at 4344 and 4356 Wyoga Lake Road to accommodate a proposed mixed-use development. Princeton Crossroads Investments has proposed building four office/commercial buildings on at least 10 of the acres and about 150 apartment units behind the office structures. According to city officials, the proposed project would result in a \$25.5 million economic impact for the city.

Akron has big plans for \$153 million in federal aid (April 2021)

The City of Akron will receive \$153 million in federal aid through the American Rescue Plan. Mayor Dan Horrigan has proposed distributing the assistance in six priority areas: housing, public utility programs, small-business growth, violence prevention, parks and public facilities, and information technology upgrades, with a promise to keep at least \$25 million in the city's cash reserves through 2026. Pending approval from City Council, the mayor has proposed the following expenditures: \$30 million for parks, community centers and downtown parking deck repairs; \$29 million to upgrade technology, increase cybersecurity and ensure the rainy day fund doesn't dip below \$25 million through 2026; \$25 million for housing rehabilitation and building grants; \$25 million to replace lead service lines, upgrade water mains and add to the Akron Cares Utility Bill Relief grant program; \$24 million for small-business loans, support for entrepreneurs, assistance for industries hit by COVID-19, direct help to the downtown economy and funds to boost job readiness/access/employment services and beef up the Vacant Building Registry, which polices and tears down blighted commercial structures; \$20 million to reduce community and youth violence through employment programs and training, support for ongoing initiatives, more recreational assets for teens and young adults and combating gun violence.

HUD awards millions to Stark County, Canton (April 2021)

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has awarded \$3.22 million to Stark County and \$2.57 million Canton, through the supplemental HOME Investment Partnerships Program to address homelessness and housing instability. It's one of two HUD allocations related to homelessness resulting from the American Rescue Plan Act; HUD will soon announce the allocation of funding for emergency vouchers for people experiencing and at-risk of homelessness. A total of \$5 billion in supplemental HOME funding was allocated to 651 recipients nationwide. The funding must be used by 2030 for the development of affordable housing, tenant rental assistance, or for services to homeless people or those at risk of becoming homeless.

Akron-based GOJO continues to grow with new production site in Ashland (April 2021)

GOJO Industries recently signed a seven-year lease for a facility on George Road in Ashland that is expected to employ 60 to 90 people by June. GOJO will produce Purell hand sanitizer in the 600,000-square-foot distribution center, formerly the McGraw Hill building. The company has reported a 300% increase in production and shipping for Purell hand sanitizer throughout the pandemic. To keep pace with demand, GOJO has added 2 million square feet of manufacturing space, doubling the number of its plants in North America.

SARTA launches new program to help area employers, workers (April 2021)

The Stark Area Regional Transit Authority (SARTA) is launching a new program designed to help Stark County businesses hire and retain new workers. Participating employers will receive free 31-day fixed-route bus passes for eligible new and current employees to use for travel to and from work. SARTA will restock passes as needed and work with employers to coordinate the program and ensure its success.

Barberton WiFi Zone Project Set to Impact over 800 Public Housing Recipients (April 2021)

The Akron Metropolitan Housing Authority (AMHA) and Building For Tomorrow (BFT) ConnectHome Akron Initiative is bringing no cost, quality internet service to underserved communities in Barberton through their ongoing Community WiFi Zone project. The \$153,000 Barberton WiFi Zone Project is a collaborative effort between AMHA, the Barberton Community Foundation, Barberton City Schools, and the City of Barberton. The Barberton WiFi Zone project will impact 463 children and 329 adults living in 272 AMHA Public Housing Units at both Van Buren Homes and Crimson Terrace. The Barberton WiFi Zone is a part of an ongoing AMHA WiFi Zone Initiative throughout Summit County. In September, the housing authority launched its first two WiFi Zones at Stephanie Keys Towers in Stow and Pinewood Garden in Twinsburg. It is currently on track to complete service to the Paul E. Belcher Senior Apartments in Akron, and Edgewood Village in Akron.

Massillon's Duncan Plaza remodel about 75% done (April 2021)

The remodeling of Duncan Plaza in Massillon is about 75% complete. The \$1.34 million revitalization project will accommodate more than 1,000 with seating and green space for live music and entertainment. The plaza will include a new amphitheater, which will be the new home for Massillon's Summer Concert Series. City officials are hoping to unveil the plaza in May.

JobsOhio investing \$50M in part ownership of startups (April 2021)

JobsOhio will invest \$50 million this year in taking ownership stakes in start-up companies. The JobsOhio Growth Capital program aims to help fledgling businesses, particularly in health care and technology sectors, attract funding while making a profit that JobsOhio can invest in future companies. The approach is similar to venture capital, a style of private investing that makes bets on small companies, hoping the stakes become more valuable after the company grows. JobsOhio officials say the new program fits with their goal of supporting start-up companies and promoting innovation that can lead to economic development. The state through JobsOhio also has launched "innovation districts" in Cleveland, Columbus and Cincinnati that aim to leverage research from the three cities' universities and

hospitals into jobs. In 2020, JobsOhio invested \$47 million in six companies suffering financial difficulties due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Through the program, JobsOhio will not contribute more than 20% of funding, and will partner with organizations like JumpStart to propose deals and develop the terms.

Athersys signs lease for Stow expansion (April 2021)

Biomedical technology firm Athersys Inc. confirmed its plans to expand into Stow, but the timeline and use of its new space are still being determined. Athersys signed a 10-year lease on a 210,000-square-foot industrial building in Fogg Corporate Properties' Seasons Business Park. Athersys is receiving a 2.484%, 10-year tax credit from the Ohio Tax Credit Authority for the expansion, which requires the company to maintain operations in Stow for at least 13 years. Athersys is expected to create up to 400 full-time jobs in Stow, generating \$34.8 million in new annual payroll. Athersys indicated it will move to Stow before the end of 2021.

North Canton launches new plan to revamp downtown (April 2021)

The City of North Canton is embarking on a new downtown revitalization plan. City Council has introduced legislation that would create five new zoning districts along Main Street. If approved, the multi-part legislation would replace the existing Main Street Business District and establish five zoning areas along that commercial corridor — Main Street Center, Main Street North, Main Street South, Main Street North Gateway and Main Street South Gateway. The plan aims to improve walkability, attract young professionals and their families, create and maintain aesthetics, and attract private investment. Council approved sending the multi-part legislation to the Planning Commission, which will consider it and make recommendations. Council will hold meetings to discuss the plan in detail.

Chance for new life at Akron's Chapel Hill Mall gives hope to nearby neighborhoods, businesses (April 2021)

The planned conversion of the former Chapel Hill Mall into a multi-use business park under new owner Industrial Commercial Properties (ICP) has people optimistic for the site's future and for the surrounding neighborhoods and businesses in Akron, Cuyahoga Falls, and Tallmadge. Last week, ICP announced it planned to convert the 829,000-square foot mall into a multi-use campus with construction of new buildings. Akron officials believe turning the long-neglected Chapel Hill Mall into a diverse business park should benefit the surrounding neighborhoods and businesses. A business park with a mix of such things as light industrial, warehousing and other businesses, including office space, could create significant job opportunities. A redevelopment agreement with the city calls for ICP to spend \$6 million in exterior and interior renovations and improvements on the 60-acre property within six months of the purchase. City Council members said ICP may be spending up to \$20 million on the project, including purchase costs.

Cuyahoga Falls moving forward on Merriman Valley Master Plan (April 2021)

The cities of Akron and Cuyahoga Falls are collaborating on a Merriman Valley Master Plan. The cities will contract with Farr Associates to prepare a study and master plan for the Merriman Valley and Schumacher Planning Areas. The amount being spent on the contract is capped at \$200,000. Cuyahoga Falls and Akron will split the cost, but Cuyahoga Falls is serving as the fiscal agent for the process. Both cities will use Community Development Block Grant monies to fund the project. The master plan being developed is the result of discussions that occurred with area residents who objected to residential developments approved in the Valley area in 2018 and 2019. Last year and earlier this year, the same group of residents objected to a plan to build 197 townhomes on the former Riverwoods Golf Course. Akron City Council in February approved rezoning the golf course to allow the homes to be constructed. As they objected to the plan, the residents formed a group called PreserveTheValley.com. Farr Associates intends to start the master plan process in April and finish it in early 2022. The planning process will include workshop meetings known as charrettes to solicit community input.

Employers making jobs 'as enticing as possible,' but 'Help Wanted' pleas going unanswered (May 2021)

Widespread “help wanted” signs show the economy in Northeast Ohio as well as the rest of the United States is recovering from the damage of the COVID-19 pandemic. Employers in a wide range of industries are hiring in Northeast Ohio, but many businesses are having trouble filling openings. Local as well as national figures show increasing numbers of people with jobs, but those numbers remain below pre-pandemic levels. Despite numerous surveys and related data showing strong hiring demand, just 266,000 new jobs were added in April across the U.S. when nearly a million new jobs had been expected. This slowing occurred even as states eased COVID restrictions and vaccinations rates increased. Many economists anticipate job growth will average 500,000 new jobs a month for the remainder of 2021, consistent with jobs numbers seen in February. Hiring continues to be difficult, and employers are exploring ways to make offers as enticing possible, with more competitive pay, benefits, and incentives. For a number of reasons, many jobless individuals are not actively seeking employment. Many need to stay at home to care for children or elderly parents, others fear contracting COVID-19 in a workplace, and others claim they can earn more on unemployment. Governor Mike DeWine announced that Ohio would stop offering the additional \$300 per week on June 26 for those who lost their job because of the pandemic.

