



Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy
2024 Annual Performance Report



RESOLUTION NUMBER FY2024-004

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) 2024 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 based on the incidence of unemployment rates and the existence of the CEDS; and

WHEREAS, the NEFCO General Policy Board in conjunction with its 124 local units of government has formulated a regional economic development strategy entitled the *2023-2028 CEDS*; and

WHEREAS, the EDA requires the submittal of the *CEDS 2024 Annual Performance Report* by January 31, 2024 to maintain NEFCO's Economic Development District designation and the region's 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 2024 Annual Performance Report*.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the NEFCO General Policy Board adopts the *Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) 2024 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 17, 2024

Todd Peetz, Secretary
NEFCO General Policy Board



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Acknowledgements

The Northeast Ohio Four County Regional Planning and Development Organization staff thanks the 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 ED22CHI3020026 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 views 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 goals included in the CEDS is reported in the annual performance report. The 2024 Annual Performance Report (APR) includes recent trends observed between the issuance of the [2023-2028 CEDS](#) in January 2023 and the present time. The 2024 APR lists milestones and evaluates the progress of the region and NEFCO towards satisfying the seven goals included in the CEDS. Preparation of the CEDS and the APR maintains NEFCO's status as a U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration (EDA)-designated Economic Development District and the region's eligibility to apply for EDA grants.

The CEDS and the APR describe the region's economic conditions, as well as the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. In 2024, 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 2024 APR 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. The 2024 APR also evaluates the progress in attaining the seven goals included in the CEDS.

Though the pandemic is not over, the COVID public health emergency expired in May 2023. Despite some 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 in 2023. The EDA Tech Hub designation for the Greater Akron Sustainable Polymers Tech Hub marked a potentially economically transformative moment for the region. The EDA Recompete Plan approval for the Stark Economic Development Board-led coalition offers an opportunity to pursue substantial resources to address employment barriers and improve workforce development for neighborhoods in southeast Canton. Development continues to move forward on the nearly \$1 billion Hall of Fame Village, which aims to be a national destination and key economic focus of Canton and Stark County. The principal cities of Akron, Canton, Kent, and Wooster continue to invest in the revitalization of their respective downtowns, while collaborating with their local universities.

The major challenges going into 2024 will be workforce development and training, supply chain complications, and housing. Unemployment has decreased to pre-pandemic numbers, but workforce levels have not rebounded. Businesses and other workplaces continue to have difficulty filling positions; they will need to adapt and consider adopting changes to attract new workers, including offering onsite or other childcare provisions, transportation services or benefits, paid training and career development opportunities, and offering remote and hybrid work options for employees. Other challenges include racial and gender equity and inclusion, access to broadband in the rural portions of the region, and developing economic resilience. The region must continue to address these issues to be prosperous, resilient, and economically competitive.

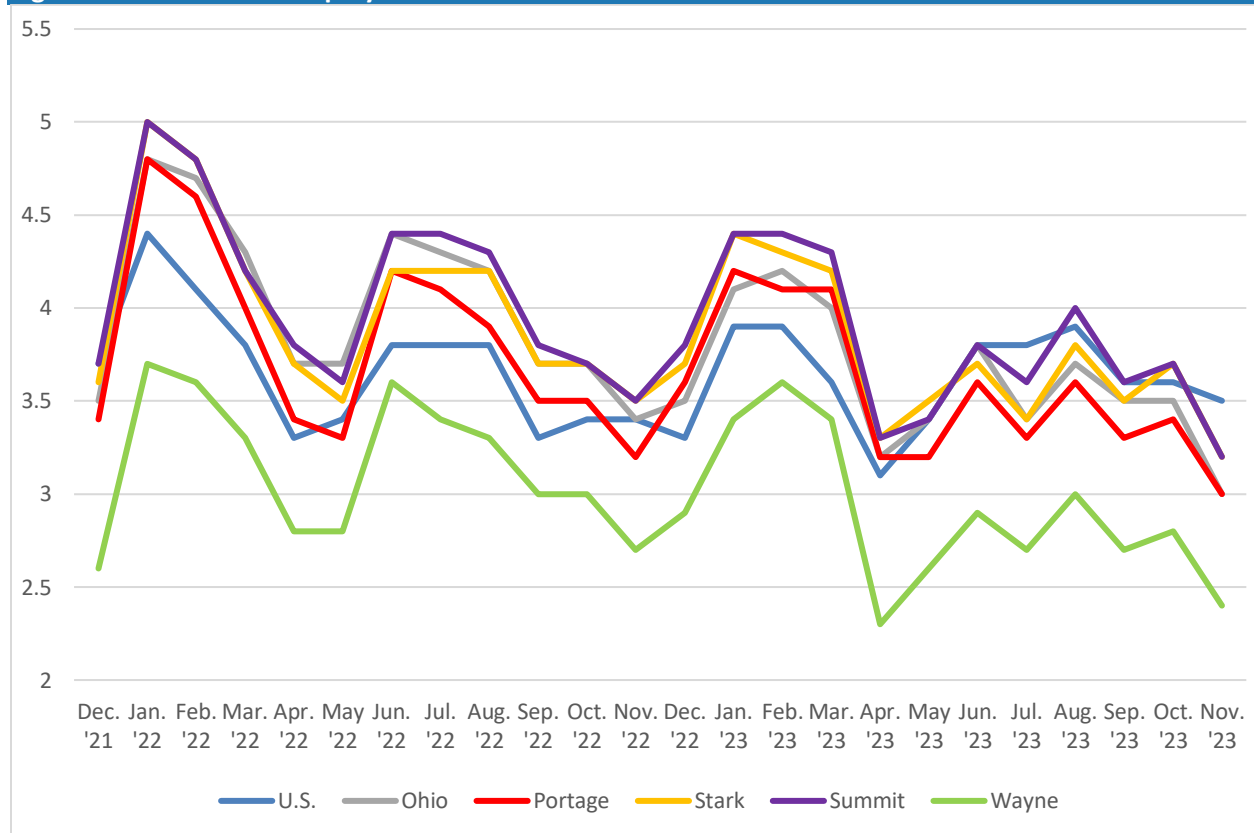
The future economic strength and resiliency of the region will be dependent on collaboration, public-private partnerships, equity and inclusion, effective workforce development strategies, and investment in quality-of-life enhancements. The region is poised to continue in a positive trajectory as it progresses into 2024.

Adjustments to NEFCO Strategy

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

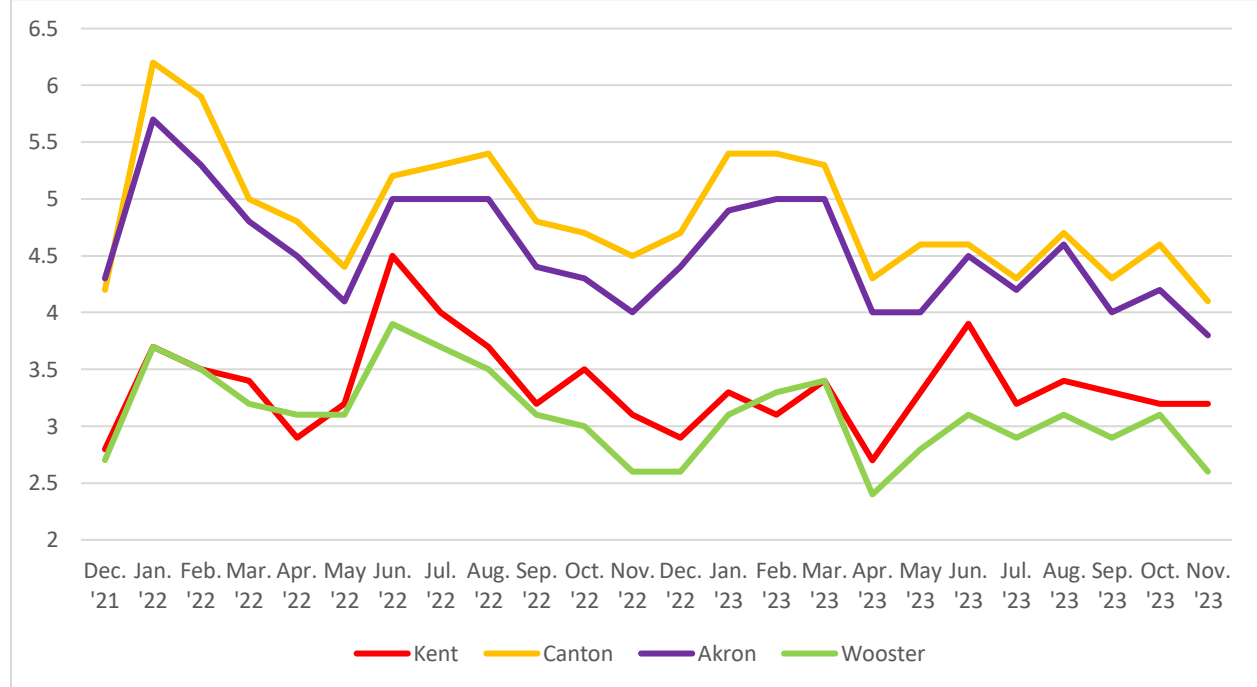
The unemployment trend over the past two years follows the extreme spike and drop period, which occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic and recovery. The 24-month unemployment rate pattern for the four NEFCO counties shows the seasonal jumps in unemployment occurring each January (post-holiday season) and June (see Figure 1). The 24-month period spans between December 2021 and November 2023; data are provided by the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The region's unemployment rates match the trend experienced by the state of Ohio and the U.S. Wayne County consistently had the lowest unemployment rates throughout the 24-month period. Summit County consistently had the highest unemployment rate among the NEFCO counties.

Figure 1: 24-Month Unemployment Rates for NEFCO Counties



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, January 2024

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. The most noticeable pattern is that Wooster and Kent consistently had lower unemployment rates than Akron and Canton. Additionally, the cities' monthly unemployment rate mirrors that of their respective counties, as seen in Figure 1. Wayne County and Portage County had lower unemployment rates than Stark County and Summit County. This pattern may be reflected in the employment sectors of each county. For instance, Wayne has the lowest percentage of retail and service-related jobs, which continue to experience workforce shortages.

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


Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, January 2024

Local governments may qualify for EDA assistance based on the economic distress of a census tract or a community's per capita income. A community can qualify as economically distressed either by its per capita income or unemployment rate. A community's per capita income must be 80 percent or less than the U.S. per capita income (\$41,261) or have a 24-month unemployment rate one percent or greater than the national average (3.65 percent). The per capita income data is derived from the most recent U.S. Census Bureau 2022 American Community Survey Five-Year estimate (2018-2022); these data are updated annually. The 24-month unemployment rate is dynamic, updated monthly by the Bureau of Labor Statistics; the rate accounts for the last 24 months and is constantly changing accordingly. For the purposes of the 2024 Annual Performance Report, the 24-month period includes unemployment data between December 2021 and November 2023.

Table 1 displays calculations of economic distress for counties and select cities and villages in the NEFCO region. City and county names in bold denote economically distressed communities per EDA metrics. Cells without data indicate that statistics are not provided at this geographic level by the Bureau of Labor Statistics. In Portage County, the villages of Garrettsville, Hiram, and Windham and the cities of Kent and Ravenna have per capita median income levels less than 80 percent of the national average. In Stark County, the municipalities of Alliance, Beach City, Brewster, Canton, East Canton, East Sparta, Magnolia, Massillon, Minerva, Waynesburg, and Wilmot have per capita income levels less than 80 percent of the U.S.; Canton has a 24-month unemployment rate of 4.88 percent, which is also a qualifying metric. In Summit County, the municipalities of Akron, Barberton, Lakemore, and Northfield have per capita income levels less than 80% of the U.S. In Wayne County, the municipalities of Apple Creek, Congress, Creston, Shreve, West Salem, and Wooster have a per capita median income level below 80 percent of the national average. Also, the per capita median income of Wayne County is \$32,908, which is 79.76 percent of the national average.


Table 1: Economic Distress in the NEFCO Region

Unit of Government	24-month Unemployment Rate (BLS)*	PCMI (ACS 5-yr. est.: 2018-2022)	Percentage of U.S. PCMI
Portage County	3.69%	\$37,771	91.54%
Village of Garrettsville	N/A	\$32,746	79.36%
Village of Hiram	N/A	\$24,178	58.60%
City of Kent	3.35%	\$27,506	66.66%
City of Ravenna	N/A	\$29,996	72.70%
Village of Windham	N/A	\$19,089	46.26%
Stark County	3.88%	\$34,652	83.98%
City of Alliance	N/A	\$25,606	62.06%
Village of Beach City	N/A	\$30,193	73.18%
Village of Brewster	N/A	\$27,728	66.96%
City of Canton	4.86%	\$22,649	54.89%
Village of East Canton	N/A	\$31,465	76.26%
Village of East Sparta	N/A	\$28,048	67.98%
Village of Magnolia	N/A	\$32,512	78.80%
City of Massillon	4.22%	\$29,859	72.37%
Village of Minerva	N/A	\$32,797	79.49%
Village of Waynesburg	N/A	\$24,123	58.46%
Village of Wilmot	N/A	\$24,437	59.23%
Summit County	3.95%	\$40,786	98.85%
City of Akron	4.54%	\$28,930	70.11%
City of Barberton	4.33%	\$30,995	75.12%
Village of Lakemore	N/A	\$29,903	72.47%
Village of Northfield	N/A	\$31,137	75.46%
Wayne County	3.02%	\$32,908	79.76%
Village of Apple Creek	N/A	\$28,699	69.55%
Village of Congress	N/A	\$28,103	68.11%
Village of Creston	N/A	\$28,389	68.80%
Village of Shreve	N/A	\$31,273	75.79%
Village of West Salem	N/A	\$30,767	74.57%
City of Wooster	3.10	\$32,296	78.27%
NEFCO region	3.79%	\$37,680	91.32%
Ohio	3.82%	\$37,729	91.44%
United States	3.65%	\$41,261	-

Sources: Bureau of Labor Statistics, 24-month Average (December 2021-November 2023); U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2023: ACS 2022 5-year Estimates Data Profiles (2018-2022); StatsAmerica

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 venture development

organization (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.

Table 2: 2024 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
Matt Riehl	JumpStart, Inc.	Director of Government Relations	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
David Lukas	Summit County Dept. of Community and Economic Development	Assistant Director	Public Sector
Scott Wagner	Barberton Community Development Corp.	Executive Director	Private Sector
Jenn Kiper	Wayne County Planning Department	Director	Public Sector
David Messner	City of Akron	Development Manager	Public Sector
Eric Helmstedter	City of Kent	Economic Development Director	Public Sector
Todd Peetz	Portage County Regional Planning Commission	Director	Public Sector
Chris Hardesty	City of Canton	Economic Development Director	Public Sector

This roster of the 2024 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 2024. 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: 2024 NEFCO General Policy Board

Name	Affiliation	Type
Portage County*		
Amos Sarfo	Stormwater Program Supervisor, Soil and Water Conservation District	Public Sector
Joe Diorio	Portage County Health Commissioner	Public Sector
Sabrina Christian-Bennett	County Commissioner	Public Sector
Todd Peetz	Director, Portage County Regional Planning Commission	Public Sector
Daniel Blakely	Director, Portage County Water Resources	Public Sector
Vacant	Citizen, Portage County Appointee	
City of Kent		
Kailyn Cyrus	Development Planner	Public Sector
Stark County		
Keith Bennett	County Engineer	Public Sector
David Maley	Planning and Development Director, City of Louisville	Public Sector
Kirt Conrad	CEO/Executive Director, Stark Area Regional Transit Authority	Public Sector
Joe Mazzola	Planning Director, City of Alliance	Public Sector
Richard Regula	County Commissioner	Public Sector
Jim Troike	County Sanitary Engineer	Public Sector
Bob Nau	Director, Stark County Regional Planning Commission	Public Sector
Alfredo Carranza	Building Contractor, Stark County Appointee	Private Sector
Dan Moeglin	Executive Director, Stark Parks	Public Sector
Stephan Wilder	Mayor, City of North Canton	Public Sector
Michael Naso	Economic Development Services Coordinator, Stark Economic Development Board	Private Sector
Vacant		
City of Canton		
James Benekos	City Engineer	Public Sector
Summit County		
Alan Brubaker	County Engineer	Public Sector
James Balogh	Twinsburg Township Trustee	Public Sector
Sam Scaffide	Mayor, City of Twinsburg	Public Sector
David Kohlmeier	CTI Engineering	Private Sector
David Lukas	Assistant Director, Department of Community & Economic Development	Public Sector
Ilene Shapiro	County Executive	Public Sector
Dianne Sumego	dms water solutions, llc.	Private Sector
Michael Vinay	Sanitary Sewer Services Director	Public Sector



Name	Affiliation	Type
Caitlin Elrad	Economic Development Coordinator, Department of Community & Economic Development	Public Sector
City of Akron*		
Shammas Malik	Mayor	Public Sector
Linda Omobien	Council Member	Public Sector
Chris Ludle	Deputy Director Public Service	Public Sector
Helen Tomic	Comprehensive Planning Manager	Public Sector
Vacant		Public Sector
Vacant		Public Sector
Vacant		Public Sector
Wayne County		
Jonathan Hofstetter	County Commissioner	Public Sector
Jenn Kiper	Planning Director	Public Sector
Steve Wheeler	Safety/Service Director, City of Orrville	Public Sector
City of Wooster		
Robert Reynolds	Mayor	Public Sector
Ohio EPA (Ex Officio)		
David Emerman	Chief, Northeast District Office	Public Sector

*Appointments pending

A Regional Approach

As the four-county region's EDA-designated Economic Development District, Ohio Governor-designated 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?

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. The region has continued to recover; unemployment rates are back to pre-pandemic levels, though workforce levels have not returned completely. 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 and post-pandemic periods. The Greater Akron area is poised to become a global leader in the manufacturing and commercialization of sustainable polymers with its recent designation as an EDA Tech Hub. The Regional Transportation Improvement Project continues to work to extend the U.S. Route 30 expressway eastward to connect the NEFCO region with petrochemical facilities along the Ohio River Valley. 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 downtown redevelopment. Akron is actively

converting vacant and underused office and manufacturing buildings to residential, including the Bowery redevelopment, CitiCenter, former Cascade Hotel, Law Building, Philadelphia Rubberworks, the former B.F. Goodrich factory, and former Beacon Journal Building. Akron is promoting downtown living to complement the overhaul of Main Street into a pedestrian-friendly, complete street and the redevelopment of Lock 3 Park. Canton continues to focus on augmenting its six major community asset regions identified in the city's Comprehensive Plan, including the Pro Football Hall of Fame, Cleveland Clinic Mercy Medical Center, Aultman Hospital, Downtown, Shorb neighborhood, and Timken.¹ 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. Kent and Wooster continue to revitalize their downtowns to attract investment, while collaborating with their respective universities. Though not located in the NEFCO Region, the \$20 billion Intel project in New Albany, Ohio will impact much of the state, particularly for those companies and communities that are part of Intel's supply chain.

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 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 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 must also address the top barriers to employment: childcare and transportation. Local governments, transportation agencies, nonprofit organizations, and businesses must explore innovative solutions to bolster the workforce. 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. 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
- Invest in strategic economic development and planning initiatives
- Implement the NEFCO Economic Recovery and Resiliency (ER&R) plan, which recommends workforce development and entrepreneurship, community development, and regional business strategies
- Focus on regional strengths and target industries
- Identify and address regional economic development deficiencies
- Develop benchmarking to evaluate the region's progress and competitiveness

¹ City of Canton Comprehensive Plan, <http://cantonohio.gov/pdf/CantonFinal%20Draft-03.07.16.pdf>

- 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
- 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 Program Manager for Economic Development Planning manages the agency's economic development planning program and CEDS planning process. As part of the CEDS, NEFCO staff is also working on the implementation of regional business, workforce development and entrepreneurship, and community development strategies identified in the ER&R Plan, which was approved by the General Policy Board in 2022. In addition, two other full-time staff members assist with the economic development planning program, including the NEFCO Executive Director and Administrative Assistant. The economic development planning 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 11 illustrates the distribution of EDA grant monies invested in the NEFCO region since 1980 (see Figure 3).

In 2023, NEFCO was part of a coalition that was awarded a \$400,000 EDA Regional Technology and Innovation Hubs (Tech Hubs) Strategy Development grant and Tech Hub Designation. In addition to being a consortium member, NEFCO provided technical assistance to the Greater Akron Chamber in the development of its application.

2023 EDA Grant Awards for NEFCO Region

Applicant	Project	EDA Grant	Award
Greater Akron Chamber	Sustainable Polymers Tech Hub	Regional Technology and Innovation Hubs (Tech Hubs)	Tech Hub Designation (Unfunded) ²
Greater Akron Chamber	Sustainable Polymers Tech Hub	Regional Technology and Innovation Hubs (Tech Hubs)	\$400,000 Strategy Development Grant
Stark Economic Development Board	Reconnecting Canton	Distressed Area Recompete Pilot Program (Recompete)	Recompete Approval (Unfunded) ³
Stark Economic Development Board	Reconnecting Canton	Distressed Area Recompete Pilot Program (Recompete)	\$500,000 Strategy Development Grant

² The EDA Tech Hub Designation is unfunded but is a prerequisite for EDA Tech Hubs Phase 2 Implementation Grant eligibility

³ The EDA Recompete Plan Approval is unfunded but is a prerequisite for EDA Recompete Pilot Program Phase 2 Implementation Grant eligibility

The NEFCO General Policy Board has committed matching funds to support the economic development program for the current fiscal year through June 2024. 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.

● 2020s Project
 ● 2010s Project
 ● 2000s Project
 ● 1990s Project
 ● 1980s Project

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration

Report on Economic Development Activities

The following activities were undertaken in 2023 to support and implement NEFCO's 2023-2028 CEDS:

Economic Resilience

The NEFCO 2023-2028 CEDS incorporates the ER&R Plan, which was funded by an EDA CARES Act grant. The ER&R Plan is fully integrated into the CEDS and includes Community Development, Workforce Development and Entrepreneurship, and Regional Business strategies. In 2023, staff worked on addressing many of the strategies recommended in the ER&R Plan; staff will continue to work on implementing these strategies in 2024.

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.

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 Ohio Economic Development Representative, and, when appropriate, meetings are requested to discuss projects that will assist a community with efforts to address economic challenges. Major closures in 2023 included Republic Steel in Canton (185 jobs); Yellow Trucking in Richfield, Copley Township, and Green (600 jobs); and Deluxe Corp. in Streetsboro (71 jobs). Significant positive economic development stories are also noted.

Involvement on Regional Committees

During 2023, NEFCO's Executive Director continued to serve as a member of the Akron Metropolitan Area Transportation Study (AMATS) Technical Advisory Committee (TAC). 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.

Since 2010, NEFCO has participated in 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 2040.⁴ NEFCO's Executive Director serves as the 2nd Vice Chair. 2023 marked the sixth 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.

The Executive Director also serves as a non-voting member of the Northeast Ohio Areawide Coordinating Agency (NOACA) and Vibrant NEO Brownfields Steering Committee. The Steering Committee is tasked to make revolving loan fund recommendations to the Vibrant NEO and NOACA

⁴ Northeast Ohio Sustainable Communities Consortium, Vibrant NEO 2040, <http://vibrantneo.org/vibrantneo-2040/vneo-2040-full-report/>



Boards of Directors. The Steering Committee reviews applications submitted for RLF loans and subgrants; conducts all standard due diligence normally undertaken by lending entities; drafts loan and subgrant agreements, including determination of loan or subgrant, dollar amount, interest rate, and payback period, subject to Vibrant NEO and NOACA approval; and recommends projects to the Vibrant NEO and NOACA Boards of Directors or their appropriate committees, based on the criteria developed by Vibrant NEO.

Updates and Communication

Each month, NEFCO staff communicates funding 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 General Policy Board, Environmental Resources Technical Advisory Committee and Regional CEDS Committee meetings. NEFCO also maintains an active funding opportunities page on its website, which includes numerous programs in seven different categories: broadband and telecommunications, brownfields and environmental remediation, community development and planning, parks and recreation, public works and economic development, transportation, and water quality and conservation. 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 2023.

Planning Assistance

NEFCO staff assisted area officials, community leaders, and professionals with various projects of importance to local communities. In 2023, NEFCO met with and assisted the following communities and organizations with grant projects: City of Akron, City of Canton, City of Hudson, City of Streetsboro, Bounce Innovation Hub, Greater Akron Chamber, Portage Area Regional Transit Authority, and the Stark Economic Development Board. 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 EDA grant applicants to improve the competitiveness of applications and ensure projects meet EDA investment priorities. Staff also acts as liaison between prospective applicants and the EDA. In 2023, the NEFCO General Policy Board provided letters of support to the Portage Area Regional Transit Authority, City of Akron, Bounce Innovation Hub and University of Akron Research Foundation, the Greater Akron Chamber, and the Stark Economic Development Board for EDA grant project applications.

Staff continues to assist local governments with the implementation of infrastructure investments and programs. In 2023, NEFCO participated in the Ohio Public Works Commission infrastructure project program (Program Year 38) as a member of the six-person Technical Advisory Committee of Summit County's District 8 Public Works Integrating Committee.



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 CEDS Goals

The following evaluation details the progress completed by both NEFCO and the region for the seven goals included in the CEDS.

2023-2028 CEDS PLAN GOALS

- 1 Address the supply chain and promote domestic production
- 2 Support programs that build human capital
- 3 Encourage development of industries that support Northeast Ohio's economic clusters
- 4 Promote redevelopment of blighted, underused, vacant, and environmentally challenged sites
- 5 Encourage investment in infrastructure and affordable housing
- 6 Support programs that diversify and build strong, resilient local and regional economies
- 7 Develop benchmarking to evaluate region's progress and competitiveness

Goal 1: Address the supply chain and promote domestic production

- A. Analyze supply chain issues and opportunities for the region's targeted industrial sectors
- B. Support policies and programs that encourage domestic/regional production
- C. Support programming and partnerships designed to support small businesses engaged in supply chain and production
- D. Support tech and tech-enabled startups that support and/or enhance supply chain and domestic production

NEFCO Highlight:



Provided a letter of support for Bounce Innovation Hub/University of Akron Research Foundation EDA Build to Scale grant application



NEFCO continues to support entrepreneurial development. In 2022, the City of Akron was awarded a \$2 million EDA grant for the Bounce Innovation Hub Expansion and Renovation Project, a \$3.1 million project that will activate over 20,000 square feet of unused space at the Bounce Innovation Hub. 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. In 2023, NEFCO provided a letter of support to Bounce and the University of Akron Research Foundation for their EDA Build to Scale grant application, Scaling Resources in the NEFCO Region. Though the project did not receive funding, Bounce and its partners continue to seek venture capital and other resources to scale its proven programs and networks to serve entrepreneurs.

The Appalachian Regional Clean Hydrogen Hub was awarded funding from the U.S. Department of Energy to develop the region – including parts of Ohio, West Virginia, and Pennsylvania – into a clean hydrogen energy hub. The Hub would create many jobs, lower energy costs, and maintain the region's status as a leader in manufacturing and innovation. The award leverages the region's abundant energy resources and numerous public and private sector partners. The effort has been led by the Midwest Hydrogen Center of Excellence, Stark Area Regional Transit Authority, Dominion Energy, and Cleveland State University. The Appalachian Regional Clean Hydrogen Hub is anticipated to create more than 21,000 jobs, including 18,000 construction jobs and more than 3,000 permanent jobs.⁵

In Summit County, Kraftpack, one of the leading manufacturers of paper and plastic based food-service packaging products in China, is opening its first U.S. operation in Twinsburg. The Company is projecting to add 87 jobs in three years. The Company will be leasing space in Twinsburg with plans to build a larger facility in 5 years.

STATUS: MAKING PROGRESS

Goal 2: Support programs that build human capital

- A. Support the continued growth and success of programs that train/develop workers and entrepreneurs
- B. Support programs and initiatives to improve upskilling and employee retention
- C. Support efforts and programs aimed at retaining local college and high school graduates with the NEFCO region
- D. Expand technical and vocational training opportunities
- E. Support programs that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion

NEFCO Highlights:



Provided technical assistance and letters of support for City of Akron and Stark Economic Development Board EDA Recompete Pilot Program grant applications. The SEDB was awarded Recompete Plan approval and Strategy Development Grant for Reconnecting Canton project

⁵ Stark Area Regional Transit Authority, <https://www.sartaonline.com/breaking-brown-secures-appalachian-regional-clean-hydrogen-hub/>



Completed information-gathering surveys for regional vocational schools and high schools

Workforce development factors remain the top challenges facing the region's economy. Businesses continue to struggle to find workers. Childcare and transportation access have affected labor force participation. The region must find ways to eliminate barriers to employment and address the essential wraparound services to lure additional individuals into the workforce. Companies should consider providing flexible schedules, paid training, and other attractive benefits to be competitive.

NEFCO provided technical assistance and support for two EDA Recompete Pilot Program grant applications. The Stark Economic Development Board's Reconnecting Canton – a collaborative project of SEDB's Strengthening Stark Network and in conjunction with the city of Canton – aims to reduce the prime age employment gap in Canton through planning and targeted investments in workforce development strategies, transportation, childcare, and other critical infrastructure to remove barriers to employment and connect people with good jobs. Reconnecting Canton specifically targets the Madison-Lathrop neighborhoods in Southeast Canton. The project proposes investments in critical resources and supportive services, including expanding transportation options and rebuilding key infrastructure such as day care facilities, grocery stores, laundry facilities, and health care centers for disadvantaged populations, to enhance employment opportunities. Reconnecting Canton will also promote diversity, equity, and inclusion, as it focuses on reaching historically underrepresented communities. In December 2023, the SEDB-led coalition was awarded a Recompete Plan approval and Strategy Development Grant from the EDA. The coalition will now compete for Recompete Phase 2 implementation funding.

The City of Akron's Key Employment Strategies in Transportation, Opportunity, Neighborhoods, and Education (KEYSTONE) Program aims to reduce the prime age employment gap in the City of Akron through planning and targeted investments in transportation, childcare, and other workforce development strategies to connect people with good jobs. This EDA Recompete Pilot Program project will focus investments in the most economically disadvantaged Census tracts in Akron. The KEYSTONE Program will promote diversity, equity, and inclusion, as it focuses on reaching historically underrepresented communities. Though the project did not receive EDA funding, the City of Akron and its partners will continue to seek resources to address workforce development and reduce barriers to employment for its prime-age employment demographic.

NEFCO distributed surveys to high and vocational schools throughout the region to gather information on vocational program enrollment; job placement; regional job and residency following graduation; new programs being considered to respond to regional business needs; post-secondary, technical, trade, and apprenticeship participation for recent graduates; and desired resources to connect students and graduates with employment. Welding, cosmetology, and pre-nursing tended to be the top programs (based on enrollment) for vocational schools; these programs also had the highest rate of job placement. Job placement was generally 50 percent or higher for all schools. More than 50 percent of recent vocational school graduates remained employed in the NEFCO region. Logistics was identified as a new program being considered. Vocational schools identified a need for additional funding and staffing resources, as well as more internships and apprenticeships with regional employers. All respondents of the Regional High School Survey indicated their respective schools offered vocational, technical, or trade classes and programs. Regional high schools offered a variety of different programs; most new programs being considered centered around computer science and related applications. High

schools noted that internships, apprenticeships, and employer visitations are the top resources that would help connect students and graduates with employment. Unlike vocational schools, the regional high schools had less data on residency and employment retention of recent graduates within the region.

In November, Kent City Schools were awarded \$2.3 million in state funding for an Advanced Manufacturing and Innovation Center project at Theodore Roosevelt High School.⁶ The grant, which was awarded through the state's Career Technical Construction Program, will be used to construct a 3,500 square-foot addition to create a new manufacturing program and expand enrollment in the engineering pathway. The facility will be used by students in the Six District Educational Compact, which is comprised of Cuyahoga Falls, Hudson, Kent, Stow-Munroe Falls, Tallmadge, and Woodridge school districts.

The Greater Akron Chamber and Elevate Greater Akron developed the Business Navigator, which provides a wealth of resources to support business needs, particularly those for minority-owned and female-owned businesses.⁷ The Business Navigator provides a list of resources on professional services, business locations, financing, human resources, and strategic and technical assistance through a robust search engine.