177 Canton businesses share \$1.17 million from COVID relief program (May 2021)

The City of Canton has distributed about \$1.17 million in grants to 177 small businesses through COVID-19 relief programs. Businesses with 25 or fewer full-time employees could apply for grants of up to \$10,000 through The Canton CARES Small Business Grant Program. The program was funded through the city’s CARES Act allocation, Community Development Block Grant funds, and the Economic and Community Development Institute (ECDI). ECDI was given \$150,000 of the state CARES Act money to administer the Canton CARES Small Business Grant Program. ECDI and the Stark County Minority Business Association each received a portion of \$20,000 in CDBG funds to administer those grants. In partnership with the city, the Stark County Minority Business Association (SCMBA) distributed \$70,000 of the CDBG funds to 14 minority-owned businesses. Those businesses were part of the inaugural Enhancing Resources for All (ERA) program, which involved business training and mentorship over the past several months. The SCMBA plans to seek other grant funds and host the program every year.

Ohio to drop \$300 in extra jobless benefits (May 2021)

Governor DeWine announced on May 13 that jobless Ohioans will no longer be given an extra \$300 a week in federal pandemic unemployment benefits starting June 26. The measure is being implemented to encourage jobless individuals to return to the workforce. DeWine said Ohioans have time to get vaccinated before the end of June.

Minerva Dairy prepares youths for post-high school careers (May 2021)

Minerva Dairy has instituted a youth apprenticeship program with Minerva, Carrollton, and United High Schools. The apprenticeship program prepares students for a full-time career at Minerva Dairy or elsewhere. Hours vary and apprentices are paid \$12 an hour. Many student workers are from the FFA programs in their respective schools. Minerva Dairy hopes to see some of the high school workers eventually go into management or become shift supervisors.

Updated housing strategy goes after bad landlords, focuses on struggling neighborhoods (May 2021)

The City of Akron has updated its housing strategy. The strategy will push for private and public investment in working-class neighborhoods that have yet to benefit from Akron's housing revival. Planning to Grow Akron 2.0 — an update on the first version from 2017 — includes better housing code enforcement, stiffer fines for absentee landlords, smoother zoning and permitting processes, a landlord-tenant council, a comprehensive strategy for homelessness by 2022, a housing trust fund to help with home improvements, and a comprehensive review of every vacant property and all 84,000 residential

structures in the city. The city has also pledged to continue supporting nonprofit organizations like East Akron Neighborhood Development Corp., The Well CDC, Akron Civic Commons and the Knight Foundation to stabilize housing and neighborhoods. Starting with specific portions of Goodyear Heights, Kenmore, North Hill and West Akron, the City aims to couple private investment and philanthropy with public infrastructure projects and new policies that would encourage lenders, developers and residents to invest in functionally broken housing markets. The City will explore the creation of a housing trust fund to assist new home construction and rehabilitation, as well as gap financing programs. The city also wants to encourage the historic designation of neighborhoods, which allows developers to apply for tax credits, and the adaptive reuse of old buildings. New zoning would allow more mixing of retail and residential, especially in middle neighborhoods. The city is planning to work more collaboratively with the Summit County Land Bank on the acquisition and reuse of the thousands of vacant Akron properties the two entities have come to own after a decade of aggressively demolishing homes after the housing crisis. The city also plans to form a landlord-tenant commission and increase enforcement to heighten compliance and address registry of rental properties. The Planning To Grow Akron 2.0 report calls for better marketing of tax abatements.

Aultman breaks ground on new Timken Family Cancer Center (May 2021)

On May 5, Aultman Hospital broke ground on the \$28 million Timken Family Cancer Center. The Center includes the renovation of 13,270 square feet of existing space and a 45,000 square-foot addition. New features include a central entrance and patient drop-off; new support systems to make it easier for patients and caregivers to navigate the hospital; redesigned care areas aimed at privacy and improved treatment; and family respite areas and a healing garden designed to provide wellness and comfort to patients and their loved ones.

NE Ohio's economic recovery pace stepping up, although job growth still lags (May 2021)

The region's economy is showing a quicker than anticipated recovery from the slump created by the coronavirus pandemic, according to new data from Team NEO and observations by economists. Stronger consumer spending, apparently helped by the arrival of stimulus checks, boosted retail sales in March. Jobless claims also have declined, as unemployment is closer to pre-pandemic levels. Despite a recovery of the region's gross domestic product, job creation seems to be lagging. According to Team NEO, Northeast Ohio's GDP, which is the value of goods and services produced in region, should fully recover and grow by 4% over 2020. Nationally, GDP is expected to grow by 5% over 2020. Employment in Northeast Ohio is expected to grow 1.7%; employment levels may not fully recover until 2025. While claims indicate that unemployment is high, business surveys and employers contend companies are struggling to fill open jobs. Team NEO expects three employment sectors — leisure and entertainment, real estate, government — are expected to remain below pre-pandemic levels. The oil and gas industry, as well as mining, are expected to see the most job growth. Job recovery will also be largely dependent on how quickly entertainment and recreational activities reopen.

TimkenSteel agrees to sell Chinese subsidiary (May 2021)

TimkenSteel Corp. announced it has signed an agreement to sell its Chinese subsidiary, TimkenSteel (Shanghai) Corp. Ltd., to Daido Steel (Shanghai) Co. Ltd. for approximately \$7 million in cash. The deal will make Diado a key authorized distributor of TimkenSteel products in China. It is anticipated the sale will close in the third quarter once customary reviews and due diligence have been completed.

International mulch manufacturer eyes vacant Suffield Township factory (May 2021)

Portage County Commissioners on Thursday approved a Community Reinvestment Area (CRA) agreement for Oldcastle Lawn & Garden at the old Trelleborg site on Route 43, near the Portage/Stark county border. Oldcastle is an international firm that makes mulch and soil for big box hardware stores. The 10-year CRA agreement gives Oldcastle a 50-percent tax abatement on \$2.2 million in improvements planned at the site. The total investment in the project is estimated at \$5.5 million. The company plans to

close a purchase deal on the property on April 30. The development will bring 40 full-time jobs over three years, most of those in the first year. The Portage Development Board is working with JobsOhio to get funding for environmental clean-up costs of the site.

New role for old tire factory: Apartments planned in former B.F. Goodrich plant in Akron (May 2021)

Canal Place in Akron, formerly the B.F. Goodrich factory, will be redeveloped into 139 studio, one- and multi-bedroom apartments, aimed predominantly at young professionals working for nearby employers such as Akron Children's Hospital, GOJO Industries, and others. The \$40 million residential redevelopment project will gut and rebuild much of the large interiors of Canal Place buildings 10-17 that run along South Main Street. The apartments could be available as early as this fall. Developer Osborne Capital is also to add a boutique grocer or restaurant in ground-floor space in the northeast corner of Building 10, across the street from GOJO. Osborne indicates it will take into 2022 to more completely build out the site. The project is part of the ongoing reinvention for Canal Place, which since the demise of B.F. Goodrich has been repurposed for mixed-use office, commercial and industrial ventures that currently include two popular brewpubs. Osborne also has plans to buy and convert another big Canal Place building off West Bartges Street into 100 apartments, but that hinges on whether the project gets state historic tax credits later this year. Osborne is also redeveloping the 149-acre Rosemont Country Club in Fairlawn, which closed in 2020. The Canal Place work is among the latest redevelopments bringing new, repurposed living space to downtown Akron. Other apartment conversions in the core downtown further north on Main Street include The Bowery project and the nearby former Law building now called "The 159."

State could kill municipal broadband services such as FairlawnGig, critics fear (June 2021)

The Ohio Senate's budget includes a provision that would limit municipal broadband services. Fairlawn, Hudson, Wadsworth and more than 30 other municipalities currently have municipally-owned broadband utilities. The language in the state's proposal stipulates municipalities may provide broadband services only to subscribers in unserved areas. Among other things, the language also prohibits municipalities from aggregating federal funds to fund and operate a broadband service. Opponents say the measure would impose excessive requirements upon a governmental-owned and operated broadband service from existing, growing and providing services to their residents and businesses. Eighteen other states have severely restricted or banned municipal broadband service. The language appears aimed at protecting private broadband providers. The provision was among other nonbudgetary items inserted into the budget that the state Senate approved June 9. The Ohio House approved its own version of the budget in April. The two chambers have until June 30 to agree on a common document.

New ATM line now shipping from Diebold Nixdorf factory in Hoover District (June 2021)

Diebold Nixdorf has started assembling its newest automated teller machines at the company's production center in the Hoover District. The first two DN Series drive-up ATMs destined for customers in North America were shipped at the end of May. Dozens more have since moved through production and out to customers. The company has been assembling DN Series machines at its facility in Paderborn, Germany, and earlier this year shifted some production to Stark County to be close to customers in North America. Diebold Nixdorf opened its production site in the Hoover District two years ago. Diebold is adding 178,000 square feet to the existing 182,000 square feet for engineering, research and development, logistics, and warehousing. The facility will serve as Diebold Nixdorf's production site for North America. The facility was assembling ATMs before adding the DN Series. Physical security equipment and pneumatic tubes used at bank drive-up windows, along with some retail checkout equipment also are being assembled at the site. About 100 people work at the factory. The company is hiring as demand grows for DN Series ATMs. Diebold Nixdorf expects to have more than 400 employees assigned to the Hoover District facility once the addition is completed. Another 800 employees will be assigned to the corporate office in Hudson.

Lordstown Motors warns money shortage imperils future of Northeast Ohio startup (June 2021)

Lordstown Motors Corp., which is developing the Endurance electric pickup truck in the former General Motors Lordstown complex, needs substantially more money to stay in business. Without additional money coming in, there is "substantial doubt" about Lordstown Motors' operations continuing in Northeast Ohio, the company disclosed recently. Lordstown Motors says it is seeking additional funding, including a federal loan. The company reported it lost \$125.2 million for the quarter ending March 31, while having \$587 million in cash and cash equivalents on hand. Lordstown Motors also faces substantial competition from numerous other automakers that are already making and selling electric vehicles, with more under development. General Motors last built the Chevrolet Cruze there and opted to shutter the plant once Cruze production stopped. The factory complex has been an economic mainstay of the region since the 1960s, employing thousands of people at its peak.