The Bounce Innovation Hub is the NEFCO region's leading business incubator, offering a number of programs that assist entrepreneurs, startups, and small businesses resources to expand and thrive. Of the small businesses and entrepreneurs Bounce serves, 69 percent are minority and woman-owned.⁸ The Generating Real Opportunity and Wealth (GROW) Program offers programming for those interested in starting, building, or expanding a small business in the Greater Akron area.⁹ GROW includes three programs: Aspiring Entrepreneur Program, MORTAR at Bounce, and Next Level Business Incubator. The Aspiring Entrepreneur Program is a 10-week cohort program focused on basic entrepreneur and business skills.¹⁰ MORTAR at Bounce is a 15-week small business accelerator that provides business development education o established entrepreneurs.¹¹ MORTAR, which is part of the Bounce Innovation Hub's GROW Program, serves primarily minority- and woman-owned businesses, but is open to all entrepreneurs and small business owners. The Next Level Business Incubator targets established Black-owned small businesses who are ready to scale.¹² This program offers one-on-one advising with Bounce advisers.

The Stark County Manufacturing Workforce Development Partnership (SCMWDP) and ConxusNEO are two of the thirteen subgrantees administering the Ohio Manufacturers Association's \$23.5 million EDA Good Jobs Challenge grant project, which will develop and launch an action plan to train populations that have been underrepresented in manufacturing.¹³¹⁴ The SCMWDP is working in Stark County, and ConxusNEO is working in Portage and Summit Counties. SCMWDP is utilizing a talent pipeline model known as WorkAdvance for job placement. Placement included outreach, vetting, basic job training,

⁶ <https://www.kentschools.net/o/trhs/page/cte-expansion>

⁷ Greater Akron Business Navigator, <https://www.greaterakronbusinessnavigator.org/>.

⁸ Bounce Innovation Hub, <https://bouncehub.org/>

⁹ Bounce Innovation Hub, <https://bouncehub.org/grow/>

¹⁰ Bounce Innovation Hub, <https://bouncehub.org/aspiring-entrepreneur-program/#>

¹¹ Bounce Innovation Hub, <https://bouncehub.org/mortar/>

¹² Bounce Innovation Hub, <https://bouncehub.org/next-level-incubator/>

¹³ Stark County Manufacturing Workforce Development Partnership, <https://www.starkmanufacturing.org/>

¹⁴ ConxusNEO, <https://www.conxusneo.jobs/>

placement, and 12 months of career coaching and follow up with those that are now employed. Twelve employers are signed up for this program; the employers work closely with the career coaches to identify and address any barriers a candidate may encounter, which may prevent them from being successful in their job. The employers are required to offer career pathways and upward mobility that equate to a livable wage. The SCMWDP is focusing its efforts in the urban and disadvantaged communities where there are higher poverty rates. The SCMWDP is also working on a program for employers to upskill new and incumbent workers.

ConxusNEO is working with employers, community and workforce organizations, and educators in Portage and Summit counties. ConxusNEO is learning from employers about their workforce needs and challenges so that we prepare individuals for in-demand roles; sharing with employers about federal and state resources that can offset their training costs to upskill employees; inventorying training programs and meeting with educators to learn more about their facilities and programs; and introducing the WorkAdvance model to community and workforce organizations and educators who are now building a strategy on how to best recruit, train and support individuals to be successful in manufacturing careers. To date, 60 individuals have learned more about careers in manufacturing and 25 individuals recently completed 2g welding at Stark State College. The goal of the program is to train 150 individuals by 2025.

STATUS: MAKING PROGRESS

Goal 3: Encourage development of industries that support Northeast Ohio's economic clusters

- A. Support projects that contribute toward strengthening the region's targeted industries
- B. Support activities that complement targeted and other existing industries in the region
- C. Capitalize on and expand existing regional industrial clusters (e.g., polymers, chemicals, plastics, etc.)
- D. Encourage and support the development of speculative industrial buildings and properties
- E. Provide support and funding to the local universities for development and research for the identified industry clusters
- F. Support programming and partnerships focused on ensuring innovation and inclusion across Northeast Ohio's economic clusters, resulting in diversified, future-proof industries

NEFCO Highlight:



Provided technical assistance to the Greater Akron Chamber-led consortium, which was awarded EDA Tech Hub Designation and Strategy Development Grant for Sustainable Polymers Tech Hub project

The primary industrial sectors identified in the 2023-2028 CEDS include advanced manufacturing, advanced materials (polymers, chemicals, plastics, etc.), autonomous and electric vehicles, and health care. These four sectors continue to drive the region's focus. Secondary industrial sectors include agriculture, agribusiness, food-based manufacturing; energy; information technology; logistics; manufacturing; and research and development.

The polymer industry sector has emerged as a main sector partnership in the region. The region has among the highest concentration of polymer companies in the world. The University of Akron has the

top-ranked polymer science and polymer engineering program in the world.¹⁵ The Sustainable Polymers Tech Hub project illustrates a strong public-private partnership between local governments, nonprofit economic development organizations, universities, industry, philanthropic organizations, and others. The cluster is focused on capitalizing on the region's concentration of resources, polymer companies, and collaborative spirit. The EDA Tech Hub Designation provides the opportunity for Greater Akron to leverage its regional assets – such as the largest concentration of plastics and rubber manufacturing plants, machines, and materials in North America – as well as regional partnerships in research and development and an inclusive regional workforce, to pursue catalytic funding, which would establish the region as the global epicenter for these advanced materials. The Sustainable Polymers Tech Hub aims to tackle the severe climate and environmental impacts resulting from the use of fossil fuel-derived polymers through accelerating sustainable polymer manufacturing and commercialization in the U.S.

In May 2023, a coalition led by Case Western Reserve University (CWRU) was awarded a \$1 million National Science Foundation (NSF) Engines Development grant to plan economic, environmental, and manufacturing growth across the 18-county Team NEO region.¹⁶ The coalition's efforts to designate the region as an Engine for Sustainable Advanced Manufacturing are complementary to the focus on Sustainable Polymers and the Greater Akron region's Tech Hub designation. The CWRU-led coalition, which is inclusive of partners in the NEFCO region, was among 44 teams nationwide and the only from Ohio to receive this two-year planning grant and invitation to compete for as much as \$160 million in Phase II NSF Engines Program funding, which will be awarded in 2025. The coalition will focus on four areas: technology innovation, technology adoption, workforce and talent development, and leadership and governance.¹⁷ The coalition will focus on elevating the discovery and adoption of solutions in energy science; electrochemistry; green steel and chip production; carbon capture, storage, sequestration, and utilization; and alternatives to petroleum-based plastics, packaging, and biodegradable byproducts.¹⁸

There are a number of strong public-private partnerships within the region. All counties work closely with their respective private-sector, nonprofit economic development organization: Portage Development Board, Stark Economic Development Board, Greater Akron Chamber, and Wayne Economic Development Council. Elevate Greater Akron (EGA) is a strategic and inclusive economic development partnership between the City of Akron, Summit County, and the Greater Akron Chamber. EGA is a regional economic development plan that involves collaboration and support from business, community, non-profit and civic leaders. EGA focuses on supporting small and mid-sized business growth, inclusion and opportunity, workforce talent development, downtown and job hub development, innovation, and high potential startups, 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.¹⁹

¹⁵ The University of Akron, <https://www.uakron.edu/polymer/>

¹⁶ U.S. National Science Foundation, <https://new.nsf.gov/funding/initiatives/regional-innovation-engines>

¹⁷ <https://thedaily.case.edu/case-western-reserve-university-led-group-wins-federal-grant-to-accelerate-sustainable-manufacturing-in-the-region-and-beyond/>

¹⁸ U.S. National Science Foundation, https://www.nsf.gov/awardsearch/showAward?AWD_ID=2302943&HistoricalAwards=false

¹⁹ Stark Community Foundation, Strengthening Stark, <https://www.starkcf.org/files/publications/strengtheningstark2017-lowres.pdf>


In addition to its strong manufacturing base, Wayne County continues to promote and sustain lands devoted to agriculture, which is identified as a secondary target industrial sector in the CEDS. In 2023, Wayne County received funding through the Ohio Department of Agriculture’s Local Agricultural Easement Purchase Program for the purchase of an agricultural easement, conserving 82 acres in Baughman Township for agricultural use. Wayne is considering two other programs to conserve agricultural lands in the County: the agricultural conservation easement program-agricultural land easement and the agricultural easement donation program.

STATUS: MAKING PROGRESS

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

- A. Encourage counties and local governments to identify sites for brownfield assessments and cleanups
- B. Redevelop/reuse vacant industrial sites for economic use
- C. Encourage programs that support and pursue state and federal brownfields grant programs
- D. Work with county land banks to divest of vacant properties that have not been utilized within a certain timeframe
- E. Designate priority areas for development

NEFCO Highlights:

	Participated on the Vibrant NEO Brownfields RLF Steering Committee
	Informed the region about funding opportunities relative to brownfields

As mentioned earlier, NEFCO is an active member of Vibrant NEO, a consortium of governments and organizations, focused on creating a more vibrant, resilient, and sustainable Northeast Ohio.²⁰ The Executive Director serves as a non-voting member of the NOACA-Vibrant NEO Brownfields Steering Committee. The Steering Committee is tasked to make revolving loan fund recommendations to the Vibrant NEO and NOACA Boards of Directors. The Steering Committee reviews applications submitted for RLF loans and subgrants; conducts all standard due diligence normally undertaken by lending entities; drafts loan and subgrant agreements, including determination of loan or subgrant, dollar amount, interest rate, and payback period, subject to Vibrant NEO and NOACA approval; and recommends projects to the Vibrant NEO and NOACA Boards of Directors or their appropriate committees, based on the criteria developed by Vibrant NEO.

NEFCO staff participates on the Akron Metropolitan Area Transportation Study and Summit County District 8 Ohio Public Works Commission technical advisory committees, recommending transportation

²⁰ Vibrant NEO, <https://vibrantneo.org/>



and public infrastructure projects.²¹ 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.²² 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 has improved water quality, habitat, and recreational accessibility.

The city of Akron continues to actively redevelop its downtown. Major projects include the Bowery redevelopment, CitiCentre, Former Cascade Hotel, and Law 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 includes a cycle track, widened pedestrian pathways, green infrastructure, storm water management, and public transit improvements.

The Ohio Department of Development announced the guidelines on its brownfields programs. The Brownfield Remediation Program allocates \$350 million to remediate brownfield conditions statewide. Each of Ohio's 88 counties has a \$1 million set-aside. The Building Demolition and Site Revitalization Program allocates \$150 million to demolish commercial and residential buildings statewide and to revitalize adjacent, non-brownfield properties. Each county has a \$500,000 set-aside.

The Portage, Stark, Summit and Wayne County land reutilization corporations (land banks) have been aggressive in demolition, eliminating blight, and preparing properties for redevelopment. Demolition of vacant buildings has led to productive economic reuse. The Stark County Land Bank (SCLB) administers a Demolition Assistance Program for commercial and residential properties in Stark County. The SCLB also approved applications for over 160 properties through its Targeted Acquisition Assistance Program (TAAP).²³ The TAAP is utilized to assist with the strategic acquisition of blighted, vacant, or abandoned properties to facilitate redevelopment. Communities are poised to work collaboratively with their respective land banks for both grant programs.

STATUS: MAKING PROGRESS

²¹ County of Summit, District 8 Public Works Integrating Committee, <https://co.summitoh.net/committee-pages/District-8-Public-Works-Integrating-Committee.html>




²² Cuyahoga River Area of Concern, <https://cuyahogaoc.org/>

²³ Stark County Regional Planning Commission, https://rpc.starkcountyohio.gov/government/offices/regional_planning_commission/index.php

Goal 5: Encourage investment in infrastructure and affordable housing

- A. Support efforts to bring affordable, high-speed, reliable broadband to unserved and underserved areas of the NEFCO region
- B. Expand transportation options that enhance employment and educational opportunities, particularly for economically disadvantaged populations
- C. Support projects that encourage land use policies that improve and promote bike, pedestrian, and transit infrastructure
- D. Support projects that encourage land use policies that promote affordable housing
- E. Invest in sustainable, multimodal transportation infrastructure
- F. Invest in efforts to build new, affordable housing

NEFCO Highlights:

	Kept informed of BroadbandOhio's efforts to expand broadband
	Met with PARTA, SARTA, and METRO to review planning efforts relative to transit-oriented development and employer van pool programs
	Met with the Stark County Area Transportation Study to discuss active transportation planning

Summit and Stark Counties have begun aggressive broadband expansion projects. Summit County continues to work on the implementation of Summit Connects, a high-speed and secure broadband public safety network.²⁴ Summit Connects will initially consist of a 125-mile fiber optic cable ring connecting Summit County and all 31 local governments to gigabit speed internet service and a data center. The goal of Phase I is to improve public safety operations; Phase I is expected to be operational by 2025. In Phase II, Summit County will work with local communities to explore the feasibility of expanding Summit Connects through internet service providers to residents, businesses, schools, and other users. The City of Canton is working on developing a fiber backbone for the city, initially serving the Innovation District. Canton is also developing a strategy for residential deployment.

Transportation is a major factor influencing workforce development. The regional transit authorities in the region continue to improve operations and services to connect people with employment opportunities. The Stark Area Regional Transit Authority (SARTA) announced a new bus station will open in Massillon in early 2024. The \$5.1 million project will serve nearly 500 daily bus passengers. METRO RTA in Summit County continues to plan for transit-oriented development and bus rapid transit routes. SARTA, METRO, and the Portage Area Regional Transit Authority (PARTA) all have considered vanpool programs and other employer partnerships to connect people and jobs.

In February 2023, the City of Akron was one of 45 recipients across the United States to receive a U.S. Department of Transportation Reconnecting Communities grant to reconnect the portions of the city that were separated from downtown by the Innerbelt Highway. Akron will receive a \$960,000 planning

²⁴ Summit Connects, <https://co.summitoh.net/pages/Summit-Connects.html>

grant to complete master plan for the neighborhoods in and around the Innerbelt Highway. The city published the *Reconnecting Our Community Phase 1 Report* in December 2023, which includes short- and long-term recommendations for the 30-acre decommissioned stretch of the Innerbelt Highway.²⁵ The report acknowledges the highway project, which began in 1970, had devastating consequences to a predominantly Black neighborhood, displacing many residents and businesses, leaving emotional scars, and eliminating the possibility for building generational wealth. As Akron moves forward with this planning process, it pursues an equitable and accountable redevelopment.

Numerous nonprofit organizations and metropolitan housing authorities in the region are working on developing affordable housing and neighborhood revitalization. The Akron Metropolitan Housing Authority (AMHA) is moving forward with plans to revitalize the Summit Lake neighborhood. AMHA plans to rebuild and expand its Summit Lake Apartments, as well as to construct new housing on many of the neighborhood's vacant lots. Total cost is estimated at more than \$170 million. In 2020, AMHA and the city of Akron was one of 11 winners of a \$450,000 planning grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) Choice Neighborhoods program. The grant – along with funding from AMHA, City of Akron, Summit County, Akron Civic Commons, Knight Foundation, GAR Foundation, and Huntington Akron Foundation – supported a two-year planning process for this revitalization project. AMHA is looking to build infill housing in the neighborhood, including duplexes, triplexes, and single-family homes. AMHA is planning up to 479 units in a mixed-income housing development, with the apartments expanding to include other affordable and market-rate units. The City of Akron and the Knight Foundation are providing \$4 million each to rebuild Middlebury neighborhood homes and put housing back in the hands of local owners.

The Stark Metropolitan Housing Authority has received a \$500,000 HUD Choice Neighborhoods planning grant for the Jackson Sherrick area. The grant will fund a two-year process to devise a plan that could ultimately lead to an implementation grant of \$50 million in the future.

The City of Canton has committed \$5 million in federal funds to projects in the Shorb Neighborhood, including \$1 million to the Canton Community Improvement Corp. to acquire and demolish the Canton Inn and adjacent properties; \$1 million to Canton For All People for the repair and renovation of homes along Ninth Street NW; \$2 million to Canton For All People to build up to 60 new houses in the Shorb neighborhood over the next six years; \$900,000 to Canton For All People to help build Newton Family Apartments on the former Canton Inn site; and \$100,000 reserved for demolitions in the Shorb neighborhood. Canton's Planning Department has set aside \$100,000 for a Housing Development and Beautification grant program for the Shorb area. The nonprofit organization, Canton For All People, is planning a 52-unit apartment complex for low-income residents. The complex will be located near a market offering free fresh food on Shorb Avenue.