JumpStart launches Stark Community Challenge (June 2021)

JumpStart has launched its Stark Community Challenge, offering a share of \$20,000 to innovative teams that can develop opportunities to solve some of biggest issues facing Stark County. The initiative's goal is to generate innovative growth in the community, particularly the development of ideas into products that benefit the community. JumpStart is fielding proposals now and hopes to select a group of semifinalists for the competition by the end of June. JumpStart is based in Cleveland and provides training and capital to help tech entrepreneurs and small business develop. The agency partners with private, public and philanthropic groups with the goals of building a bright economic future for the communities it serves. The Stark Community Challenge will focus on four areas: community health, quality places, access to funding, and sports or esports. JumpStart hopes to see three to four entrepreneurs and experts form teams to attack an issue in one of those areas. The teams will be vying for a share of \$20,000 in prize money, divided equally among projects in each of the four categories.

Goodyear completes purchase of Cooper Tire (June 2021)

Cooper Tire & Rubber Co. is now a subsidiary of Goodyear. Goodyear completed the purchase on June 7. The merger is intended to solidify Goodyear as the largest U.S.-based tire maker with its purchase of Cooper, previously the fifth-largest North American tire maker. It also bolsters Goodyear's product offerings across the globe, including doubling its presence in China.

Suffield packaging company plans move to Maplecrest development in Brimfield (June 2021)

Hamrick Packaging Systems will move from Suffield Township into the Maplecrest Industrial Park in Brimfield Township. Portage County Commissioners approved an enterprise zone agreement for Hamrick, which plans to build a new plant behind the Meijer store. The enterprise zone will abate sixty percent of eligible real property improvements for 10 years. The company plans to invest \$6.8 million in real property improvements, as well as \$4.645 million in personal property. Forty-seven jobs will be maintained, and the company plans to add 15 full time and two part time jobs over the next three years, bringing its total payroll to \$4.76 million. Hamrick packages items in semi-rigid containers. The 65,000-square-foot building in Brimfield will include 50,000 square feet of manufacturing space, plus offices. Hamrick expects to move in about one year.

Redesigned Duncan Plaza start of renaissance for downtown Massillon (June 2021)

The City of Massillon opened the renovated Duncan Plaza on May 27. Duncan Plaza was constructed in 1976 and honors James Duncan, a founder of Massillon who donated the property. The \$1.394 million construction project, which began last September, features an amphitheater, seating areas, landscaping, solar lighting, and a walking trail. The plaza can accommodate more than 1,000 people. The plaza hosts numerous city events throughout the year. The city received \$750,000 in state funding and \$460,000 in funding from several foundations. Massillon contributed \$80,000 in general fund monies and \$104,020 from tax-increment financing and streetscape funds.

House passes bill to let work from home employees seek refunds for 2021 commuter taxes (June 2021)

The Ohio House passed House Bill 157 on May 26, which will permit people working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic to seek refunds for income taxes they paid to the cities where their offices are located. HB 157, which passed on party lines, would let Ohioans who live in one city but work in another file for municipal income tax refunds if they worked from home instead of at the office for all of 2021. Current law wouldn't allow refunds until 30 days after the end of Ohio's state of emergency orders, likely sometime in late August. The bill now heads to the Ohio Senate for debate. The Greater Ohio Policy Center, which advocates for investments in cities and towns, estimated in September 2020 that Ohio's six largest cities receive 88% of their funding from income taxes and could lose \$306 million if their commuter revenue disappeared. Cities and their advocates say the best and easiest solution is to stick to the original plan and let them keep collecting commuter taxes until the state of emergency order ends. That's the plan they used when they set their budgets.

Summit County adds more than 37,000 jobs from depths of the pandemic a year ago (June 2021)

Summit County had 255,900 people employed in April, or 37,200 more than in April 2020, during the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and the forced business shut-down. There were 14,000 people counted as unemployed last month in the county compared to 39,800 in April 2020. April 2020 marked the lowest point for jobs during the pandemic in the county and the state. Per the Ohio Department of Jobs and Family Services, the Summit County unemployment rate in April was 5.2%, down from 5.7% in March and down from a pandemic peak of 15.4% in April 2020. Akron's jobless rate fell to 6.6% last month, down from 6.9% in March and 17.6% a year ago. The unemployment rate in Cuyahoga Falls for April was 4.7%, down from 5.8% in March and 16.1% in April 2020. Ohio had a comparable seasonally unadjusted unemployment rate of 4.7% in April, while the United States had a seasonally unadjusted rate of 5.7%. Across the NEFCO region, Stark County had an unemployment rate of 5.2% in April, 5.4% in March, and 15.6% in April 2020. The City of Canton had 6.6% unemployment in April, 6.5% in March, and 17% in April 2020. Portage had 4.3%, 4.8%, and 13.7% for the same time period; Wayne County had 3%, 3.3%, and 11.5%, respectively.

Canton City Council grants \$200,000 for home improvement programs (June 2021)

Canton City Council granted \$200,000 to the Community Building Partnership (CBP) for the continuation of its neighborhood revitalization program. The grant was an \$50,000 increase from 2020 and is funded through the city's Issue 13 tax revenue for neighborhoods. The grant will allow CBP to offer ten-percent rebates for qualifying exterior home improvements and works with the city Building Department to assist low-income households with exterior code violations by contracting with Project Rebuild.

Akron Children's Hospital buying former Austen BioInnovation building (June 2021)

Akron Children's Hospital is purchasing the historic downtown Akron building that previously housed the Austen BioInnovation Institute and until recently was going to be the new headquarters of Akron-based materials testing company Smithers. The hospital already has facilities and offices in the northern downtown building. The sale involves Summit County (the building owner), hospital, city, and the Development Finance Authority of Summit County, which has offices there. The hospital will have an option to buy an adjacent building also owned by the county. Akron Children's could use some of the building as office space for some of its non-clinical employees. The hospital has an opportunity to immediately occupy the third floor and plans to renovate floors 4 to 6 in upcoming years. The project will include demolition of the large open-air structure that used to house and protect Akron trolleys, reconstruction of the parking lots, and the construction of a retaining wall. The \$4.5 million sale price is the appraised value of the building. Providing all the groups involved approve, the sale is expected to close on Feb. 28, 2022. \$1.8 million in site remediation work is to be completed prior to the closing.

Breeze Airways includes Akron-Canton Airport among 16 initial airports to serve (June 2021)

The Akron-Canton Airport (CAK) is among the 16 locations that will be served by Breeze Airways, a new budget airline from the founder of JetBlue. Breeze Airways will begin service on May 27 with flights concentrated in the southeastern U.S. Breeze will offer service from Akron-Canton and Columbus. Non-stop service starts in June from Akron-Canton to Tampa, followed by service to Charleston and New Orleans in July. CAK was severely impacted by the pandemic and has been working with state officials and JobsOhio on efforts to bring airline service back. Officials have been talking with Breeze since the airline's formation was announced in 2018.

City of Akron awarded \$100K Equitable Economic Mobility Initiative grant from National League of Cities (July 2021)

Akron was one of eight American cities awarded a National League of Cities (NLC) grant to tackle economic disparities, which increased particularly along racial lines during the pandemic. Akron was awarded \$100,000 in technical support through the NLC Equitable Economic Mobility Initiative. The 15-month assistance program will help the city and its partners in the fight against infant mortality to develop and implement strategies that help pregnant women and mothers overcome barriers to work, including transportation and childcare. The project is part of the Full Term First Birthday Greater Akron initiative, a local collaborative of public and private organizations formed in 2017 to reduce infant mortality rates, which are worse in parts of Akron than anywhere in Ohio, particularly among Black families. The \$100,000 grant will help the Full Term First Birthday collaboration fill the gap by providing workforce training, interviewing skills, work attire, \$200 gift cards for completing the program, childcare, transportation and more.

Canton eyes plan to revitalize Shorb area neighborhood (July 2021)

Canton is considering a revitalization plan for the Shorb area neighborhood in northwest part of the city. City officials have identified this neighborhood as distressed, with high rates of crime and residency turnover. The Neighborhood Development Master Plan Redevelopment Strategy aims to make the area safe, equitable, and economically sustainable, and includes new housing, retail outlets, and an arts corridor. According to the study, the neighborhood has 4,333 residents and 2,135 households, 877 rental units, and 319 vacant properties. Officials indicate the plan does not propose to displace any residents. The plan will be presented to the City Planning Commission and then City Council for approval.

In Carroll County and elsewhere in rural Ohio, many still lack broadband access (July 2021)

The "digital divide" across the United States is due largely to two factors: a lack of internet infrastructure in the rural areas of the country and the relatively high cost of broadband that has made the service unaffordable in many urban areas. Broadband access is available to at least 92-percent of residents in 45 of Ohio's 88 counties, yet no more than 33-percent of households actually have high-speed access. In Ohio, 6.2-percent of residents don't have adequate broadband infrastructure and 58.2-percent live in areas that have only one internet provider. In Stark County, 99-percent of households could get broadband but only 39-percent actually have it. In the rural counties south and east of Stark, broadband access is more scarce. According to Microsoft data, subscriber rates are 37-percent in Tuscarawas, 31-percent in Columbiana, 30-percent in Wayne, 23-percent in Holmes, and 18-percent in Carroll. Summit County has a subscriber rate of 45-percent. High-speed internet is a necessity, yet not all Ohioans enjoy this privilege. Private carriers largely provide the infrastructure, and continue to expand to areas, which are denser and more profitable; this affects rural, economically distressed areas of the state disproportionately.

Canton, SARTA looking into light rail between HOF and downtown (July 2021)

The City of Canton and the Stark Area Regional Transit Authority (SARTA) are seeking a \$25,000 grant to fund a feasibility study of a light-rail line between the Pro Football Hall of Fame and downtown Canton. The Hall of Fame Express (HOFX) is estimated to cost \$25-50 million, 80-percent of which

could be financed by the Federal Transit Administration. The HOFX could be used by tourists, visitors and employees to more easily access the Hall of Fame and downtown Canton. The backbone of the service would be the railroad line owned by the Akron METRO Regional Transit Authority that goes from Akron to Canton. The track runs on the eastern end of Stadium and Monument parks to Tuscarawas Street. The Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad, which offers the Polar Express train ride, has long used that track. The proposed light rail service could include stops at the McKinley Monument and Presidential Library and Museum, the Federal Building, City Hall, and the Stark State downtown campus. Potential future phases could extend to Belden Village and the Akron-Canton Airport.

Renkert Building to be transformed (July 2021)

The historic Renkert Building in downtown will receive \$5 million in Ohio historic preservation tax credits to be transformed into a hotel, event space and restaurant. The project is one of 31 statewide to share \$35.9 million in new tax credits from the Ohio Development Services Agency. The 10-story building originally constructed in 1914 has sat vacant since 2017. The Downtown Canton Land Bank bought it at auction for \$924,000 in December 2017. Though the land bank was initially eyeing the building for apartments, developers now intend to build a 92-room hotel, event space, restaurant, bar and commercial spaces in the building and a neighboring addition. The total estimated project cost is \$35.5 million. Westlake-based Ceres Enterprises LLC is leading the project and working with Cleveland-based Sandvick Architects to design the new hotel. The developer plans to maintain the marble-lined corridors and historic staircase, repair the windows and clean the brick exterior. The developers intend to transform the first floor into a ballroom-style event space for conferences and weddings, while the surface parking lot north of the building will be turned into a two-deck parking garage. Ceres also plans to build a two-story addition along Market Avenue across from Centennial Plaza with retail on the first floor and restaurant space on the second floor. Construction could begin in mid-2022 and wrap up in 2024.

Department of Justice investigating Lordstown Motors (July 2021)

The U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) is now investigating startup electric pickup truck maker Lordstown Motors (LM). LM previously disclosed earlier this year the Securities and Exchange Commission began investigating the company, including looking at claims for pre-orders of its Endurance pickup truck, and is cooperating with the SEC. The Wall Street Journal previously reported that five senior executives, including the former CFO, sold significant personal stock holdings in the company in February just before Lordstown Motors reported a significant quarterly loss. In June, the LM board fired founder and chief executive Steve Burns and the chief financial officer, Julio Rodriguez. The company in a separate news release the same day said it had made inaccurate statements tied to non-binding pre-orders of the Endurance pickup truck, which it is marketing to fleet operators. The company is hoping to begin producing the all-electric Endurance in September. The full-size pickup features an innovative design that places an electric motor in each of its four wheels. LM says it needs a significant infusion of capital to not only ramp up production of the Endurance but to stay in business. The company is talking with funding sources, including possible partnerships, and is seeking a federal loan.

Former Beacon Journal building could become apartments as part of \$31.6 million project (July 2021)

The former Akron Beacon Journal building may be converted into apartments or offices. The Ohio Development Services Agency awarded nearly \$3.2 million in Ohio Historic Preservation Tax Credits to help pay for rehabilitation costs. Total cost to rebuild the interior into residential space is estimated at \$31.6 million. The proposal includes demolishing a large addition from the 1980s to accommodate parking while leaving intact the original 1930s-era building at 44 E. Exchange Street. The tax credits were awarded based on the residential project; office space is not eligible. The owner and developer indicated he will decide by September how the redevelopment project will proceed.

State makes \$100 million available to restaurants (July 2021)

The state of Ohio is offering \$100 million in grants to eligible bars, taverns, nightclubs, restaurants, coffee shops, cafeterias, caterers, buffets, snack and juice bars and food trucks, which were impacted by the pandemic. Grant awards of \$10,000, \$20,000 or \$30,000 are available to restaurants which have operated since at least December 1, 2019. The size of the grant depends on a restaurant's losses in 2020, and may be used on a range of expenses, including rent, utilities, personal protective equipment and employee salaries. Grants through the program are available to any restaurant or restaurant chain that experienced a 10-percent or greater revenue drop in 2020 and are in good standing with state regulators. Other grant programs are available to music venues, hotels and small businesses that opened in 2020. The funding comes from a COVID aid package signed by Governor DeWine signed in May.

Portage business investment continues in 2020 (July 2021)

The Portage Development Board (PDB) had a productive 2020, despite the pandemic. The PDB helped create or retain more than 1,300 jobs through 13 projects that were completed during 2020, according to PDB 2020 Annual Report. The PDB supported more than \$293 million in new investment during 2020. Of the more than 1,300 jobs retained or created, 476 were associated with The Davey Tree Expert Company and 503 for Rovisys in Aurora. Davey Tree is constructing a 38,000-square-foot addition to its headquarters building in Ken, which will eventually create 70 more jobs. One of the largest projects was the renovation of Simplay3's facility in Streetsboro, which is roughly doubling in size. Other 2020 projects included SpringSeal (54 jobs created or retained), Bulten North America (56 new jobs), Menards, (90 new jobs), DermaMed Coatings (eight new or retained jobs), Four Seasons Manufacturing Co. (12 created or retained jobs), Robeck Fluid Power Co. (63 new or retained jobs), Simplay3 (97 new or retained jobs), Premalux LLC (13 new or retained jobs), Alacriant (10 new or retained jobs) and the Route 43 North LLC, the speculative building by Geis Company.

Municipal broadband services safe (July 2021)

After hundreds of emails from municipal broadband customers and lobbying from local officials, language that would have limited local governments from offering broadband service has been removed from Ohio's final budget agreement. Public officials feared the language in Ohio's proposed budget could have put municipal broadband internet services — such as FairlawnGig and more than 30 other municipal broadband providers in Ohio, including in Hudson and Wadsworth — out of business. Local officials attributed the removal to a grassroots campaign that they said included more than 500 individual emails from FairlawnGig customers and nearly 20 city proclamations and letters from mayors. The language, inserted without prior public discussion during state Senate deliberations on Ohio's two-year budget, drew condemnation from numerous sources, with many questioning constitutionality and impact on home rule. The language in the state's proposal said in part municipalities could have provided broadband services only to subscribers in unserved areas. Critics argued the inserted language appeared aimed at protecting private broadband providers.

Breeze Airways lands at Akron-Canton Airport (July 2021)

Breeze Airways made its first landing at Akron-Canton Airport on June 26. The Embraer E195 jet brought carried 75 passengers on its maiden trip to the airport from Tampa. The Akron-Canton to Tampa connection is only the beginning. Next month, Breeze will add Charleston and New Orleans to the local airport. And those involved with bringing Breeze said they hope it will lead to even more flights to more places in the future.

Kent State plans 40,000-square-foot addition to Aeronautics and Engineering Building (July 2021)

With increased enrollment, Kent State University's Aeronautics & Engineering Building will be undergoing a \$19 million, 41,449-square-foot addition beginning in the fall. The university hopes to move into the new addition located just east of the university library along Summit Street in the spring of 2023. On the upper two levels, plans include classrooms, instructional labs, research labs, and faculty offices. Additional classrooms and more instructional and research labs will be located on the bottom floor.

Ohio cities set to lose taxes from those working at home (July 2021)

Akron and other Ohio cities could lose millions in revenue starting next month when commuters working from home start paying income taxes where they live instead of where they would normally work. Cities have yet to determine how much revenue is at stake, yet some cities could lose millions. There are a lot of unknown variables, including how many commuters will be asked to return to the office. Higher-paying industries like the finance sector can more easily ask workers to stay home, which saves companies on office expenses, while workers in restaurant, manufacturing and hospitality sectors have had no choice but to report to work. The Ohio Senate is now considering House Bill 157, which would allow commuters to seek a rebate on income taxes paid in 2021. Republicans, including those currently backing House Bill 157, say the state should have rescinded the pandemic tax loophole when the stay-at-home order ended more than a year ago. Democrats, who generally represent urban areas, call the elimination of the pandemic tax provision an assault on the budgets of city police and fire departments. Larger urban areas fear they will not be able to fund basic city services. Governor DeWine ended Ohio's state of emergency on June 18, which means cities will not be able to tax commuter incomes if they are still working from home on or after July 18. While Akron stands to lose millions, suburban cities and villages and school districts with municipal income tax levies could see an influx of revenue. State law does not allow townships and counties to collect income taxes.

Stark State to expand Akron welding center, close Barberton satellite (July 2021)

Stark State College will close its Barberton satellite center in 2023 and expand its welding technology facilities at its Akron campus. The move will concentrate Stark State's Summit County operations to its Akron location and bring an end to the Barberton satellite established in 2013. Stark State's board of trustees approved a contract for design services in mid-May, and the \$1.4 million renovation is scheduled for completion in April. The community satellite on Norton Avenue in Barberton offers primarily welding-related classes and labs. It has 17 welding booths, which will be relocated to the Akron campus. Steinmetz said the renovated center will update the college's facilities in a field that is consistently in high demand with students and employers. The Akron welding program currently has 52 students. The Barberton building used by Stark State is owned by the Barberton Community Foundation, which is exploring its options once the community college leaves. The building was constructed as an armory, making the 16,500-square-foot structure ideal for heavy equipment. The foundation hopes to attract another educational institution when Stark State leaves. The facility could also be reutilized for light industry.

Stark businesses, nonprofits net \$846 million in PPP loans (July 2021)

Stark County businesses and nonprofit organizations received 9,908 Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loans totaling approximately \$846 million. Stark's manufacturing sector received the most money, with loans worth \$158.6 million. Health care and social assistance followed at \$144.7 million, and the construction industry came third, receiving \$104.4 million in loans. Most loans, 1,434, went to a miscellaneous "other" category. The 100 largest loans, or the top one percent, accounted for about 28.5 percent of the total money sent to the county. Thirty-nine percent of the loans ranged between \$10,001 and \$25,000 and 22 percent of the loans were below \$10,000. Meanwhile, 128 loans cleared \$1 million. The Alfred Nickles Bakery in Navarre and the North Canton-based Schroer Group, which operates pharmacy services businesses, a food service company and a health equipment purchasing group, each received \$10 million. Hilscher Clarke Enterprises, a Canton-based electric contracting company, received \$8.47 million. The Belden Brick Company received \$5.37 million. The PPP loans helped companies to avoid layoffs, provided hazard pay, and enabled employers laid-off workers.