Lock 3 Park in Akron is also undergoing a major transformation. The redeveloped Lock 3 Park will include shaded seating, landscaped gardens, artwork, skating areas, and a performance pavilion.²⁶ Located along the Ohio and Erie Canalway and Towpath Trail, Lock 3 Park provides recreation and social connections in downtown Akron. The improvements – which are to be completed in fall 2024 – will establish the location as an event, concert, and festival public space and year-round destination for residents and

²⁵ Reconnecting Our Community Phase 1 Report, City of Akron, 2023, www.akroninnerbelt.com/sites/default/files/docs/Reconnecting%20Our%20Community_Full%20Report.pdf

²⁶ Akron Civic Commons, <https://www.akronciviccommons.org/stories/lock-3-park-updates>







visitors to downtown Akron. Akron Civic Commons 2.0 is coordinated by the Ohio and Erie Canalway Coalition, in partnership with the City of Akron.

STATUS: MAKING PROGRESS

Goal 6: Support programs that diversify and build strong, resilient local and regional economies

- A. Encourage programs and projects that create and retain jobs
- B. Support efforts that will make the region more globally competitive
- C. Support entrepreneurial and technological development
- D. Improve access to capital for regional businesses in equitable manner

2023 Team NEO Economic Development Statistics by NEFCO County²⁷

						
NEFCO County	Projects	Jobs Created	Jobs Retained	Total fixed asset investment	New Payroll	Retained Payroll
Portage Co.	10	104	191	\$14.79 million	\$6.42 million	\$10.41 million
Stark Co.	13	237	197	\$49.39 million	\$17.43 million	\$17.31 million
Summit Co.	12	194	195	\$15.48 million	\$10.90 million	\$9.98 million
Wayne Co.	1	89	172	\$102.0 million	\$4.40 million	13.43 million
Total	36	624	755	\$181.66 million	\$39.16 million	\$51.13 million

Team NEO, the JobsOhio affiliate for 18 counties in Northeast Ohio, reported excellent numbers in 2023. Team NEO had success with 36 projects in 2023, accounting for 624 new and 755 retained jobs. Those jobs totaled \$39.16 million in new payroll and \$51.13 million in retained payroll. The projects totaled \$181.66 million in total fixed asset investment. Of the 36 projects, 19 were in the advanced manufacturing cluster. Six other projects were in food sciences and agriculture, and three projects were in the information services and software cluster.

Each of the four NEFCO counties and major cities has a business retention and business expansion (BRE) program. The BRE programs include annual visits to major and medium-sized companies to analyze business needs, offer support, and discuss available resources and incentives. The BRE programs are key to retaining existing jobs and ensuring companies remain in the NEFCO region. The four nonprofit economic development organizations – Portage Development Board (PDB), Stark Economic Development Board (SEDB), Greater Akron Chamber (GAC), and Wayne Economic Development Council (WEDC) – work closely with communities in their respective counties to create and retain jobs. The Canton and Akron areas have robust community and economic development planning programs: Strengthening Stark and Elevate Greater Akron.

Portage County had an impressive 2023. The PDB hosts monthly meetings with economic development professionals around Portage County to review updates on projects and programs. The PDB aids industrial realtors, builders, local industries, and local communities to maintain and improve the

²⁷ Data provided by Team NEO, <https://northeastohioregion.com/>

economic base in Portage County. The PDB conducted nearly 200 BRE visits. Major projects include Automation Plastics in Aurora (building acquisition); Quality IP in Kent (expansion); Summit Machine in Mogadore; Restaurant Depot in Streetsboro (building construction); Advanced Innovative Manufacturing in Aurora (building acquisition); HEPA Environmental in Rootstown (building expansion); Viega in Shalersville (building construction); and Martin Wheel in Brimfield Township. Per the PDB, 241 jobs were created, and 325 jobs were retained.²⁸ There was over \$232 million in new investment and \$32 million in new and retained payroll. The PDB is also establishing an Energy Special Improvement District (ESID) for Portage County to facilitate PACE loans.

Stark County had a number of large projects in 2023. There were 19 company projects that gained JobsOhio support in 2023, resulting in 302 new jobs, nearly \$18 million in new payroll, and nearly \$50 million in capital expenditures.²⁹ Six projects in Stark County received JobsOhio Inclusion Grants, which provide additional financial support for qualified projects in designated distressed communities and/or for businesses owned by an underrepresented population. The SEDB conducted 212 BRE meetings in 2023, an organizational record. Amazon opened a new fulfillment center in Canton. The one million square-foot center will create 1,000 jobs. Tractor Supply opened a \$70 million, 900,000 square-foot distribution center in Navarre. The center employs about 350 full-time workers. Notable expansion projects include Ohio Gratings in Perry Township (100 jobs), MAC Trailer in Alliance (80 jobs), and Solmet Technologies in Canton Township (10 jobs).

In 2023, the Elevate Greater Akron team conducted nearly 300 BRE meetings with Summit County businesses. Major projects in Summit County included OnQ Solution in Akron; Pepprl+Fuchs in Twinsburg (building construction); Kraftpack in Twinsburg (expanding with future plans to build larger facility); Polymerics in Cuyahoga Falls (equipment); Beringer Plating in Akron; Castle Aviation in Green (expansion); and Haydon Corporation in Stow (new construction). These major projects accounted for 202 new jobs, 202 retained jobs, \$37.146 million in new investment, and millions in new and retained payroll.³⁰ The City of Barberton was awarded \$350,000 in Transportation Improvement District funding from the Ohio Department of Transportation to improve the roadway supporting the Newell Street Industrial Park. In addition, Summit County has seen a significant increase in interest for the foreign trade zone program that it administers.

The WEDC conducted more than 50 BRE visits in 2023. 2023 was also The WEDC held an additional 155 meetings with businesses and organizations throughout Wayne County as part of the organization's five-year investor campaign. Major projects in Wayne County in 2023 included Jarrett Warehouse in Orrville (addition); Bekaert in Orrville (new warehouse); Schaeffler in Wooster (expansion); Wooster Brush Company (construction); Setzer Properties ZNCA LLC in Wooster (construction); Daisy Brand in Wooster (expansion); Morton Salt in Rittman (new equipment); Kauffman Realty in Kidron (new headquarters); Johnson Brothers Rubber (new lab/testing facility); The Village Network in Wooster (new intake facility); Magic Garage Door in Orrville (expansion); and Frito Lay in Wooster (additional capacity to warehouse). These major projects created more than 150 new jobs, over \$150 million in capital investment, and over 700,000 square feet of new space.³¹ The largest project for Wayne County in 2023 was the Daisy Brand

²⁸ Data provided by the Portage Development Board, <https://www.portagedevbd.org/>

²⁹ Data provided by the Stark Economic Development Board, <https://www.starkcoohio.com/>

³⁰ Data provided by the County of Summit, <https://co.summitoh.net/portal/County-of-Summit-Ohio.html> and Elevate Greater Akron, <https://elevategreaterakron.org/>

³¹ Data provided by the Wayne Economic Development Council, <https://www.waynecountyedc.com/>.

expansion. Daisy Brand announced it will complete an 86,000-square-foot addition to its facility in Wooster for processing and packaging dairy-based products, creating more than 100 new jobs.

STATUS: MAKING PROGRESS

Goal 7: Develop benchmarking to evaluate region's progress and competitiveness

- A. Analyze data to establish benchmark
- B. Review and adopt best practices from other regions
- C. Better understand positive and negative factors impacting region's competitiveness
- D. Assess regional equity
- E. Develop metrics to evaluate regional progress

NEFCO Highlights:

	Working with the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO) to identify comparable regions
	Serving on the NADO Research Foundation Advisory Committee

Benchmarking is an important evaluation tool for any community or region. Benchmarking helps evaluate regional progress across a broad range of categories. Over the next year, NEFCO will initiate a benchmarking process, evaluating demographic and economic factors, while looking at comparisons with similar regions across the nation. Benchmarking will help establish base data and help determine what factors have impacted development in the NEFCO region, both positively and negatively. Benchmarking will also catalog best practices from other regions and analyze how and why other regions are progressing more or less than the NEFCO region.

NEFCO is a member of the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO), which offers member organizations a wealth of information and resources on funding, planning and development news, best practices, and updates from other regional development organizations (RDOs). In 2023, NEFCO's Program Manager for Economic Development Planning was selected to serve on the NADO Research Foundation (RF) Advisory Committee, representing the Midwest Region. The Advisory Committee includes eight members: one from each of the six NADO membership regions; one representing the Associate Membership category; and the NADO Research Foundation President. The Advisory Committee works with RF leadership and staff to identify issues and topics of relevance and concern to NADO members; provides guidance and offers ideas related to research and training programs and opportunities to serve the membership; and shares their individual and collective professional expertise and in-depth knowledge of regional approaches to economic development. Through this committee assignment, staff hopes to collaborate with regional development organizations across the United States and share back best practices, particularly in regions where economic growth outpaces that of the NEFCO region. As an active member of NADO, NEFCO has reached out to NADO RF staff to help pair NEFCO with other RDOs representing regions of similar market size.

STATUS: NEED TO BEGIN WORK

2024 Schedule of Goals and NEFCO Strategies

The following CEDS goals and NEFCO strategies for 2024 have been reviewed and approved by the NEFCO General Policy Board.

Goal 1: Address the supply chain and promote domestic production

NEFCO Strategies:

- Support projects that address supply chain issues
- Connect local governments, universities, and other organizations to available resources and funding opportunities

Goal 2: Support programs that build human capital

NEFCO Strategies:

- Connect local governments and economic development organizations to available resources and funding opportunities
- Provide technical assistance and support for EDA and other grant applications
- Share results of regional vocational school and high school surveys with economic development partners
- Continued implementation of ER&R Plan workforce development strategies

Goal 3: Encourage development of industries that support Northeast Ohio's economic clusters

NEFCO Strategies:

- Provide support for Sustainable Polymers Tech Hub project
- Provide technical assistance and support for EDA and other grant applications
- Connect local governments, universities, and other organizations to available resources

Goal 4: Promote the redevelopment of blighted, underused, or vacant and environmentally challenged sites

NEFCO Strategies:

- Participate on the Vibrant NEO Brownfields Steering Committee
- Provide information on funding opportunities available for brownfields assessment and remediation via website, newsletters, and email communications
- Better engage with county land banks to understand long-term strategies
- Re-assess NEFCO strategy for addressing regional brownfields

Goal 5: Encourage investment in infrastructure and affordable housing

NEFCO Strategies:

- Better engage with internet service providers (ISPs) in CEDS planning
- Connect local governments, economic development organizations, and other organizations to available resources
- Provide technical assistance and support for EDA and other grant applications
- Provide updates to local governments on BroadbandOhio funding opportunities
- Better engage regional metropolitan planning organizations and transit authorities in CEDS planning
- ER&R Plan implementation: encourage active transportation planning
- ER&R Plan implementation: encourage transit-oriented development planning



- Better engage metropolitan housing authorities in CEDS planning
- Better engage county and regional planning commissions in CEDS planning

Goal 6: Support programs that diversify and build strong, resilient local and regional economiesNEFCO Strategies:

- Provide technical assistance and support for EDA and other grant applications
- Connect local governments, economic development organizations, and other organizations to available resources
- Encourage collaboration between community groups, workforce development organizations, and businesses
- Help connect local governments to entrepreneurial resources

Goal 7: Develop benchmarking to evaluate region's progress and competitivenessNEFCO Strategies:

- Strengthen partnership with Team NEO
- Collaborate with NADO Research Foundation to find comparable regions; analyze similarities and differences
- Compile demographic and market data
- Compile list of best practices
- Compile list of positive and negative factors
- Develop regional evaluation metrics
- Develop summary report

Timeline for Goals and Program Activities

The following timeline for CEDS goals and NEFCO strategies for 2024 have been reviewed and approved by the NEFCO General Policy Board.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Goal 1: Address the supply chain and promote domestic production												
Support projects that address supply chain issues												
Connect local governments, universities, and other organizations to available resources and funding opportunities												
Goal 2: Support programs that build human capital												
Connect local governments and economic development organizations to available resources and funding opportunities												
Provide technical assistance and support for EDA and other grant applications												



	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Share results of regional vocational and high school surveys with economic development partners												
Continued implementation of ER&R Plan workforce development strategies												
Goal 3: Encourage development of industries that support Northeast Ohio's economic clusters												
Provide support for Sustainable Polymers Tech Hub project												
Provide technical assistance and support for EDA and other grant applications												
Connect local governments, universities, and other organizations to available resources												
Goal 4: Promote the redevelopment of blighted, underused, or vacant and environmentally challenged sites												
Participate on Vibrant NEO's Brownfields Steering Committee												
Provide information on funding opportunities for brownfields assessment and remediation via website, newsletters, and email communications												
Better engage with county land banks to understand long-term strategies												
Re-assess NEFCO strategy for addressing regional brownfields												
Goal 5: Encourage investment in infrastructure and affordable housing												
Better engage with ISPs in CEDS planning												
Connect local governments, economic development organizations, and other organizations to available resources												
Provide technical assistance and support for EDA and other grant applications												
Provide updates to local governments on BroadbandOhio funding opportunities												



	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Better engage regional metropolitan planning organizations and transit authorities in CEDS planning												
ER&R Plan implementation: encourage active transportation planning												
ER&R Plan implementation: encourage transit-oriented development planning												
Better engage metropolitan housing authorities in CEDS planning												
Better engage county and regional planning commissions in CEDS planning												
Goal 6: Support programs that diversify and build strong, resilient local and regional economies												
Provide technical assistance and support for EDA and other grant applications												
Connect local governments, economic development organizations, and other organizations to available resources												
Encourage collaboration between community groups, workforce development organizations, and businesses												
Help connect local governments to entrepreneurial resources												
Goal 7: Develop benchmarking to evaluate region's progress and competitiveness												
Strengthen partnership with Team NEO												
Collaborate with NADO Research Foundation to find comparable regions; analyze similarities and differences												
Compile demographic and market data												
Compile a list of best practices												
Compile a list of positive and negative factors												
Develop regional evaluation metrics												
Develop summary report												

Regional Economic Development News

The following regional economic development news items were reported and distributed to NEFCO communities and General Policy Board members in 2023.

Akron launches community survey on future of Akron Innerbelt (January 2023)

The city of Akron has launched a survey to gather public feedback about future uses for the decommissioned portion of the Akron Innerbelt. The survey, which is part of the city's public engagement process, "Reconnecting Our Community," can be completed by visiting www.akroninnerbelt.com/community-survey. Construction on the Innerbelt began in 1970, displacing residents and businesses. A portion of the Innerbelt between Market and Exchange streets was permanently closed in 2018.

Summa to open 64-bed behavioral health facility Jan. 24 in Akron (January 2023)

The new Summa Health behavioral health facility will open on January 24. The Juve Family Behavioral Health Pavilion, a seven-story building on the Akron City Hospital campus at 45 Arch St., will consolidate care and replace inpatient and outpatient mental health and behavioral health services at the aging St. Thomas Hospital. The construction took 20 months to complete. The 159,000-square-foot facility is an \$84 million total investment by the Akron-based health system. That includes about \$64 million in new construction costs. It stands on the site of the former school of nursing, which had not been used in several years. The new building will house outpatient and inpatient programs. Those include mental health services such as outpatient psychiatry, inpatient behavioral health, inpatient geriatric behavioral health and the Traumatic Stress Center. There also will be addiction treatment services, including partial hospitalization and intensive outpatient programs. Hospital-based detox services will be located across the bridge in the main hospital. The future of the St. Thomas building on North Main Street, which is nearly 100 years old, remains unknown.