Five things the census tells us about the county (August 2021)

The U.S. Census Bureau released the results of the 2020 census on August 12. The statistics show several important trends. Akron's population decreased by more than 4 percent between the 2010 and 2020

census, striking a blow to the city's plan to increase its population to 250,000 by 2050. Akron's population in the 2020 census was 190,469, down 4.3 percent from 199,110 in the 2010 census. Summit County's population also decreased between 2010 and 2020, but only by a quarter of a percent, from 541,781 in 2010 to 540,428 in 2020. Statewide, Ohio's population increased by 2.3 percent, from 11,536,504 in 2010 to 11,799,448 in 2020. The U.S. population increased by 7.4 percent, from 308,745,538 in 2010 to 331,449,281 in 2020.

Reminderville, Twinsburg Township, and Boston Township saw the biggest population increases in Summit County. Reminderville's population increased by nearly 59 percent, from 3,404 residents in 2010 to 5,412 in 2020; Twinsburg Township grew by 36 percent, from 2,828 to 3,857; and Boston Township increased by 10 percent, from 1,272 to 1,401. Macedonia was the fastest-growing city in Summit County, increasing by 8.8 percent. Most of the northern communities increased population. Other communities that saw increases include Boston Heights (1,300 to 1,402, or 7.9 percent), Green (25,699 to 27,475, or 6.9 percent), Copley Township (17,304 to 18,403, or 6.4 percent), Tallmadge (17,537 to 18,394, or 4.9 percent), Richfield Township (6,165 to 6,437, or 4.4 percent), Hudson (22,262 to 23,110, or 3.8 percent), Fairlawn (7,437 to 7,710, or 3.7 percent), Bath Township (9,702 to 10,024, or 3.3 percent), Cuyahoga Falls (49,652 to 51,114, or 2.9 percent), Twinsburg city (18,795 to 19,248, or 2.4 percent), Richfield village (3,648 to 3,729, or 2.2 percent) and Munroe Falls (5,012 to 5,044, or 0.64 percent).

The biggest population decreases in Summit County were in Coventry Township, from 10,945 to 10,238, or -6.5 percent; Peninsula, from 565 to 536, or -5.1 percent; and Barberton, from 26,550 to 25,191, or -5.1 percent. Most of the communities in southern Summit County saw decreases in population. Lakemore (3,068 to 2,926, or -4.6 percent); Northfield Center Township (5,839 to 5,597, or -4.1 percent); Northfield village (3,677 to 3,541, or -3.7 percent); Norton (12,085 to 11,673, or -3.4 percent); Springfield Township (14,644 to 14,162, or -3.3 percent); New Franklin (14,227 to 13,877, or -2.5 percent), Mogadore (2,846 to 2,799, or -1.7 percent), Clinton (1,214 to 1,197, or -1.4 percent), Stow (34,837 to 34,483, or -1 percent), Sagamore Hills Township (10,947 to 10,845, or -0.9 percent), and Silver Lake (2,519 to 2,516, or 0.1 percent).

Asian and Latino/Hispanic communities saw major increases in population in Summit County, while the white population decreased by 8.2 percent. The county saw the largest increase among those who identified as belonging to two or more (165.8 percent) or other (106.7 percent) races, but it remains unclear what those races are. Summit County saw its Asian population nearly double between 2010 and 2020, with an increase of 90.3 percent, since 2010, and its Pacific Islander population surge by 20.3 percent. The county is home to significant communities of refugees from South and Central Asia, including but not limited to Bhutan, Myanmar, Pakistan and Afghanistan. The Hispanic or Latino population, which the census designates as an ethnicity — not a race — grew by 50.2 percent. While the overall 18-and-older population of Summit County decreased by 0.2 percent, the number of Summit County residents under the age of 18 increased by 2.5 percent. The number of Hispanic/Latino people under 18 grew by 57.4 percent since 2010, and the county saw a 264-percent increase in the number of people younger than 18 who identify as belonging to two or more races.

The number of Black people in the county increased by 2.1 percent overall and by 6 percent for under 18 populations. The American Indian population also saw gains, with a 3.4-percent increase in the general population and a 5.3-percent increase for those younger than 18.

Ohio will lose one congressional district because the state's population growth was slower than the national rate. The two districts with the greatest population growth were Rep. Joyce Beatty's 3rd Congressional District (12.3 percent) and Rep. Troy Balderson's 12th Congressional District (12.2 percent), both in central Ohio. Five congressional districts lost population: Rep. Bill Johnson's 6th Congressional District (-4.7 percent); the 11th Congressional District, which is currently vacant after

Marcia Fudge resigned to become secretary of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (-3.9 percent); Rep. Tim Ryan's 13th Congressional District (-3.1 percent); Rep. Marcy Kaptur's 9th Congressional District (-2.3 percent); and Rep. Jim Jordan's 4th Congressional District (-0.7 percent). The first deadline for Ohio lawmakers to pass a 10-year congressional district map is Sept. 30. After that, the seven-member Ohio Redistricting Commission will have a chance to draw the lines. If each step faces bipartisan gridlock, legislators could approve a four-year map.

Jetpack renovating Waltco building, already planning bigger expansion into Tallmadge (August 2021)

Akron company Jetpack is currently renovating the former 83,000-square-foot Waltco building in Tallmadge to house its manufacturing, distribution and fulfillment operations, and the owners are already thinking about further expansion. Jetpack formulates and manufactures dietary supplements and skin care products and provides fulfillment services for e-commerce businesses. According to city officials, Jetpack purchased the vacant building in July and committed to bringing 141 full-time jobs and a \$2.5 million in annual payroll to the city. The company also had plans to add 60 full-time jobs later this year, bringing their payroll up to \$4 million. In addition to the building itself, Jetpack also purchased 4.4 acres across the street, which is currently a parking lot, and has additional land behind its warehouse, which could add another 30,000 square feet. While some jobs will be moving to Tallmadge as early as Sept. 1, Jetpack is retaining its Akron location. Tallmadge jobs will range in skill level and will include manufacturing, warehousing, office and administrative jobs. Warehouse positions will come as soon as the warehouse construction is complete. Jetpack was eligible for and applied for Tallmadge's New Jobs Program, which is a three-year, 50-percent income tax grant.

Hall of Fame Village work moves forward (August 2021)

Construction at the Hall of Fame Village is continuing. A 180-room Tapestry by Hilton hotel will back up against George Halas Drive NW, just south of Fulton Road. The hotel will be connected to an 85,000-square-foot, football-themed water park. Both are set for construction later this year. Two other buildings in the retail promenade totaling 82,000 square feet will be built south of the hotel, leading toward the Constellation Center for Excellence. Construction on the spectator plaza and scoreboard for the Tom Benson Hall of Fame Stadium is complete, while construction of the 75,000-square-foot Constellation building continues on the west end of the stadium.

Myers Industries buys Alliance firm with history of making marketing icons (August 2021)

Akron polymer company Myers Industries has purchased Trilogy Plastics, a \$35 million a year rotational molding company based in Alliance. Rotational molding, also called rotomolding, is a process that heats powdered resins in a mold to create hollow plastic parts. Trilogy manufactured early plastic versions of such marketing icons as the dog "Nipper" for RCA Victor and Planters Mr. Peanut. Terms were not disclosed; Myers said it used its revolving credit facility for the purchase. Trilogy has about 265 employees and two U.S. manufacturing facilities. Trilogy Plastics will be part of Myers' Material Handling Segment and is its second rotomolding purchase in less than a year. The acquisition is expected to unlock growth and expansion opportunities, according to Myers Industries.

Aultman reaches goal for cancer center (August 2021)

Aultman Hospital says its fundraising effort for the Timken Family Cancer Center successfully reached its \$28 million goal. The bulk of the funds came from the Aultman Health Foundation which contributed \$10 million. The Women's Board of Aultman raised \$5 million, and the Timken Foundation, for which the center is named, contributed \$3 million. The remaining \$10 million came from individual donors, local foundations, and businesses. Construction on the center is ongoing, with an expected opening in the summer of 2022.

Stark Community Foundation hands out child poverty grants (August 2021)

The Stark Community Foundation (SCF) has awarded \$430,000 in grants to help fight child poverty in Stark County. The inaugural Protecting Stark's Future grants were awarded to 12 organizations. Protecting Stark's Future, a partnership with the United Way of Greater Stark County, supports collaborative, community-based solutions to reduce child poverty. The effort grew from recent data-driven work and the release of the 2020 study "Protecting Stark's Future: A Call to Coordinate Child Poverty Strategies." The SCF committed to providing one-year planning grants up to \$15,000 per project and one-to-three-year implementation grants up to \$100,000 per project to eligible organizations. For more information, visit www.starkcf.org/child-poverty.

Stark County sees sales tax revenue increase (August 2021)

Stark County has seen impressive growth in its sales tax revenue. The county received \$3.02 million based on sales of taxable goods and services in April, an increase of nearly 45 percent from April 2020 (and 28% higher than in April 2019), according to the monthly financial update presented last week to the Stark County commissioners. For the first seven months of this year, sales tax revenue is up 15.4% compared to the first seven months of 2020. Stark County has a 0.5% sales tax that funds the county's criminal justice agencies. Ohio has a 5.75% sales tax, and the Stark Area Regional Transit Authority has a 0.25% sales tax making the total sales tax rate 6.5%. The county's investment income the first six months of the year sank more than 60% to about \$850,000 due to zero or nearly zero interest rates. Property sales over the first six months of 2021 have been robust. Recorder fees were up about a third to nearly \$886,000. Conveyance fees were up nearly 35 percent to \$3.07 million. The county's casino tax revenue for the second quarter should increase substantially after a 149 percent increase in state casino revenue last month. Casinos did not reopen until June 2020. /

Unemployment rates higher in June in Canton region (August 2021)

Unemployment jumped last month in Stark County and surrounding counties, according to data released this week by the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services. As the workforce grew, so did the number of people without jobs. Stark County's jobless rate increased from 5.3 percent in May to 6.3 percent in June. The number of people in Stark County's workforce increased from 175,600 in May to 178,300 in June, while the number of unemployed people rose to 11,300 compared with 9,300 the previous month. Canton's unemployment rate rose to from 6.9 percent in May to 8.1 percent in June. Massillon had a jobless rate of 6.8% in June, up from 5.7% in May.