Ravenna wants to attract more restaurants to city (January 2023)

Ravenna has released a new report detailing the "pulse" of Ravenna's economy. The Ravenna Pulse newsletter is accompanied by the city's economic overview report, which provides more detailed demographics on the city's economy. The report notes that Ravenna is home to UH Portage Medical Center and several social service agencies because of the city's position as county seat. The report indicates Ravenna has 2,469 workers in health care and social services, which comprise 31.5 percent of the city's workforce, the largest sector of workers. Another 1,073 workers are employed in manufacturing, and 687 work in public administration. A total of 64 percent of the city's residents are employed, two percent more than the national average. Among Ravenna residents ages 25 to 54, or those considered the "prime age labor force," 82.2 percent of people are employed. Despite industrial growth in Ravenna, the city struggles to attract commercial businesses to support the new growth. City officials argue Ravenna needs more restaurants. The city has been taking steps to attract restaurants, including the creation of a Designated Outdoor Refreshment Area, which allows patrons to purchase alcoholic beverages from participating businesses and carry them within a clearly defined area.

Akron businesses partner with Firestone CLC to help young jobseekers prep for workforce (January 2023)

A group of local businesses found a way to help some Firestone high School students on their way to getting their first jobs, or at least give them a step up when it comes time for them to start looking. About two dozen members of the school's basketball program turned out during winter break to get

training on how to fill out job applications, write resumes and land their first job. The program also included real job interviews for those students old enough to go to work. Younger students received interview practice and feedback on their performance from real-world employers. Sponsors included A Better Cleaning Service-Akron, Speedy IRepair, Evans Lawn Services, McDonald's Wallhaven, Upper Crust Akron, Chuck E. Cheese Fairlawn, Ariana Sierra of Lock Hearts Home Solutions, Sheena Workman T.B.G Talent Acquisitions LLC, and Shape Me Brows. More than a dozen other individuals and companies donated money and clothing to support the program. There are plans to organize other training sessions for students in the district.

Remediation of former Starfire on Columbus Road could be completed next year (January 2023)

The Stark County Regional Planning Commission will be submitting a remedial action plan and then applying for grant funding through the state to remove contaminated soil and groundwater from the former Starfire gas station site on Columbus Road. The Stark County Land Reutilization Corp. acquired the Plain Township property in 2018 and received a \$250,000 grant from the Ohio Department of Development to start cleanup at the site. Following the demolitions, the county was required to drill several sampling wells to determine the nature and extent of the contamination. The agency found contamination in the soil and groundwater and will need more money to clean it up. Cleanup is estimated at \$200,000. The agency plans to apply for funds from Ohio's Bureau of Underground Storage Tank Regulations.

Ohio awards historic tax credits to two Canton projects (January 2023)

The Renkert Building at 306 Market Avenue N and the former Folwell-Zollinger or Granger office building at 111 Second St. NW each received historic preservation tax credits through the Ohio Historic Preservation Tax Credit Program administered by the Ohio Department of Development. The Renkert Building received \$4.77 million — which is in addition to \$5 million in historic preservation tax credits it received last year — and the Folwell-Zollinger building received \$2 million. The state also awarded the Renkert \$3.4 million for asbestos removal through the Ohio Brownfield Remediation Program and \$4.2 million in transformational mixed-use development tax credits. The Renkert Building is being converted into a 92-room, extended-stay hotel with a restaurant and event space. It will be called the Century Plaza Hotel and operate under the Marriott brand. The Second Street building is being converted into market-rate apartments. The total project is estimated to cost \$10.6 million and will result in 24 one- and two-bedroom units with first-floor commercial space.

Former Nationwide building sold in downtown Canton (February 2023)

Chris Maggione, owner of Jerzee's Sports Grille, has purchased the former Nationwide building in Canton. Although redevelopment plans have not been finalized, Maggione had previously indicated a desire to buy the building and convert the first floor into warehouse space with second-floor offices for rent. Nationwide Mutual Insurance Co. left the more than 100,000-square-foot building in early 2019. The Downtown Canton Land Bank then purchased it for \$500,000 and maintained the property opposite the Canton Museum of Art and Canton Memorial Civic Center. In late 2021, the city took ownership and paid \$1.25 million to reimburse the land bank and allocated up to \$300,000 to the Canton Community Improvement Corporation, the city's economic development nonprofit, for building upkeep. Any plans that differ from the current business zoning district would require city council approval.

Imagine Downtown Massillon seeks to bolster downtown (February 2023)

The Imagine Downtown Massillon committee seeks to bring about a downtown resurgence, with an immediate focus on new development and preservation. The new panel is looking at ways to improve and preserve historic buildings downtown and attracting younger professionals to the area. The 32-member committee consists of city officials, business and property owners, contractors, public utility representatives, and representatives from the Massillon Museum. The new group is an offshoot of the

previous Imagine Downtown Massillon effort, which included the downtown Streetscape initiative and Duncan Plaza redo.

Shorb neighborhood revitalization efforts in full swing (February 2023)

Canton For All People is looking to construct three new homes, renovate eight existing homes, and build a community center in the greater Shorb neighborhood this year. In the past eight months, the community development corporation – created by Crossroads United Methodist Church and the Lemmon and DeHoff family foundations – has purchased 11 properties, demolishing two that were not safe to renovate. The city and Canton For All People each produced their own studies on the greater neighborhood around Shorb Avenue NW about two years ago with plans to improve housing, safety and the quality of life for residents. Working in partnership, they demolished the problematic Canton Inn in November. Canton For All People has continued to lead revitalization efforts in the greater Shorb area, which it defines as Tuscarawas Street W to 12th Street NW and McKinley Avenue NW to the railroad in the west. The goal is to renovate 300 properties within 10 years. The city gave \$1 million in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding for the organization's housing renovations and its support of the group's application for low-income housing tax credits at the former Canton Inn site. Canton For All People will apply for nine-percent tax credits from the Ohio Housing Finance Agency to construct a 54-unit apartment complex. The group is also developing the Shorb Neighborhood Market and Resource Center, which will provide access to healthy food in partnership with the Akron-Canton Foodbank, and space for community gatherings and potential classes in partnership with other area organizations.

Ohio rates first in plastics industry employment, UA students benefit (February 2023)

The Plastic Industry Association's 2022 Size and Impact study showed that the U.S. plastics industry remains one of the U.S. economy's largest and strongest sectors and continued to grow in 2021, employing 808,500 people and making shipments worth \$401 billion. Ohio had the most plastics industry employees in the U.S. in 2021, with 75,100 workers. The plastics industry is expected to continue to grow in 2022-2023. The University of Akron's College of Engineering and Polymer Science offers certificate and degree programs for students and professionals, and educational outreach programs for K-12 students and teachers. In April, UA became the first public university in Ohio to offer an undergraduate degree in polymer science and polymer engineering, providing more students from around the world with skills as polymer scientists and engineers. Early in 2022, edurank.com rated UA's polymer science and plastics engineering program best in the world. In September 2022, the National Academy of Inventors and Intellectual Property Owners Association issued a report on top-ranked U.S. and international universities receiving the highest issuance of U.S. utility patents by the United States Patent and Trademark Office in 2021. UA has been ranked in the top 100 every year since 2017. The College of Engineering and Polymer Science faculty represent one of the largest concentrations of polymer expertise in the U.S., having invented 300 active U.S. patents and patent applications, including some that have been commercialized worldwide. Students also have hands-on research with faculty and co-op opportunities with businesses in Northeast Ohio, which is a national hub for the polymer and plastics industry.

NEOMED gets \$2 million in federal funds toward dental school (February 2023)

The Northeast Ohio Medical University (NEOMED) has received \$2 million in federal funding toward its planned dental school. The funds from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services are part of the fiscal year 2023 omnibus funding bill. NEOMED said the \$2 million, when combined with \$1 million in funding from the state of Ohio and a \$10 million gift from the Dr. Dominic A. and Helen M. Bitonte Family Foundation, brings the college more than halfway to its goal of \$25 million to establish and sustain the dental college. NEOMED plans to open the Bitonte College of Dentistry in 2025, eventually graduating about 50 dentists annually. The school will offer a dental clinic that, along with health

centers and hospital-based dental departments, will coordinate care among providers to improve total overall health. Last year, NEOMED opened a health clinic to the public.

Building activity soars in Aurora (February 2023)

Bolstered by Pulte Homes' residential development on the former Sea World of Ohio property and some other areas of brisk building, 2022 was the city of Aurora's most active construction year in almost a decade. Residential, commercial, and industrial building activity totaled \$82.37 million in 2022. The most expensive industrial project was Ashley Furniture's new building at \$10 million, followed by a mezzanine at McMaster-Carr (\$6.1 million). Others were \$250,000 for roof repair at Piping Rock, \$200,000 for a mezzanine at Avantor/Poseidon and \$150,000 for interior alterations at Piping Rock. Leading the list of the 15 commercial building permits were apartment additions at the Atrium at Anna Maria at \$4 million and an addition at Ganley Chrysler at \$2.5 million.

Welded partnership: Stark State named a 'sister college' to Akron's East CLC (February 2023)

Akron Public Schools and Stark State College announced the college will be the sister college for East Community Learning Center, in addition to already being the sister college for Garfield CLC. The college partnerships are designed to boost academics and to encourage students to consider continuing their education after high school, but Stark State's offerings in technical education also align well with some of the more hands-on career pathways at East. East already offers college credit classes through Stark State at the high school, but the partnership formalizes the relationship and grows it significantly. Stark State is committing 2,500 hours of support over the next three years. That support includes increased class offerings at the high school, access for students to the college campuses in Canton and Akron, helping students fill out financial aid forms, and supporting teachers in developing their curriculum to ready students for post-secondary work or a career. The partnerships between community entities, whether they are businesses, non-profits or colleges, are forged with the help of United Way of Summit and Medina Counties. Each high school has at least two academies, which serve as the umbrella for several career pathways, including welding. The district structured each academy to have a named partner, which is the highest level of partnership in the academies.

New Metro RTA plan means more frequent service for most riders in Akron (February 2023)

Starting June 4, Metro RTA plans to make major changes that will improve service for most riders. The new Reimagined Network will bring more frequent service that places 97 percent of riders within a quarter-mile of a bus stop, and 63 percent of riders close to lines with more frequent stops, according to an analysis by Metro. That 63 percent includes 77 percent of low-income riders and 79 percent of people of color who use the system. Currently, only 36 percent of riders have access to a bus that comes every 30 minutes or less. There will be five routes where buses will make rounds every 15 minutes, where the average wait time at a bus stop will be 7½ minutes. Other routes will also increase in frequency, from 45 to 30 minutes and from as long as 90 minutes to 60 minutes. Currently, the only frequent service line is the DASH, Akron's free weekday shuttle service, which runs every 10 to 15 minutes from the downtown terminal to the University of Akron. It will be discontinued. The Metro board of directors is scheduled to approve the overall plan March 28 and continue with outreach regarding the change through April and May. Comments on the plan can be made at www.reimagine-metro.com/. The agency indicates the new system was specifically designed to benefit lower-income residents. In the new system, median-income residents of Summit County within a quarter-mile of transit would be able to reach about 53 percent more jobs in 45 minutes and lower-income resident living near transit would be able to use transit to reach about 104 percent more jobs in 45 minutes. The median person of color living near transit would be able to reach about 89 percent more jobs in the same amount of time. The new plan also includes improved out-of-county connections, including an

hourly express from downtown Akron to Portage Area Regional Transit Authority's main terminal in Kent.

Tractor Supply CO.'s new \$70 million distribution center in Navarre makes public debut (February 2023)

Tractor Supply Co. officially opened its \$70 million, 900,000 square-foot distribution center in Navarre. The facility, which began operations on December 6, employs approximately 350 full-time workers. Work on the warehouse at the former Stark County Farm started in June 2021. It's a full-service distribution center, shipping Tractor Supply products to retail stores in multiple eastern U.S. states, as well as fulfilling online orders. The center aims to service more than 250 stores across Ohio, as well as sectors of West Virginia, Pennsylvania, Indiana and Michigan. Tractor Supply is planning to add employees in an attempt to bring its total workforce up to 600 to 700.

Will new group revitalize downtown? Main Street Barberton organizers discuss mission (March 2023)

Main Street Barberton is looking to revitalize downtown Barberton. The new organization is looking to hire a director and establish a downtown office in April. The organization will aim to make a more vibrant downtown and host numerous events throughout the year. The city and the Barberton City Foundation each will contribute \$50,000 annually for three years to get MSB rolling. After that, the organization will use fundraising techniques established by Heritage Ohio to keep things on track. One goal will be to establish a database of downtown assets, with an eye to attracting new businesses and residential tenants.

How do you feel about living in Akron? City seeks feedback through survey, online portal (March 2023)

The city of Akron is asking residents to provide feedback about living and working in Akron. The city has started an online platform to host community conversations about key issues and initiatives. The program launch follows the survey results of the Akron Decides initiative, which indicated city residents desire more of a voice in civic matters. The survey and online platform aim to make the city more proactive in gathering community feedback, receiving meaningful analytics, and providing a more equitable engagement with our residents. The 35-question survey asks residents to rate their experiences with different aspects of Akron life, including transportation, public safety, education, and affordable housing. Collected data will be used to better understand concerns important to residents. The city is partnering with Zencity to host and administer the survey and engagement processes. Beyond the community survey, residents can fill out issue-specific surveys — such as a questionnaire about electric vehicle car-sharing — through the engagement platform. Discussion boards also are being incorporated into the engagement platform; one has been set up to discuss a proposal to redesign the city's flag, and more topics are planned for the portal.

Metro RTA hosting final hearing on new Reimagined Network fixed routes (March 2023)

Metro RTA is hosting its final public hearing on its draft Reimagined Network, a new, redesigned system for the Summit County public transportation provider's fixed routes. The public hearing will be held March 1 from 6 to 8 p.m. at the Akron-Summit County Public Library Main Branch. The major changes include restoring the number of service hours to pre-pandemic levels; expanding weekend service, with all routes running Saturdays and Sundays except for three regional routes; adding five new high frequency corridors (West Market, South Arlington, East Exchange, Grant/Brown and Euclid/Diagonal/Vernon Odom); adding three new 30-minute routes in addition to the five existing 30-minute services; and adding new regional connections to Kent, Brimfield and Cuyahoga County.

Stark, Canton look into joint project to expand fiber networks, internet access (March 2023)

The city of Canton and Stark County are exploring a project that would expand the county's and city's fiber networks. The project aims to improve internet speed at government buildings and eliminate the

need to pay third-party network service providers at these facilities. The city of Canton also has plans to expand its safety camera network and lay the backbone for offering commercial and residential fiber internet service. Both Stark and Canton would be able to add government buildings, such as the County Jail, Engineer's Office, Health Department, and Building Inspection Department, to their fiber networks, which would save money on network service costs. Canton is looking to build upon its existing safety camera network. The city would invest \$1 million in additional cameras, license plate readers and other related equipment as part of the project. The project also would create a backbone for Canton to offer commercial or residential fiber internet service in the future. Canton would pay roughly \$7.6 million, with \$6.6 million going toward the network itself and \$1 million going toward cameras and other related equipment. Funds would come from the city's share of American Rescue Plan funds. Stark County would pay a total of \$1.5 million for its portion.

Canton Township to hold public forum on community's future direction (March 2023)

The Stark County Regional Planning Commission is working on the development of a comprehensive plan for Canton Township. A public forum is scheduled for February 27th. The plan will create a vision for the township and assist trustees with decision making. The planning effort will include input from residents and businesses. The SCRPC has developed similar plans for other communities, including most recently for Plain Township. The comprehensive plan will address zoning, parks and open spaces, transportation, and capital improvements. Canton Township has about 13,000 residents.

What's next for Merriman Valley? Businesses abuzz as entertainment district plan emerges (March 2023)

The Merriman Valley-Schumacher project, a joint effort between Akron and Cuyahoga Falls, continues to forge ahead with a proposal for an entertainment district. The proposal is gathering support from the business community as well as a citizen coalition that has taken a more cautious view of growth and development plans. Both cities are developing new zoning parameters for the area. Mandy Lal, the new owner of Liberty Commons, recently petitioned Akron to create a roughly 24½-acre community entertainment district (CED) including the development's mix of commercial and residential complexes. Lal is looking to bring more full-service restaurants and taverns to the once-popular area, but more liquor permits would need to be made available to attract those businesses. Akron City Council is currently reviewing the CED designation, which would facilitate the opportunity for more businesses to invest and establish themselves in the area and to make it easier for these establishments to apply for liquor licenses. Unlike Akron's DORA district, open containers are not allowed outside of the confines of the establishment. A CED designation for Merriman Valley would create a pool of up to 15 new D5-J liquor licenses for use of food-serving establishments within the area. Preserve the Valley, a volunteer citizen action coalition, has reacted positively to the CED plan, as it would limit nuisance and public disturbance issues.