Federal grant approved to help lure Houston service back to Akron-Canton Airport (August 2021)

The Akron-Canton Airport has received a \$850,000 federal Small Community Air Service Development Grant to restore air service with George Bush Intercontinental Airport in Houston. The grant will be offered to United Airlines to make up for any loss in revenue as service is resumed. Akron-Canton officials have been working to restore airline service lost during the coronavirus pandemic. When travel declined, airlines redistributed aircraft to larger markets. At one point, airlines were providing only three flights per day from Akron-Canton and the number of passengers using the airport dropped to 10 percent of the normal loads. Last year, the airport began working with area legislators and JobsOhio on a plan that paired local and state dollars to attract airline service. Local municipalities and organizations pledged a combined \$250,000 toward enticing an airline to add or resume service at Akron-Canton, while the state offered additional support.

Akrochem expects growth with Bech Chem purchase (August 2021)

Specialty chemicals and materials company Akrochem is expanding into new industries with the purchase of Houston-based Bech Chem. Akrochem indicated the purchase of Bech Chem will allow it to expand into new markets that include paints, coatings and lubricants. Akrochem provides rubber chemical and compounding materials. was founded in 1929 in Akron and in 2013 relocated its headquarters to Embassy Parkway in Fairlawn. Akrochem also has facilities in Akron, Norton, Stow and in California. Bech Chem's markets include paint and coatings, grease and lubricants, plastics, and chemical processing.

Summit jobless rate hits 2021 high (August 2021)

Summit County's jobless rate rose from 5.5 percent in May to 6.6 percent in June - its highest level this year - according to figures released by the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services. Akron's unemployment rate last month was 8 percent, up from 6.9 percent in May and down from 13.1 percent in June 2020. The jobless rate in Cuyahoga Falls in June was 6 percent, up from 5 percent in May and down from 9.9 percent a year ago. A key jobs figure, the number of people employed in Summit County for the month of June improved slightly from a 21-year low set in 2020. However, the number of people employed in June in Summit County was also the lowest number for 2021; the 6.6 percent unemployment rate was also the high for the year. There were 242,800 people counted as employed in Summit County last month, down 1,900 from 243,900 in May while up 2,100 from 240,700 in June 2020. There were 17,200 people counted as unemployed last month, down from 28,500 in June 2020. The labor force last month was measured at 259,900, down from 269,100 a year ago. The number of people with jobs last month was the second lowest number for June dating back to 2000. The high for the month of June was 282,000 people employed in 2007. There were 268,400 people counted as working in June 2000 and 12,800 people unemployed; the size of the labor force then was 281,200. Unemployment rates rose in all 88 Ohio counties last month. Rates elsewhere in NEFCO region for June, May and June 2020: Portage County: 5.8, 4.5, 8.9; Stark County: 6.3, 5.3, 10; Canton: 8.1, 6.9, 12.4; Wayne County: 4.8, 3.5, 7.5.

State panel preliminarily approves more money to extend U.S. 30 expressway (September 2021)

The Ohio Transportation Review Advisory Council (TRAC) recently approved its draft transportation projects plan for the next four fiscal years. The preliminary transportation funding plan includes \$1.5 million for the U.S. 30 expressway project from Trump Road to State Route 44, an estimate \$123 million project. The U.S. 30 project was the only Stark County project on the list. The funding will cover the final design for the project. TRAC last approved money for the project in November 2019 when it allocated \$2 million for preliminary engineering and design as well as environmental studies. The Regional Transportation Improvement Project (RTIP), whose aim is to extend U.S. 30 to Pennsylvania, has also received an \$18 million BUILD grant from the U.S. Department of Transportation and. The RTIP is also investigating a plan to allow for businesses benefitting from the project to contribute to a voluntary assessment fund, which could help finance the project. The Stark County Area Transportation Study earlier this year committed \$900,000 in federal funding to pay for acquisition of properties in East Canton and Osnaburg Township. The cost of buying roughly seven homes, properties and access to right-of-way could cost \$5 million. The TRAC will vote on the final funding plan on September 22. The public comment period is open now until September 17.

The Village of Reminderville may become a city (September 2021)

Reminderville's population grew from 3,404 residents in 2010 to 5,412 in 2020, according to the recently released U.S. Census. The 59-percent increase will mean the village will become a city. The Ohio Secretary of State will certify population totals and approve the city status.

Green wants a new development district (September 2021)

The City of Green will propose a new development district for 180 acres of vacant land east of Arlington Road. The plan includes establishing a tax increment financing (TIF) incentive district, which will not add new taxes on current residents, businesses and industries. The proposal is consistent with the city's long-range vision for upgrading infrastructure and attracting developers in the area between Boettler Road, Interstate 77, and Arlington Road. The development of the district would include construction of a nearly mile-long extension of Southwood Drive eastward from Arlington, intersecting with Fortuna Drive before concluding at Tabs Drive. The new stretch of road would improve traffic flow in the area, allowing motorists and Green safety forces to more quickly reach destinations across the city. State law now provides the flexibility needed to create a TIF initiative district that, instead of using such funding solely for business and commercial development, has provided the mechanism to include new residential

development within the designated district. Funding from the developers would create the revenues to extend the road. City officials believe the development will increase population, promote business growth, and increase the tax base.

Population drops stuns Lakemore in Census (September 2021)

Earlier this year, officials in the Village of Lakemore were hopeful population counts via the 2020 Census would show a large enough increase to propel the village into the status of a city. Instead, Lakemore's population declined 4.6 percent to 2,926 residents, shocking village officials. The Hidden Lakes development in Lakemore, when complete, will add 400 homes. Conversely, the City of Green's population increased by 6.9 percent to 27,475 residents, passing Barberton as the fourth largest city in Summit County. Green was the only municipality in the county south of Akron to post a population increase. New Franklin declined slightly since 2010. Future water and sewer expansion could lead to additional development and population over the next 10 years.

Mount Union looks to develop community learning center (September 2021)

The University of Mount Union (UMU) is in the early stages of developing a community learning center that would provide career services, training, and mentorship opportunities to adults in poverty. UMU received \$14,000 in grant funding from the Stark Community Foundation to conceptualize and design the project over the course of the next year. The center's focus would be to provide adult education opportunities, including basic job skills, job preparation, and other skill sets. Additionally, the center would provide support to children by involving education students at Mount Union. This will give the students an opportunity to work with children and gain experience that will help them in their desired careers, she said. The project is a collaboration of 12 community partners, including the Alliance Area Chamber of Commerce, Alliance Area Development, Alliance Family YMCA, Alliance City School District, Alliance Community Pantry, the Salvation Army of Alliance, Alliance Area Domestic Violence Shelter, YWCA of Alliance, Early Childhood Education of Alliance, Rodman Public Library, Habitat for Humanity of Alliance, Alliance Pregnancy Center, Aultman Alliance Community Hospital, and the City of Alliance. The project was awarded a Protecting Stark's Future grant, which focuses on projects that address child poverty.

Goodyear invests in electric vehicle charger network startup (September 2021),

Goodyear Ventures, Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co.'s venture capital affiliate, announced it has added California-based AmpUp to its investment portfolio. Founded in 2018, AmpUp provides advanced charging networks and related software in North America. The acquisition reinforces Goodyear's commitment to innovation and electric mobility. The size of the investment was not disclosed by Goodyear Ventures or AmpUp. AmpUp has also secured additional capital in this latest fundraising round from Foothill Ventures and TechNexus Venture Collaborative. The capital infusion came less than a year after AmpUp's initial seed funding. In 2020, Goodyear announced the creation of the Goodyear Ventures venture capital fund, seeding it with \$100 million to target investments over 10 years in future mobility solutions.

Summa behavioral health building taking shape (October 2021)

Summa Health's new seven-story, 60-bed behavioral health facility on Akron City Hospital's campus is under construction. The project, which is part of the hospital's \$80 million Phase 2 construction campaign, is expected to be complete by the end of 2022 and ready for use by the first quarter of 2023. The new Behavioral Health Pavilion is being built on the site of the former School of Nursing building on Arch Street near East Market. Once complete, Summa will vacate the historic St. Thomas Hospital, where behavioral health services and other hospital services currently reside. Future plans for the St. Thomas building have not been determined.

Tallmadge tire manufacturer plans to build \$10 million facility in Brimfield's Maplecrest (October 2021)

Martin Wheel, a division of Kenda Tire, has requested a 10-year, 60-percent tax abatement for its new building, which will be located in the Maplecrest development in Brimfield Township. Martin Wheel is the second manufacturer to approach the Portage County Commissioners about relocating to Maplecrest (Hamrick Packaging received a tax abatement for its proposed building in the Maplecrest development in June). Martin Wheel plans to invest \$13-\$18 million in the new location, about \$10 million of that in the building itself. The company plans to retain 101 jobs and add at least 24 new employees. The company has an annual payroll of \$5.6 million. The company is relocating from its current location in Tallmadge, where officials say it cannot expand. The new location is in within the Tallmadge-Brimfield Joint Economic Development District. The company makes more than 12,000 products, including wheels for lawn mowers, yard tractors and tires for golf carts.

Amazon plans to hire 1,000 people for its Skyland Pines Fulfillment Center (October 2021)

Amazon plans to hire 1,000 people for its new fulfillment center, planned at the former Skyland Pines site in Canton. Details about available jobs will be posted on the company's website closer to when the facility opens in 2022. If Amazon hires 1,000 people in Canton, it will become the ninth largest employer in Stark County.

Giant Amazon warehouse planned for Skyland Pines (October 2021)

Amazon is constructing a new one million-square-foot fulfillment center at the former Skyland Pines Golf Club in Canton. The facility is expected to open next year and create 1,000 jobs. Amazon said it chose to invest in Canton without taking incentives from the various state and local organizations that assisted with the project. The company thanked Canton officials, Stark Economic Development Board, Stark County commissioners, Team NEO and JobsOhio for their help. The project is valued at \$87.4 million. Amazon will be the largest single employer Canton has added in decades. The project will add approximately \$936,000 in annual income tax revenue for the city. To accommodate the facility, Canton City Council annexed the land for the site and amended the zoning. Council also approved a replat of the property — dividing it into a 92-acre parcel and a 40-acre parcel — and dedicated a right-of-way to allow access from U.S. Route 62 via Rebar Avenue NE. Amazon currently employs 41,000 full-time and part-time associates in Ohio.

Hall of Fame Resort lines up more funding for construction of HOF Village (October 2021)

The Hall of Fame Resort & Entertainment Co. has secured a \$25 million loan from Erie Bank to help pay for the construction of the Hall of Fame Village. The company is in Phase II of the Hall of Fame Village development, a \$300 million project that includes an office building, retail centers, hotel and water park, and a conference center. The company worked previously with Erie Bank on financing for the renovation of the DoubleTree by Hilton hotel downtown. Terms of the new agreement are expected to be finalized by the end of the year. The 75,000-square-foot Constellation building is close to opening, while construction should begin soon on the Center for Performance. Meanwhile, infrastructure work is progressing on sites for the Hilton Tapestry hotel and the football-themed water park. Additionally, the youth sports complex south of McKinley High School is being expanded, with amenities being added.

Work progresses on six-story building on the corner of Franklin and Erie in Kent (October 2021)

Construction continues on a six-story building on the corner of Franklin Avenue and Erie Street in Kent. Plans call for a restaurant, a bar and a bakery on the lower levels and 16 apartments spread throughout the top four floors. The building is being built at the site of the former Ramella's Pizza and Mug's Brew Pub. A corporation owned by Badreyyeh Alhasawi owns the property. The completion date has not been determined.

Akron leaders propose ways to spend \$145 million in federal stimulus (October 2021)

The City of Akron is looking to spend \$145 million in federal stimulus funds to help qualified applicants buy and repair homes, eradicate lead waterlines, stem crime, expand access to health care, support small businesses and add recreational options. City Council was presented with a list of 18 possible projects: community grant program to address youth violence; surveillance cameras and doorbell cameras to reduce crime; public utility and infrastructure projects, including utility assistance, minor plumbing repairs grant program, lead service replacement, and water main replacement projects; parks and public space improvements, including the Lock 3 Vision Plan, development of an Akron Youth Conservation Corps, Summit Lake recreational access, and community center revitalization projects; housing programs, including down payment assistance program, financing affordable housing construction, rehabilitation grants for qualified homeowners; small business assistance programs, including a business mentorship program and Main Street retail draft program; and improved access to social services and health care, including AxessPointe Community Health Centers and financial coaches. All projects are intended to improve equity, build resilience, and provide recovery from the economic impacts of the pandemic.

Details emerge in deal for Taiwan's Foxconn to buy former Lordstown GM plant in Ohio (October 2021)

Taiwan-based Foxconn Technology Group, the world's largest electronics maker, is negotiating a deal to buy the former Lordstown GM plant from startup electric truck maker Lordstown Motors. Foxconn is best known for making Apple iPhones. It also brings much-needed funding to struggling Lordstown Motors, which has been under increasing scrutiny over its lack of orders and financial security. The two companies announced a nonbinding agreement to negotiate a deal under which Lordstown would sell the former General Motors plant in Ohio near Youngstown, excluding some assets, for \$230 million. Foxconn will also buy about \$50 million of Lordstown Motors stock.

Streetsboro manufacturer Waltco doubling its workforce with additional product line (October 2021)

Streetsboro manufacturer Waltco will be adding 100 new jobs in the coming months, doubling its workforce. Waltco, which primarily manufactures lift gates for trucks, will begin producing Moffett M8 forklifts. The Moffett M8 forklifts attach to the rear of trucks and are designed to be both portable and used outdoors.

City of Canton to purchase former Nationwide Building for \$1.25 million (October 2021)

Canton City Council approved the purchase of the former Nationwide building from the Downtown Canton Land Bank for \$1.25 million. Canton will use Issue 13 income tax revenue from the comprehensive plan fund. Council also agreed to pay the Canton Community Improvement Corporation up to \$300,000 for maintenance of the facility. Canton will partner with JobsOhio and Team NEO to market the 148,000-square-foot building. The Stark County Land Bank purchased the property in 2019 for \$500,000.

E-commerce company Tradefull Inc. moving operations from Jackson Township to Green (October 2021)

E-commerce company, Tradefull Inc., is moving from Jackson Township to Green, where it will consolidate its operations. Tradefull is moving from several buildings on Freedom Avenue in Jackson Township to the former Airtex-AFC facility, a 275,000-square-foot structure at 2100 International Parkway. Tradefull plans to create more than 200 workers by the end of 2023. Green City Council is expected to approve a five-year Municipal Economic Development Grant for Tradefull operator the Kasper Group at Council's Oct. 26 meeting. The grant would amount to 50 percent of Tradefull's 2 percent employee income tax payments annually being returned from the city for multiple uses by the company, including building renovation and research and development. Tradefull provides outsourced e-commerce solutions, using custom technology and services that drive revenue, save money and provide logistical support. Tradefull anticipates having 113 employees in 2022 with annual payroll of \$3,750,000

and then growing to 316 workers in Green by the end of 2023, with an annual payroll of \$15.5 million. With the same number of employees by the end of the five-year pact, Tradefull expects an annual payroll of almost \$16.5 million.

Wooster's largest building built at one time breaks ground (October 2021)

On October 20, Wooster Brush Co. broke ground on a new 608,400-square-foot warehouse and production facility, the largest construction project in the history of the Wooster. The new facility, once constructed, will cover 14 acres and include 38 docking area, three overhead doors, 41 total exterior overhead doors, and 19 exterior doors. Construction will take approximately two years. The site will produce materials made by other Wooster Brush Co. plants.

Akron to spend federal stimulus on housing, crime fight, small business, more (November 2021)

Akron City Council has allocated \$6.3 million of the \$145 million the city is receiving from the federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). Initial spending plans include: \$1.2 million for small business assistance; \$1 million for the removal of water service lines with lead connections; \$1 million for a pilot program of 50 police cameras near the University of Akron; \$850,000 for housing rehabilitation; \$700,000 for struggling water and sewer customers who apply for help through the depleted Akron Cares fund; \$600,000 for new housing construction; \$450,000 in community grants to curb youth violence; \$300,000 for compliance, including \$250,000 for Guidehouse, a private consulting firm; and \$200,000 to expand Financial Empowerment Centers in the city of Akron. City Council approved legislation in October authorizing the mayor to accept and spend the entire \$145 million. Half of the funding is in the city coffers now, and the other half will arrive next year. Virtual town halls have been scheduled in each of Akron's ten wards to discuss Akron's spending plans.

Canton council approves Court Avenue downtown plan (November 2021)

Canton City Council has approved a plan intended to re-imagine Court Avenue and connect downtown attractions. The city approved a contract with MKSK Inc. – the Columbus-based firm that designed Centennial Plaza – for up to \$120,000. The city, Downtown Canton Special Improvement District, ArtsinStark, and National First Ladies' Library and National Historic Site will collaborate on the Re-imagining Court Avenue Master Plan and Comprehensive Strategy. The plan will recommend improvements along Court Avenue from Fourth Street SW to Sixth Street NW.

What's downtown Canton's next big project? (November 2021)

The City of Canton is considering additional new projects for its downtown. Ideas include a public restroom and a stage covering at Centennial Plaza, a marketplace at one or two historic buildings, and a revamped Court Avenue to help connect places downtown. The city is seeking to revamp the Court Avenue corridor to make it more pedestrian friendly and help people move between downtown attractions. The city has also discussed purchasing property northeast of Fourth Street NW and Court Avenue NW, which is currently a parking lot, for the bathroom and storage facility. The plaza's live programming equipment also would be moved there from the Canton Regional Chamber of Commerce.

Hall of Fame Resort inks agreements with CommScope, ASM Global for Village operations

(November 2021)

The Hall of Fame Resort & Entertainment Co. has announced agreements with CommScope and ASM Global. CommScope designs, builds, and maintains hardware and software for communications networks. ASM Global will bring concerts, festivals, and events to Tom Benson Hall of Fame Stadium. The Hall of Fame Resort is developing the Hall of Fame Village powered by Johnson Controls, a nearly \$1 billion project, including a retail center, office building, hotel and football-themed water park, center for performance and youth sports playing fields.

AmbaFlex expanding operations, adding workers in Canton (November 2021)

Dutch-based AmbaFlex Manufacturing Inc. is expanding its footprint in Canton with a new 50,000-square-foot building at 1530 Raff Road SW. The facility complements an existing 100,000-square-foot AmbaFlex facility directly to the south. The plant primarily manufactures spiral conveyors that move products up or down in e-commerce warehouses or canning and bottling, dry goods packaging, and print finishing facilities. It also produces the AcuuVeyor, a conveyor system to accumulate products, and the AmbaVeyor, a more horizontal conveyor system. The expansion is expected to cost \$10.5 million in total, with \$8.5 million for the building and \$2 million for equipment. AmbaFlex has more than doubled its staff in the past year and now employs more than 160 people at the Canton site. The company will add 35 employees within the next five years as part of the expansion and an agreement with JobsOhio. JobsOhio is providing a \$100,000 grant for the project, which will create jobs that amount to \$1.75 million in new payroll. The new building, which will be constructed between April and late May next year, will manufacture the AmbaVeyor and store parts or finished components of the spiral conveyors.