Allegiant adds seasonal nonstop flights between Akron-Canton and Myrtle Beach (March 2023)

Allegiant announced it is adding seasonal nonstop flights from Akron-Canton Airport to Myrtle Beach International Airport starting June 1. Allegiant now has eight nonstop flights from the Akron-Canton Airport: Myrtle Beach, Nashville, Ft. Lauderdale/Miami, Punta Gorda/Ft. Myers, St. Pete/Clearwater, Orlando/Sanford, Savannah/Hilton Head and Sarasota/Bradenton.

Breeze, Allegiant add destinations from Akron-Canton Airport (March 2023)

Breeze Airways will offer seasonal direct flights to Norfolk International Airport Thursdays and Sundays from June 1 to September 5. Breeze is also adding additional flights to Orlando International Airport this summer. The airline also offers flights from Akron-Canton Airport to Charleston, Las Vegas, Nashville, New Orleans, Orlando, Tampa and West Palm Beach, Florida. Akron-Canton Airport also welcomed its first Allegiant flight from Nashville International Airport. Allegiant also offers several flights from Akron-

Canton to locations in Florida: Orlando, Punta Gorda/Fort Myers, Tampa Bay, Sanford and Fort Lauderdale area.

GOJO is up for sale, Wall Street Journal reports (April 2023)

GOJO Industries, the Akron-based maker of Purell, is up for sale, according to a Wall Street Journal story. Family-owned GOJO has hired JP Morgan Chase to run an auction, the newspaper reported. The WSJ said the company could be valued at around \$3 billion with about \$1 billion in annual sales. GOJO was founded in Akron in 1946 by Jerry and Goldie Lippman to create a hand cleaner for tire workers to replace the kerosene and benzene which had been used to remove carbon black and graphite. GOJO found success during the COVID-19 pandemic as it made bold moves to handle production delays in January 2020. The company ramped up production and began blow-molding its own bottles and injection-molding all components in a Purell bottle and refills that go into dispensers in its own facilities. In 2020, the company produced 140 billion doses of Purell. The international company has its headquarters in downtown Akron with Northeast Ohio facilities in Cuyahoga Falls, Wooster, Massillon, Maple Heights and Ashland. The company employs 2,300 workers worldwide, 1,800 in Ohio.

Former Alliance Neighborhood Center having rebirth with stores, vital programs (April 2023)

The former Alliance Neighborhood Center is being renovated to help serve the high-poverty surrounding neighborhoods. About 73 percent of those who live around the center are in poverty, according to 2021 city statistics. Hoping to improve the situation, Alliance YWCA and four other agencies have or will open a variety of services inside the facility, now called "The Commons." The other tenants are StarkFresh, Men's Challenge, Sports Outreach, and the University of Mount Union. The services at The Commons will include a clothing store, grocery store, job training and life skills programs, sports ministry, and health and wellness care. There also will be community rooms for smaller groups. The Commons is supported and managed by the Greater Alliance Foundation in partnership with Mount Union and a network of other agencies. Stark Community Foundation provided funds for initial startup expenses.

Mayflower Manor gets new life (April 2023)

Akron's historic Mayflower Manor has been completely restored and renovated into an apartment community for seniors and disabled residents. The Capital Realty Group has invested \$20 million in improvements to the Mayflower, furnishing apartments with new appliances, cabinets, kitchens, bathrooms, air conditioning and heating, flooring, and updated fixtures. Amenities include a library with reading spots, a computer room, a TV room, a large gaming area and tables for social activities. The laundry facilities and inviting fitness room each have all new machines and equipment. Rent is based on income; residents enjoy a high-quality apartment home in a prime historic location for a price that fits their budget.

MAC Trailer receives a tax credit to expand operations in Alliance area (April 2023)

MAC Trailer Enterprises Inc. is expanding its operations in the Alliance area and plans to create 80 full-time positions, generating \$4 million in new annual payroll and retaining \$4.5 million in existing payroll, according to the Ohio Department of Development. Mike Conny, the owner of MAC Trailer and several other area real estate properties, bought the 20-acre former Royal China site in Sebring in 2020. Along with state and local officials, Conny is helping to fund the remediation of the contaminated property. The site has been a brownfield property for decades. This expansion allows MAC Trailer – headquartered in Lexington Township – to increase output on both frameless and framed dump trailers. The Ohio Tax Credit Authority approved a 1.339 percent, seven-year tax credit for the project. MAC Trailer operates three plants in the Alliance area and manufactures dump, platform, pneumatic tanks, liquid tanks, refuse trailers and dump bodies under the MAC Trailer, Trailstar, Beall, and MAC LTT brands. The trailers are made at 12 plants across the United States. Locally, MAC Trailer manufactures end dumps at its facility on Commerce Street in Lexington Township; half rounds, transfers, and chippers

at its West Main Street plant in Alliance; and platforms and pneumatic tanks at a facility on Allen Road in Salem. It has an aftermarket parts facility on Rockhill Avenue in Alliance. The company also has a manufacturing plant under the Trailstar brand in Smith Township.

Expanding Ohio Gratings buys neighboring business, looks to fill 100 jobs (April 2023)

Ohio Gratings, a family-owned aluminum and steel gratings maker, acquired a neighboring company, Precision Component Industries, last month in a deal that includes a 70,000-square-foot assembly facility. Both businesses are located in the 5200 block of Southway Street SW in Perry Township. Precision Component Industries (PCI), a machine shop specializes in high-precision products for aviation, automotive, military and space-exploration markets. It will continue to operate as a separate entity but under Ohio Gratings' banner. Grates produced by Ohio Gratings are used in road construction for storm drains and gutters, as well as architectural design and industrial shelving and flooring. Carbon steel and aluminum are used to make the bulk of products sold. Ohio Gratings and Precision Component Industries are seeking to fill more than 100 open positions. Positions are available in operations, skilled labor and machining, engineering, marketing and sales support, demand planning and manufacturing leadership. With the addition of PCI, Ohio Gratings has grown to more than 500 employees in Stark County. Dozens of workers are local vocational school students, and many have stayed on full-time.

Amazon opens new fulfillment center in Canton (May 2023)

Amazon has opened the new fulfillment center in Canton. The one million-square-foot center, designated as "AKR1" at 4747 Rebar Ave. NE, began processing and delivering orders Sunday. The center will employ about 1,000. According to Amazon, the warehouse is equipped with "innovative robotics technology." Throughout the state, Amazon operates 16 fulfillment and sortation centers, 17 delivery stations, one air hub, 12 Whole Foods Market stores, four Hub Locker+ sites, two Prime Now fulfillment centers, one wind farm and 17 solar farms. Amazon invested more than \$20 billion across Ohio by January of this year and employed more than 37,000 people.

FirstEnergy to move out of downtown Akron, consolidate corporate offices in West Akron (May 2023)

FirstEnergy Corp. is relocating its headquarters from downtown Akron to White Pond Drive as part of an office consolidation plan. In 2019, the company signed a 10-year lease extension with McKinley, Inc. for its downtown headquarters that would keep the company in Akron until at least June of 2035. FirstEnergy and McKinley are in negotiations over the sale, and it's too early to say what FirstEnergy will do with the building once they own it. Because the downtown complex hosts other tenants, the only portion the utility is buying is the tower housing FirstEnergy. The move from the downtown building to the White Pond facility might take several years. The former FirstMerit and now Huntington tower has been for sale since 2019. Huntington continues to use the building while it seeks a buyer. The chamber and city and other organizations are working on re-imagining downtown Akron as many employees are not returning to downtown post-pandemic.

Topcraft plans \$1 million investment to expand in Barberton (May 2023)

Topcraft, manufacturer of countertops and cabinets, plans to expand its operations in Barberton. The \$1 million, 9,000-square-foot expansion will increase warehouse and production capacity by 80 percent. Topcraft expects to double its workforce; the company currently has a staff of 16 full-time employees. Construction is expected to start soon and be completed by the end of 2023. The City of Barberton approved a Community Reinvestment Area designation for the project.

Local developers plan industrial, commercial park at former Ford site (May 2023)

Canton City Council approved the transfer of five parcels totaling about 96 acres to the Canton Community Improvement Corporation. The CCIC will sell the land – the former Ford property south of Georgetown Road – for \$10,000 to A&J Urban Development, which is operated by local businessmen

Steve Coon and Todd Pugh. Coon and Pugh intend to invest \$500,000 into the site to make an industrial and commercial park with buildable land marketable within two years. Only about two-thirds of the land can be developed because of wetlands and granite. The property will revert to the city if it's not developed within the timeframe. The Ford Motor Co. closed the plant in the late 1980s and donated the land southeast of Marietta Avenue and Georgetown Road to the city in 2004. It was first transferred to the CCIC in 2010, and a partial road extending south from Georgetown Road was completed in 2018 with a \$500,000 Ohio Department of Development grant.

Imagine Massillon: Mayor introduces proposal to boost building rehab (May 2023)

Massillon Mayor Kathy Catazaro-Perry introduced a proposal last week that would make partially unoccupied structures part of the city's registration process. The proposal would help redefine what a vacant building is to encourage owners to preserve and rehabilitate their properties, while avoiding demolition. If passed, the legislation would take effect in January. Noncompliant building owners who have no plan in place to upgrade their properties would be subject to a registration fee in the first year of \$960 for structures under 20,000 square feet, and \$1,920 for those 20,000 square feet and up. Similar, but lesser, registration fees are proposed for residential dwellings, such as an empty or vacant house. It is estimated there are at least 30 buildings downtown that need some attention.

Massillon working with Community Building Partnership on new home renovation grant effort (May 2023)

Massillon is starting a new exterior home renovation grant program. The program offers a rebate for qualifying exterior home improvements. Residents in the city's low-to-moderate income areas are eligible for up to a 20 percent rebate on work capped at \$4,000. Residents not located in low-to-moderate income regions can expect up to a 10 percent rebate on work that cannot exceed \$2,000. Exterior grants are available to homeowners in the city who are up to date on property taxes. New painting projects, driveway and sidewalks, landscaping, porch, windows, doors, and siding upgrades are examples of qualifying exterior efforts that program will help fund. The Community Building Partnership of Stark County is contributing \$50,000.

Aurora announces plans to acquire old SeaWorld with plans to open park with pool and beach (June 2023)

The city of Aurora is looking to purchase a part of the former SeaWorld side of Geauga Lake to preserve it as a park. A \$4.5 million deal presented to Aurora City Council calls for the city to buy 40 acres of the former theme park and the 53-acre lake from Industrial Commercial Properties. The acreage includes the park's former parking lot, aquarium that could be a future restaurant and a large pool area that was added when Cedar Fair operated a waterpark there. Sea World Ohio closed in 2000 and the park was taken over by Six Flags, which operated the amusement park across the lake. Six Flags combined the two parks and billed the attraction as the largest theme park in the world. The parent company of Cedar Point took over in 2004 and slowly dismantled the combined park before closing the amusement park side of the lake in 2007. It continued to operate a waterpark on the old Sea World side of the lake until it closed in 2016. The property has been slowly redeveloped in the ensuing years into everything from a car dealership to homes and retail space. The city plans to use about \$1.3 million in emergency federal funds left over from COVID toward the purchase. The initial plans call for the construction of a boardwalk around the lake and demolition of a majority of the buildings left over from the amusement park days with the exception of the old aquarium that will be preserved.

Akron launches next round of Mow to Own program (June 2023)

The city of Akron has launched another round of its Mow to Own program. The program, which started in 2020, has given more than 100 vacant, city-owned lots away to nearby property owners who agreed to maintain them. Neighboring property owners and nonprofit organizations are eligible. The program

has relieved the burden on city mowing crews and has allowed vacant land to be put to productive use. For this year, 44 vacant lots were chosen as part of the program. Interested participants can view these available lots at AkronLiving.org. The city will notify adjacent property owners of the program and provide instructions for how to apply.

Diebold Nixdorf to seek Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection (June 2023)

Diebold Nixdorf plans to file for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection after reaching an agreement with key financial stakeholders to restructure its debt. The company, a leading provider of automated teller machines and financial security software and hardware, is seeking to complete the restructuring. The company said it expects the restructuring transactions to be consummated in the third quarter of 2023. Diebold Nixdorf relocated its headquarters across Summit County from Green to Hudson in 2021.

Greater Akron shows stagnant growth in latest Census estimate (June 2023)

With a few exceptions, most communities in Greater Akron are experiencing stagnant population growth or slight declines, according to the latest U.S. Census estimates. Kent saw the largest estimated increase in the region, jumping 9.6 percent from 24,778 in 2021 to 27,147 in 2022. Kent's population still has not returned to its 2020 level of 28,182 residents. Meanwhile, Akron's estimated population dropped by 41, from 188,550 in 2021 to 188,509 in 2022. In Summit County, most communities were estimated to have little to no changes in population from 2021 to 2022. Cuyahoga Falls, which had the largest estimated decrease in the county, lost an estimated 208 residents in 2022, falling from 50,863 to 50,655. Twinsburg had the largest increase, growing by an estimated 74 residents between 2021 and 2022, growing from 19,342 to 19,416. The other community in Summit County with an estimated population growth was Northfield, which grew by an estimated four residents to 3,531. Aside from Kent, Aurora had the biggest estimated population growth in Portage County, increasing about one percent (or 178 residents) to 17,528. Ravenna had the biggest loss of residents within the county. An estimated 47 residents have moved out of the city, dropping the population to 11,298. A majority of communities in Stark County saw small declines in residents. The biggest decline was found in Canton, which lost an estimated 556 residents, falling from 70,227 to 69,671. Massillon increased by an estimated 95 residents from 32,197 to 32,292. Like the rest of the counties in the region, Wayne County saw flat population numbers. The city of Wooster grew an estimated 1.8 percent from 26,541 to 27,031, adding an estimated 490 residents within the city.

Akron's unemployment rate hits a milestone in April (June 2023)

Akron's unemployment rate dipped to an all-time low of 3.3 percent in April as the jobs picture improved to a record level statewide. The rate dropped from 4.2 percent in March. The previous low of 3.4 percent in November matched a mark set in December 2021 — with the area continuing to bounce back from a record-high 15 percent unemployment rate set in April 2020. The Akron metropolitan statistical area for employment data includes all of Summit and Portage counties. The Canton-Massillon area, which encompasses Stark and Carroll counties, also recorded 3.3 percent unemployment in April. April's unemployment rates were 2.4 percent for Wayne County, 3.2 percent for Portage County, and 3.3 percent for Stark and Summit Counties. Employers locally and throughout Ohio continue to add jobs at a brisk rate and as job seekers return to the labor force to take advantage of wage gains and a wide range of opportunities. Ohio's rate dropped to 3.7 percent last month, down from 3.8 percent in March. Ohio employers added a robust 18,100 jobs in April and now have added 53,900 jobs since December. The job gains this year now mean Ohio has essentially recovered the nearly 900,000 jobs lost during the pandemic and is about 30,000 jobs away from the state's jobs record set 23 years ago when the state recorded 5.64 million jobs. While coming back, Ohio's labor force remains smaller today than before the pandemic started, and employers have routinely noted difficulty in finding workers.

Stark commissioners create boundaries for Canton Township's new tax abatement zone (June 2023)

The Stark County Commissioners approved a resolution to establish boundaries for a new Community Reinvestment Area in Canton Township. The CRA is a tax abatement zone in will allow eligible commercial and industrial companies in the area to receive tax exemptions on future construction or renovations. The 970-acre zone is known as the Raff/Gambrinus/ Faircrest CRA. The tax incentive term and percentage will be negotiated on a case-by-case basis ahead of remodeling or construction. The commissioners designated a housing officer to administer the program and also created a Community Reinvestment Housing Council that will make an annual inspection of properties that received an exemption.

Akron pursuing \$7 million federal grant for up to 130 new, public EV charging stations (June 2023)

Akron is pursuing a \$7 million Charging and Fueling Infrastructure Discretionary Grant through the U.S. Department of Transportation for up to 130 electric vehicle charging stations with the first 25 online as early as next year. By 2027, the charging stations could be gradually built out across Akron with locations determined by demand. The public EV charging station plan is in addition to another grant the city is seeking for charging stations that would power a new fleet of municipal trash recycling trucks that run on electricity, which the city hopes to buy someday. A private-sector partner is financing the required 20 percent local match. Four companies have submitted proposals: Volta Charging LLC; OBE Power Networks LLC; Distributed Solar Development in partnership with EV Connect; and Alternalite Electric in partnership with ChargePoint Inc. The city will select the best option if the grant application is successful.

Mahoning County to announce \$1.5M investment in local broadband expansion (July 2023)

Mahoning County Commissioners will unveil a plan to use \$1.5 million American Rescue Plan funds to expand broadband services to areas in the county of most need. The Eastgate Regional Council of Governments will manage the ConnectMahoning project by issuing a broadband Request for Proposal, selecting the provider, and overseeing the implementation of the system. Eastgate conducted a Regional Broadband Feasibility Study in 2021 and has been using the results from that study as the blueprint to improve broadband throughout the region, which includes Ashtabula, Trumbull, and Mahoning Counties. After the Feasibility Study, Eastgate conducted a deeper dive into Mahoning County to identify the specific communities in rural Mahoning County most underserved. Once it was identified that Springfield, Goshen, Milton, Jackson, and Smith Townships are the communities most in need of broadband, Eastgate developed a plan to address that need. The money from the commission will fund the ConnectMahoning implementation and will initially target areas within those five townships.

Middlebury housing rehab initiative gets \$8M boost to build affordable homes in Akron (July 2023)

The City of Akron and the Knight Foundation are providing \$4 million each to rebuild Middlebury neighborhood homes and put housing back in the hands of local owners. Akron is providing \$4 million to the Well CDC, a neighborhood nonprofit that rebuilds local houses. Of that amount, \$2.75 million is from the American Rescue Plan Act with \$1.25 million from U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development grants. The Knight Foundation is providing a \$4 million match to rebuild homes. The funding will allow Well CDC to rebuild approximately 58 more homes. The Well CDC has rehabilitated 84 homes in the neighborhood since 2016. The average rent for Well CDC housing is \$850 a month per home.

Akron, Cuyahoga Falls seek zoning overhauls to achieve greener vision for Merriman Valley (July 2023)

Akron and Cuyahoga Falls have begun unveiling their vision for a more walkable, healthy, and environment-minded Merriman Valley-Schumacher Area as part of the cities' master plan for the shared vicinity. The proposed Conservation Neighborhoods Plan and accompanying "form-based" zoning codes aim to preserve and respect green spaces. Cuyahoga Falls will lead its own public discussion on form-based zoning plans for the area. Protection of green spaces in the area was a key concern expressed by

residents during the feedback-gathering stage of the master plan formation. The issue was pushed front-and-center as the group Preserve the Valley formed in opposition to a now-shelved proposal to sell Theiss Woods, a property near the master plan footprint, for residential development. The concept of conservation neighborhoods would set limitations on how developers can build out. Developers have the right to develop 30% of the empty land for residential purposes. A form-based zoning code "specifies requirements for the physical character and layout of the environment rather than focusing on the separation of uses of land and buildings such as residential versus commercial.

Former Harter Bank in downtown Canton to get \$7.5M makeover into apartments, market (July 2023)

The former George D. Harter Bank building in downtown Canton is slated to become a 30-unit housing complex with a local market on the ground floor. The Ohio Department of Development recently announced that a \$1.44 million historic preservation tax credit was awarded to the approximately \$7.5 million project. The remaining financing will come from private sources and \$1.2 million in federal historic preservation tax credits. The commercial property at 126 Central Plaza has been vacant since 2016 and was almost foreclosed upon in late 2021. PJT-Pointe West — an affiliate of the Cuyahoga Falls-based Testa Companies — sold the property in July 2022 for \$892,500 to DDC Canton LLC, according to county property records. The Pennsylvania-based D&D Realty Group is the new owner behind the plans. The three-floor mezzanine lobby will be used for a food and small business market in coordination with the city of Canton. Floors two through nine will be converted into market-rate apartments and the basement will be for tenant storage, according to the application. Work is expected to start this summer and be finished by the end of 2024. About 51 or 52 permanent jobs should be created once the 1922 bank building revitalization is complete.

Solmet Technologies to create new jobs in Canton Township with \$4.4M expansion (July 2023)

Solmet Technologies has plans for 15,000-square-foot, \$4.4 million expansion that will create 10 full-time jobs in the township's new tax abatement zone. The company intends to increase and modernize its steel processing by investing about \$2.8 million in building construction and \$1.7 million in new machinery, furniture, and fixtures at its existing facility at 2716 Shepler Church Ave. Stark County commissioners recently approved a tax-exemption agreement for real property improvements with the company for 15 years at 75%. Founded in 1985, the company produces open-die forged parts for a number of industries. Its business revolves primarily around industrial, oil and gas and steel production. Construction on the new expansion will likely begin in the next several weeks. The expansion will create \$730,000 in additional annual payroll, according to an agreement between the company and the commissioners. Solmet Technologies is located in a tax abatement zone in Canton Township, or an area where eligible commercial and industrial businesses can receive tax exemptions on construction and renovation projects. Commissioners approved boundaries for a tax-break zone called the Raff/Gambrinus/Faircrest Community Reinvestment Area in May.

'A fun place to visit': Main Street Barberton director has big plans (July 2023)

Main Street Barberton (MSB) is ready to spotlight Tuscarawas and Second streets. Main Street Barberton, like other Ohio Main Street programs in Wadsworth, Hudson, Medina, Kent and Ravenna, is tasked with revitalizing downtown while promoting the city's unique historic character. MSB will concentrate solely on the downtown district, with the goal of helping existing businesses and getting new ones to start. It will also look to bring events and programs downtown. Barberton Fourth Friday will be coming in October, and other events will come as things like an inventory of downtown establishments and the MSB web site are completed. MSB will inventory downtown businesses. The MSB is currently looking for downtown office space and will have its website online within a month for interested residents to find out more about the program.

Samsung Renewable Energy plans Stark County solar farm (July 2023)

Nearly two years after Samsung Renewable Energy announced plans for a massive solar farm in northeastern Stark County, the company has yet to submit plans to the state for the project. But a company spokesman says construction on the 800-acre farm in Washington Township could begin in late 2025. The company originally targeted starting construction in early 2023 and completing the project in 2024. According to the project website, if built, the solar farm would produce 150 megawatts, which could power an equivalent of 27,750 homes. Samsung Renewable Energy has eight other solar projects in the United States, all located in California. None of these farms produce more than 50 megawatts, making the proposed Stark solar farm its largest American project yet.

Akron-area demand still strong for home sales, new builds (August 2023)

Akron and other Summit County communities remain in a sellers' market this summer, with solid demand continuing from homebuyers. The supply of homes for sale has declined as potential sellers assess interest rates and their ability to purchase a home after their residence is sold. However, inventory has nudged higher than recent lows. Since January 2021, 30-year fixed mortgage rates nationally have climbed from 2.65 to 6.81 percent, an increase of more than 150 percent. The result has been slower home sales nationally, and in some regions of the country a decrease in the median price of homes sold. The demand from homebuyers has put homebuilders in a frenzy, with Summit County residential building permits rising to the highest level this century, according to Federal Reserve statistics. In 2022, permits for 2,724 new private housing structures were authorized by Summit County municipalities. From 2008, the year of the housing crisis and Great Recession, to 2021, that number didn't rise above 788, and 2022 permits were the highest since the 2,836 recorded in 1999. Put together, demand from homebuyers in Summit County remains solid despite the pressure of higher interest rates and other economic uncertainties like inflation.

Republic Steel to idle steelmaking in Canton (August 2023)

Republic Steel has announced it will "indefinitely idle" steelmaking operations in Canton and Lackawanna, New York, ending leaded steel production in the United States and furloughing nearly 500 steelworkers, including 185 workers in Canton. Republic Steel, which is headquartered in Canton, is a subsidiary of the Mexican company Grupo Simec. They are leading suppliers of special bar quality steel (SBQ) and the only producers of leaded steel in North America. The Canton plant at 2633 Eighth St NE has been the subject of environmental concerns from area residents and ongoing Ohio and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency enforcement. Republic Steel has operated under a court order since July 2021 related to the amount of lead released into the air and has been in recent settlement discussions with the state. The company invested \$10 million in the Canton facility over the past several years to comply with environmental regulations, particularly the National Ambient Air Quality Standards for lead. Republic Steel also has operations in Massillon and Lorain. It wasn't immediately clear what would happen with those facilities. The City of Canton and the workers received no notice of the shutdown.

Summit County secures \$350,000 grant for Barberton Industrial Park (August 2023)

Summit County was recently awarded a \$350,000 grant from the Ohio Department of Transportation for the Newell Street Industrial Park project in Barberton. The project is one of ten selected from Transportation Improvement Districts (TID) across the state. The County collaborated with the City of Barberton and the Barberton Community Foundation (BCF) to prepare the application. The award will assist the City in making infrastructure improvements to provide access to the site and begin the transformation of the former brownfield into a multi-user industrial park. The grant funds will improve signalization on Newell Street and Norton Avenue, improve Newell Street capacities, and create left turn lanes on Norton Avenue. The BCF acquired the 36-acre industrial site in 2022 as part of a public-private

partnership with the City to develop the site into the Newell Street Industrial Park. The Summit County TID was created in 2014 to foster intergovernmental and public-private cooperation to facilitate infrastructure improvements, which result in job creation or job retention. The TID can issue bonds for projects, receive funds, acquire and sell property, and create special assessments for the improvements. Its mission is to assist in planning, constructing, and improving highways, roads, bridges, interchanges and accompanying capital improvements and developments throughout the County and across political subdivisions within the TID area.

Yellow trucking company closes; hundreds out of jobs at Copley, Richfield facilities (August 2023)

Yellow trucking company closed on July 30th, effectively putting about 30,000 employees out of work, including hundreds in Copley Township and Richfield. The union estimates Yellow employs more than 600 people at its Summit County locations. In March, the company closed its site in Green, which employed 107 people. Yellow, which is the third-largest trucking company in the U.S., had an outstanding debt of about \$1.5 billion as of March. The company has been losing customers as news of its problems spread, according to The Wall Street Journal.

Yellow employees in Copley, Richfield await fate of struggling trucking company (August 2023)

Hundreds of workers at trucking giant Yellow locations in Copley Township and Richfield could lose their jobs permanently as the Kansas-based company prepares for a possible bankruptcy filing as early as Monday. Various media reported that the company's declining financial outlook and an ongoing battle with unions suggest that bankruptcy is inevitable. Yellow, formerly known as YRC Worldwide, has been engaged in a public battle with its union employees as the company deals with high debt and other financial difficulties. Recently the cash-strapped company attempted to withhold payments to health and welfare benefits. It lost a decision related to that matter in a Kansas courtroom. In March, the company closed its Holland location in Green, which employed 107 people. Yellow employs more than 600 people at its other Summit County facilities. Yellow handled an average of 49,000 shipments per day in 2022. As of last week, the company was handling an estimated 10,000-15,000 daily shipments. As of late March, Yellow had an outstanding debt of about \$1.5 billion. Of that, \$729.2 million was owed to the federal government. Yellow employs about 30,000 workers, about 22,000 of them unionized.

\$170 million plan could transform long-neglected Summit Lake community (August 2023)

The Akron Metropolitan Housing Authority (AMHA) is moving forward with plans to revitalize the Summit Lake neighborhood. AMHA plans to rebuild and expand its Summit Lake Apartments, as well as to construct new housing on many of the neighborhood's vacant lots. Total cost is estimated at more than \$170 million. In 2020, AMHA and the city of Akron was one of 11 winners of a \$450,000 planning grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) Choice Neighborhoods program. The grant – along with funding from AMHA, city of Akron, Summit County, Akron Civic Commons, Knight Foundation, GAR Foundation, and Huntington Akron Foundation – supported a two-year planning process for this revitalization project. AMHA is looking to build infill housing in the neighborhood, including duplexes, triplexes, and single-family homes. AMHA is planning up to 479 units in a mixed-income housing development, with the apartments expanding to include other affordable and market-rate units. The existing Summit Lake Apartments will be demolished and rebuilt, complete with new pedestrian-friendly streets and new open space. Additionally, AMHA's Summit Lake plan includes strategies aimed towards improving resident services such as connecting residents with free/low-cost specialized health services, expanding the reach and impact of current workforce programs in Summit Lake, creating programs that focus on increasing financial literacy and achieving financial stability, and supporting the establishment and growth of small businesses. Other services that AMHA hopes to implement as part of this Choice Neighborhoods plan is supporting existing homeowners with home improvements and making neighborhood streets pedestrian- and bicycle-

friendly, as well as developing year-round programming and events for all ages at area parks. AMHA plans to submit its application to HUD this fall or next. If approved, officials believe construction would begin around spring 2025.

'A really big deal.' New federal grant could help rejuvenate southeast Canton neighborhood
(September 2023)

The Stark Metropolitan Housing Authority has received a \$500,000 Choice Neighborhoods planning grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for the Jackson Sherrick area. The grant will fund a two-year process to devise a plan that could ultimately lead to an implementation grant of \$50 million in the future. Largely cut off from surrounding neighborhoods, the Jackson Sherrick housing complex contains 340 units on 31 acres. It is part of Southeast Canton, which is physically "orphanized" from the rest of Canton, according to a 2015 HUD Impediments to Fair Housing report. A committee of residents, agency, civic, and government leaders will now begin work on the plan. The plan may include recommendations such as demolishing and rebuilding Jackson Sherrick and include a series of proposed public-private partnerships to leverage potential grant money into investments much larger than \$50 million. Residents would form the bulk of the planning committee, and they would be eligible to receive training, education and make visits to communities that have received similar grants in the past. The application contends the units were poorly designed and constructed; that they don't promote the use of open space; and that residents often are too secluded to feel safe. The southeast section of Canton has an average household income of less than \$15,000 a year, ranking it within the top 10 percent of the poorest neighborhoods in the entire U.S. Other facts highlighted in the application: Only one in three people have a high school diploma; every child is eligible for free and reduced school lunches; 70 percent of all housing is rental; elevated infant mortality rates; high crime rates compared to other areas; and a lack of basic necessities such as doctors, dentists, restaurants, laundromats and banks. The same HUD report which noted the area's outlier status, also called it the most racially segregated area in Ohio — 70 percent of the 12,000 people are African American.

FedEx Custom Critical moving Green operations to Richfield location in 2024 (September 2023)

FedEx Custom Critical will relocate its Green operations on Boettler Road to a 70,000-square-foot structure in Richfield next year. Richfield Village Council authorized the mayor to move forward with a Job Creation Income Tax Incentive Agreement with the company. The resolution did not detail how many jobs would be created or brought to the village. The Richfield site is located near a FedEx Freight facility on Brecksville Road in the village. Under the agreement, FedEx is expected to relocate next year. As part of a Summit County intergovernmental agreement, Green will continue to receive income tax revenue from FedEx. Starting in 2024, the city will receive 50 percent of the income tax revenue generated by the relocated operations. That amount will gradually decline for five years, after which the village will receive 100 percent of the generated revenue. In 2019, FedEx Custom Critical was listed as the second largest employer in Green, with more than 670 employees. Current figures were not available.

Joann Fabrics to lay off workers at Hudson headquarters (September 2023)

Hudson-based Joann Inc. is laying off some workers at its company headquarters. The number of layoffs is not publicly known. The fabrics and crafts retailer has about 850 stores in 49 states. Prior to going public in 2021, Joann was privately owned for 10 years by affiliates of Los Angeles-based private equity investment firm Leonard Green & Partners. Joann reported \$2.2 billion in revenue at the end of 2022, down 8.3 percent from \$2.4 billion the previous year. The company reported a \$200.6 million net loss for the last fiscal year, which ended in January. This year's losses are on track to exceed last year's, after the company announced net losses of \$127.5 million during the first two quarters of 2023, versus \$92

million during the same period last year. The corporate layoffs come as the company announced it is hiring 5,000 part-time workers for the holiday season.