State-of-the-art new Crystal Clinic Orthopaedic Hospital opens for patients Nov. 1 (November 2021)

The \$100 million, 165,000-square-foot Crystal Clinic Orthopaedic Hospital on Embassy Parkway in Fairlawn opens on November 1, 2021. The facility has three levels, 12 operating rooms and 60 private patient rooms. The facility will house orthopedic surgery, reconstructive/plastic surgery, inpatient post-surgical care, physical therapy, diagnostic digital radiology imaging, and Crystal Clinic QuickCare for the immediate care of orthopedic and sports injuries. The facility replaces inpatient and surgical space at Summa Health's St. Thomas Hospital in Akron, where the Crystal Clinic had been leasing 133,000 square feet of space for 12 years. Summa also is building a new behavioral health facility on its Akron City Hospital campus and plans to vacate St. Thomas after the new facility is ready in early 2023.

Summit County unemployment rate shows gradual improvement from year ago (November 2021)

Summit County added jobs in September compared to a year ago, and the unemployment rate dropped, according to the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services. The ODJFS data continue to show an economy gradually improving from the COVID-19 pandemic lows of 2020. However, the data showed the county and much of the state have yet to return to pre-pandemic employment levels. Summit County's unemployment rate dropped from 5.4 percent in August to 5.0 percent in September. The rate was 7.7 percent in September 2020. Akron's jobless rate dropped from 6.6 percent in August to 6.2 percent in September. Akron's unemployment was at 10 percent in September 2020. Cuyahoga Falls dropped from 4.8 percent in August to 4.4 percent in September (6.9 percent in September 2020). Summit County has yet to recover jobs lost not just since the beginning of the pandemic but also at the start of the Great Recession – and even 21 years ago. For the month of September since 2000, the number of employed people in Summit County peaked in 2007 at 283,800, meaning there were 32,200 more people working in the county than there were last month. There also were more people working in Summit County in September 2000, at 266,800, than there were last month, the state figures show. Elsewhere around the NEFCO region, Portage County dropped from 4.7 percent in August to 4.3 percent in September; Stark County decreased from 5.1-percent in August to 4.8 percent in September; Canton dropped from 6.4 percent to 6.3 percent; and Wayne County dropped from 3.9 percent to 3.4 percent.

Allegiant Air returning to Akron-Canton Airport with service to Florida, Savannah (November 2021)

Allegiant Air will return to Akron-Canton Airport in March 2022 and will offer service twice per week to Savannah, Punta Gorda, Sarasota, and St. Petersburg. Allegiant will end service at Cleveland Hopkins International Airport. Allegiant initially offered service from Akron-Canton in May 2015. It moved to Hopkins in February 2017, a few months after Spirit Airlines began service from Akron-Canton to vacation destinations in Florida and South Carolina. Allegiant is the second airline this year to begin new service at Akron-Canton. Breeze Airways began in June offering service to New Orleans, Tampa, and Charleston, South Carolina.

Wayne County Transit hits the road with a successful first two weeks (November 2021)

Wayne County Transit (WCT) opened earlier last month and has had a successful first few weeks. WCT has partnered with the Stark Area Regional Transit Authority (SARTA) to provide public transit in Wayne County. SARTA obtained grants from the state to finance vehicles and staff for the Wayne service. SARTA anticipates ridership to increase over the coming months. WCT is available for all Wayne County residents. Each ride is \$2.50, regardless of distance. Every rider must be registered in the program. Rides should be scheduled in advance by at least three days on the Community Action Wayne/Medina County website. Workers who use the service to get to work can use it for free in the first twenty days.

State gives tax breaks in exchange for job creation in Ravenna (December 2021)

The Ohio Tax Credit Authority approved tax incentives for a new manufacturing facility at the former GE plant in Ravenna and an accounting firm expanding in Fairlawn. Manufacturer LG Chem America Inc. expects to create 72 full-time positions, generating \$4.7 million in new annual payroll with its proposed project in Ravenna. The new manufacturing plant would be at the former GE plant on North Chestnut Street in Ravenna. The 47-acre property is owned by Chestnut Commerce Center LLC, which purchased the land for \$2.3 million in 2016. LG Chem is a division of LG focused on producing a highly functional heat- and impact-resistant compound used for a variety of applications from toys to household appliances and automotive parts. LG Chem's project remains contingent on the firm gaining approval from the city and Ravenna Board of Education for an Enterprise Zone Agreement, which would give the firm an additional 100-percent, 15-year property tax exemption to move into the former GE building. Accounting and consulting firm Cohen & Co. expects to create 61 full-time positions, generating \$6.5 million in new annual payroll and retaining \$24.9 million in payroll by expanding in the Cleveland, Youngstown and Akron areas. The Cohen & Company's Fairlawn office provides assurance, tax, and advisory services. The firm has about 320 employees in Northeast Ohio, of which about 70 are based in Fairlawn.

Superior Dairy sold, will be subsidiary of Michigan Milk Producers group (December 2021)

Superior Dairy will become a subsidiary of the Novi, Michigan-based Michigan Milk Producers Association. The deal is expected to lead to greater innovation, product diversity and efficiencies in the marketplace. The association expects to move faster to meet needs of customers and consumers, while supporting Superior Dairy's long family history in Stark County farmers, employees and other stakeholders. Superior Dairy has been expanding, spending \$25 million on improvements since 2017. Its workforce surpassed 400 people in 2020. The dairy ships milk to customers in 44 states, with much of the product co-packaged and sold under a private brand label by large retailers around the country.

Dome planned for Hall of Fame Village's center for performance complex (December 2021)

The Hall of Fame Resort & Entertainment Co. has announced plans for a dome over the center for performance, which will house a turf field for football and soccer, as well as two basketball courts that can be used for volleyball. There also will be locker rooms, meeting areas and other amenities. The center will be across the street and west of the Constellation Center for Excellence, which is at the west end of Tom Benson Hall of Fame Stadium. The dome will rise about 80 feet and measure 290 feet by 345 feet. There will be just over 100,000 square feet of space under the dome, with 20,000 square feet dedicated to the locker rooms and meeting space. Flooring will be available to cover the courts and turf field so that the building can be used for conventions, dinners, concerts and other events. Construction is underway, with plans for the foundation to be started later in December.

Firm plans to develop 470 acres north of Turnpike in Shalersville (December 2021)

Streetsboro-based Geis Co. plans to develop about 470 acres just north of the Ohio Turnpike on the west side of Route 44 in Shalersville Township. The land is currently farmland, bisected by Beck Road. If developed, the site would be an industrial and commercial hub for the area. Geis has developed about 5.5 million square feet of industrial facilities in Streetsboro over the past several decades. The speculative

buildings planned for Shalersville, which could range from 250,000 square feet to 1.2 million square feet, would have convenient access to highways and several major airports, which could serve manufacturing and distribution uses.

The big picture in Brimfield: development booms at I-76, Tallmadge Road (December 2021)

Development at the interchange of Tallmadge Road and Interstate 76 in Brimfield continues to boom. Two new industrial companies, a grocery store, and two car service businesses are planned in Brimfield's joint economic development district with Tallmadge. Two industrial businesses plan to move into new facilities behind the Menard's and Meijer stores, Hamrick Manufacturing is building a new facility located behind the Meijer store, and Martin Wheel is planning one behind Menards. Brimfield Township is considering two tax increment financing agreements to help pay to extend the road and utilities farther into the development, which will serve Martin Wheel and any other companies that build on the industrial land.

Local leaders look for investors, voluntary assessments to complete U.S. Route 30 (December 2021)

Consultants Norman Anderson of CG/LA Infrastructure and Gordon Arbuckle of 2025 Law and Policy are assisting the Regional Transportation Improvement Project (RTIP) U.S.-30 group in identifying investors to provide the funding necessary to finance the eastward extension of the U.S. Route 30. Once sufficient progress is made in getting investors' commitments, local officials will ask area businesses that would benefit from an extension to pay voluntary assessments to provide further funding. More than an estimated \$1 billion is needed to complete the US-30 expressway to Route 11 in Columbiana County. There is interest in utilizing the proposed right-of-way for utility and high-speed broadband.

Akron will get a new tire test track next year, Bridgestone Americas announces (December 2021)

Bridgestone Americas is building a tire test track facility on its 100-acre Akron campus that opens next year. The track is going up off Wilbeth Road next to the company's new race tire plant, the Advanced Tire Production Center. The "new vehicle dynamics track" is intended to help Bridgestone's product development program and let employees drive vehicle prototypes to better understand the performance enhancements needed to design tires for the vehicles. The track is expected to be completed next summer and will have multiple courses intended to simulate real-world wet and dry driving conditions. Bridgestone said it also is nearing completion of its Advanced Tire Production Center that will build Firestone brand IndyCar race car tires. The ATPC is expected to open next year; production is being relocated from the former Firestone complex north of the new facility. The former Firestone plant and corporate headquarters is being redeveloped into an industrial park.

Akron investing another \$2 million in Summit Lake (December 2021)

Akron City Council has been asked to approve an additional \$2 million in federal American Rescue Plan Act funding for the Summit Lake revitalization project. Last year, council unanimously approved \$3 million for the Summit Lake renewal project, which includes a \$3 million trail around the lake that spins off the Towpath Trail, a bridge from the community center playground to a new north shore boathouse, canoe launch area and pavilion, and a full extension of the floating boardwalk to span the width of the lake, connecting Summit Lake and Kenmore while allowing boats to pass under an arched walkway. The Ohio & Erie Canalway Coalition, along with the city and other partners in the Civic Commons, are overseeing a total of \$40 million in improvements at Summit Lake and Lock 3, a downtown park set for a complete overhaul next year. At Summit Lake, the \$3 million trail is in the final design stage, with construction beginning by mid-2022. Construction on the remainder of the Phase I and II improvements at Summit Lake is expected to begin in 2023. Phase III of the Summit Lake Vision Plan will then shift focus to the Kenmore shore, where \$5 to 7 million in potential upgrades are still being considered.