McKinley Career Tech welding students, Ohio Gratings forge partnership (September 2023)

Canton City Schools and Ohio Gratings have developed a partnership, whereby McKinley Career Tech welding students will be employed by Ohio Gratings Inc. while finishing their senior year. Five seniors have been given the opportunity to join Ohio Gratings; eight more seniors are expected to sign their letters to join the company in a few weeks. The newly forged partnership sets up seniors with the family-owned Perry Township gratings maker to get hands-on experience while completing their final year in the welding program. The students will earn around \$18-per-hour working on a part-time basis. They will work during school hours with the possibility of working additional hours. Ohio Gratings has always worked with local schools, including R.G. Drage in Massillon and Buckeye Career Center in New Philadelphia. During the summer the company had about 40 employees in high school or recently graduated. They also brought in local teachers and exposed them to different work environments to better prepare their students for the workforce.

Stark Tuscarawas Workforce Development Board receives \$193,750 grant (September 2023)

The Stark Tuscarawas Workforce Development Board (STWDB) received a \$193,750 Business Resource Network Grant from the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services for outreach and career exploration services. The award will be used for strategic planning to identify how to better connect and serve communities; funding for current staff who work with businesses and job-seeking individuals, who might need assistance finding a job or receiving additional training; workforce development software; and for an initiative in Tuscarawas County to create employer spotlight videos targeting students and younger residents.

Western Reserve Health Center complete in Hudson (September 2023)

The 53,000-square-foot, three-story Western Reserve Health Center recently opened its doors to patients at 231 Seasons Road in Hudson. The facility includes Western Reserve Hospital and Unity Health Network, an independent physician network. The facility provides gastroenterology, endocrinology, orthopedics, lab and x-ray services, primary care, rheumatology, and podiatry services. The area surrounding the Seasons Road interchange has been a hotbed of economic development recently. The Haydon Corporation is moving in to the 254,000-square-foot facility off Seasons Road at 4847 Gray Lane. In April 2022, Hudson City Council granted a 15-year, 50 percent property tax exemption under a Community Reinvestment Agreement (CRA) with UYS Properties LLC and Anchor Seasons Road Owner LLC. UYS Properties and Anchor agreed that its prospective tenants would "relocate 31.8 full-time equivalent ("FTE") jobs from its existing facility in Hudson and will relocate 44.6 FTE jobs from its facilities in the cities of Cuyahoga Falls, Akron, Tallmadge and Stow" to the new location over a five-year period beginning in 2023. The annual payroll for the jobs being retained in Hudson is over \$3 million, while the annual payroll from new jobs is estimated to be almost \$3 million. An estimated \$8,304,368 will be generated from the jobs relocated from municipalities outside Hudson. According to the CRA application, the project will create 32 new jobs not including the full-time and part-time jobs that are moved to the facility from other locations.

Employers Health to add jobs amid headquarter expansion in Jackson Township (September 2023)

Employers Health company is in the process of building its new headquarters at Belden Center Plaza, 4655 Fulton Drive NW. The Ohio Department of Development recently approved a tax credit for Employers Health via the Ohio Tax Credit Authority. A more spacious headquarters will allow the company to add 23 jobs to its office, which presently has 35 employees, according to Team NEO. The commercial property acquired by Employers Health sold via bankruptcy earlier this year and was divided into separate parcels. Employers Health provides pharmacy-related health benefits to employees

through contracting businesses. Clients include manufacturers, professional service companies, education and health care firms, utilities, and union organizations in 38 U.S. states.

Republic Steel workers still in limbo after idling announcement (September 2023)

Nearly 200 workers remain in limbo after Republic Steel closed August 10th without notice. Republic Steel's parent company, Grupo Simec, cited a challenging market for its special bar quality steel in its decision to "indefinitely idle" steelmaking operations in Canton and Lackawanna, Pennsylvania. The announcement caught union, city, and business leaders off guard. They said the company did not honor union contract language or federal law that requires advance notice. More than 100 workers attended a job fair at the Foltz Community Center in East Canton to learn about employment opportunities. Representatives from roughly 50 companies packed the job fair, which was hosted by the Canton Regional Chamber of Commerce, Stark County Manufacturing Workforce Development Partnership, and United Steelworkers Local 1200. Many of the companies were from Stark County, including H-P Products, Canton Drop Forge, MAC Trailer Enterprise, Minerva Dairy, Ohio Gratings, PCC Airfoils, and TimkenSteel. Many of them were ready to hire workers on the spot.

GOJO, maker of Purell, laying off staff. Company to stay in Akron (September 2023)

Akron-based GOJO Industries announced it is eliminating up to 10 percent of its workforce. The company did not provide the exact number of layoffs, but indicated they were mostly salaried positions. Impacts to manufacturing and distribution would be limited. GOJO also stated it was committed to remaining independently owned and based in Akron. GOJO was founded in Akron in 1946 to create a cleaner to replace tire workers having to wash their hands with kerosene and benzene to remove carbon black and graphite. In April, the Wall Street Journal reported that family-owned GOJO had hired JP Morgan Chase to run an auction. It was reported the company could be valued at around \$3 billion with about \$1 billion of annual sales. Demand for the hand sanitizer Purell grew at unprecedented levels at the beginning of the pandemic, but competitors quickly jumped into the retail market with their own products.

Deluxe Corp. closing Streetsboro plant (September 2023)

Deluxe Corporation will close its plant on Philipp Parkway in Streetsboro, eliminating 71 positions. The closure will occur between October 31, 2023 and March 1, 2024.

Gregory Industries to move headquarters to Jackson Township (September 2023)

Gregory Industries is preparing to build a new headquarters in Jackson Township. The company expects to break ground in September and move to the 36-acre site west of Interstate 77 and southeast of Sunset Hills Memory Gardens in October 2024. The company's 30-acre campus at 4100 13th St. SW in Canton Township will continue galvanizing and manufacturing steel highway, fence, and strut products. Gregory Industries employs a total of 175 people there. About 45 employees in administrative, accounting, marketing and other roles will move to the new headquarters. Gregory plans to hire 10 to 12 staff members in the next two years and about 36 more by 2028 at the new headquarters. Gregory said the first phase, consisting of 97,000 square feet for strut products, should be complete this fall. A second, 180,000-square-foot phase would begin late this year or early in 2024.

City of Akron seeks proposals from solar energy developers (September 2023)

Akron is seeking proposals from solar energy developers to lease land at Hardy Road Landfill to construct, own, operate, and maintain a ground mounted solar photovoltaic (PV) system. The city seeks qualified vendors interested in the lease or other potential use of the landfill to allow for the construction and installation of a solar PV system to be installed on approximately 77 acres. Officials hope the new use for the closed landfill will promote reductions in greenhouse gas emissions while increasing local renewable electricity. Proposal applications are due Sept. 19.

Akron receives \$1M grant to develop urban forestry workforce training pipeline (October 2023)

The city of Akron, along with several community partners, has received a \$1 million USDA grant to develop an urban forestry workforce training pipeline in five disadvantaged neighborhoods experiencing the highest tree canopy loss in Akron. The city partnered with nonprofit partners Truly Reaching You, Akron Urban League, the Akron Zoo, and CommEN Strategies to start Project ACORN, which stands for Akron Community-Owned Reforestation Network. Project ACORN seeks to deliver workforce development, racial equity, climate and stormwater management benefits to city residents. Participants in the program will train at a new Urban Forestry Academy site on city-owned land at Theiss Road to hone skills in tree planting, trimming, pruning, tree identification, invasive species control, common tree diseases and ailments, tree health monitoring, and long-term tree maintenance. When the eight-week program concludes, participants may receive industry certifications and technical skills to pursue a career in forestry. Akron residents re-entering society from prison and placed by Truly Reaching You or young adults participating in the Youth Entrepreneurship Program at the Akron Zoo will be eligible to join the academy. Trees cultivated at the academy will primarily go toward improving the canopies in East Akron, Middlebury, Sherbondy Hill, South Akron, and Summit Lake, in addition to other neighborhoods as needed.

HOF Village water park project will be “transformational” for region (October 2023)

The Hall of Fame (HOF) Village water park is currently under construction. The \$117 million, 120,000-square-foot football themed water park is expected to be finished by October 2024. Water park features will include high-thrill rides, sport racer tube rides, football-themed decor, swim-up bars, giant television screens, a lazy river, water slide tower, cabanas, children's area, and outdoor patio and entertainment area. Work on the adjacent 180-room Hilton Tapestry hotel is expected to begin soon. Local tourism officials laud the water park as a transformational project for the region.

Permanent, not temporary: Republic Steel won't reopen in Canton (October 2023)

Republic Steel's shutdown of mills in Ohio and New York — originally announced as an indefinite "idle" — is permanent. The company, a subsidiary of Mexican-based Grupo Simec, announced on Aug. 10 that steelmaking would be idled and about 500 total employees at its Canton and Lackawanna, New York, facilities would be furloughed. Local and international union officers said Republic Steel notified them on Sept. 13 that the closure would be permanent. Bill Conner, with the United Steelworkers International Union, said it applied to all of Republic Steel's plants — including Canton and Massillon. Many former employees have found other work; a job fair in late August coordinated by the local union, Canton Regional Chamber of Commerce, and Stark County Manufacturing Workforce Development Partnership was a success.

StarkFresh opens new Alliance grocery location, aiming to serve an impoverished area (October 2023)

Canton based-nonprofit StarkFresh held a grand opening event for its new Alliance location with employees, community leaders, and residents. The full-service store is inside The Alliance Commons at 405 S. Linden Ave., the former Alliance Neighborhood Center. It neighbors the YWCA Career & Fashion Boutique. The store serves one of the city's most impoverished areas — though anyone can shop there — where about 73 percent of households are in poverty. The north section of the city, where the StarkFresh store resides, has not had a full-service grocery store in almost four years.

Post-COVID, Stark County universities and colleges are stabilizing with enrollment (October 2023)

Stark County universities and colleges are experiencing stable enrollment in a post-pandemic world. That fits with reports that undergraduate enrollment is steadying statewide and nationally, with fewer declines. Still those same reports indicated that many universities have not returned to pre-COVID figures. Local university and college officials said COVID-19 is no longer impacting their enrollment figures and they're seeing growth in certain areas. Malone University reported a 6.3 percent increase in

the number of first-year undergraduate students, and a 19 percent increase in recruitment, for the 2023 fall semester compared to fall 2022. They also have the largest class of graduate students enrolled there since the pandemic. Malone reported 1,218 students enrolled this fall. The University of Mount Union reported 2,049 students enrolled this fall, about 80 fewer than last year. The university credits in-person and virtual recruitment strategies, plus marketing campaigns, for helping to improve enrollment. Walsh University reported 2,160 students enrolled there this fall, a decrease of 151 from last year. Walsh has been actively trying to slow the decline with various strategies, including new academic and athletic programs and recruiting military veterans. Kent State University (20,485 students) and the University of Akron (13,633) saw slight increases in enrollment. Stark State College reported 9,653 students enrolled in the community college for the 2023 fall semester, about 400 fewer than last year. Some officials believe the decline stems from higher employment in the area, where "adult learners" have chosen to work in readily available jobs rather than complete an associate degree, which is standard for community colleges. Stark State has experienced growth in its College Credit Plus dual enrollment program — up 0.7 percent over last fall — where high school students can earn high school and college credit simultaneously. It's free for public school students, with limited cost for private school or homeschooled students. The Aultman College of Nursing (242 students) saw an 18.5 percent increase in new and incoming students this fall. Local universities are implementing strategies to improve enrollment, including offering attractive financial packages, \$1,000 reductions, new academic and athletic programs, military veteran programs, and launching marketing campaigns.

Volaris Group acquires North Canton-based software company Squirrels (October 2023)

The Toronto-based Volaris Group has acquired Squirrels LLC, a North Canton software development company founded in 2012. Volaris Group owns more than 190 software companies across 40 vertical markets. It's an operating group of Constellation Software. Squirrels has created screen mirroring, digital signage, and media streaming applications that include Reflector, Ditto, and AirParrot. Squirrels joins Volaris as part of its education market that delivers software to educational institutions. The financial terms of the acquisition were not disclosed. Squirrels had 30 employees in May 2021 and planned to employ nearly 50 people by the end of the year, according to a Crain's Cleveland Business profile.

Manufacturing Day in Stark County: Students get up-close look at area plants (October 2023)

Local manufacturers gave high school students across Stark County an inside look at career opportunities during the second annual Manufacturing Day. Nine area high schools and 13 companies participated in the countywide event coordinated by the Stark County Manufacturing Workforce Development Partnership. The nonprofit partnership was formed in 2021 by local companies and regional agencies with the goal of bolstering manufacturing in Stark County, which consists of 550 manufacturers and 26,000 employees. Manufacturing Day is a chance to show career pathways in manufacturing. Participating high schools included Fairless, Alliance, East Canton, Academy for Urban Scholars Canton, Louisville, Sandy Valley, Minerva, Marlington, and Hoover. Participating companies included Hendrickson, Ohio Gratings, Stark Industrial LLC, Coastal Pet Products, Powell Electrical Systems, Stark State College, United Architectural Metals, Cintas Corporation, Lindsay Precast, Mac Trailer, PTC Alliance, and NSK Corp.

Timken Co. acquires Italian manufacturer (October 2023)

The Timken Co. has expanded its presence in the linear motion market with the acquisition of Italian manufacturer Rosa Sistemi. The company employs about 65 people and is based near Milan, Italy. In 2018, Timken purchased the Rollon Group, a manufacturer of linear motion products in a range of industrial and commercial fields, and then in 2021 purchased Intelligent Machine Solutions, which makes robotic and automated machinery. In April of 2023, the company bought the Nadella Group, another European manufacturer of linear motion products. Rosa Sistemi is expected to generate about

\$15 million in revenue this year. Timken made the acquisition with cash on hand but did not disclose the financial terms.

Wayne County to receive \$1.5M for demolition and brownfield sites (October 2023)

Wayne County, like other counties across the state, will receive \$500,000 in funding from the Ohio Department of Development (ODOD) to remediate distressed properties. Recognizing the urgency to address this issue, the state of Ohio has implemented the Demolition and Site Revitalization Program (DSRP) in addition to the Brownfield Remediation Program. The Wayne County Land Reutilization Corporation (WCLRC) is working to ensure neighborhood land values in Wayne County are not impacted by abandoned structures. The WCLRC is aggressively seeking abandoned residential or commercial buildings and properties for both the Demolition and Brownfield programs. The WCLRC, also known as a land bank, is a tool that local government entities may use to deal with the problem of abandoned buildings. The DSRP focuses on demolishing unsafe structures and emphasizes revitalizing the vacant lots left behind. By transforming these vacant lots, the program will breathe new life into the county's neighborhoods and promote a sense of pride and vibrancy. Ohio has made strides in revitalizing abandoned structures through the innovative Demolition and Site Revitalization Program. Major cities throughout the state have seen old, dilapidated buildings transformed into art galleries, boutiques, restaurants, offices, and recreational areas. Another program available to Wayne County is the Brownfield Remediation Program. This program will bring \$1 million to the county to remediate those properties. According to the ODOD, a brownfield is an abandoned, idled, or underused industrial, commercial, or institutional property where known or potential releases of hazardous substances, such as petroleum, complicate expansion or redevelopment.

Castle Aviation kicks off \$12 million hangar project at Akron-Canton Airport in Green (October 2023)

Castle Aviation, a freight and passenger carrier at Akron-Canton Airport, kicked off a \$12 million hangar project to house its growing fleet of aircraft. The hangar will be about 60,000 square feet when completed, with an additional 10,000 square feet for storage and 10,000 square feet for offices. Employment at Castle Aviation is also expected to expand; the company now employs about 75 people. The new facilities will enable Castle Aviation to become a fixed-base operator, or FBO, at the airport. FBOs provide general aviation services for private and recreational flyers.

Kent State reports first growth in systemwide enrollment since 2012 (October 2023)

Kent main campus enrollment this fall is 25,283, a gain of more than 200 students from last year, representing a 0.8 percent increase. The university's regional campuses reported 8,247 students, bringing the total number enrolled in the system to 33,530 — an increase of 321 students (or 1 percent) from year. The regional campus enrollment is stabilizing after two years of decline. Enrollment at the Stark campus this fall is 2,311, which is down 129 students (or 5.6 percent) compared to last year. The university has almost returned to pre-pandemic numbers, in terms of new freshmen. First-year student retention is returning to pre-pandemic levels as well. Kent campus and regional campus retention rates are at 79.7 percent and 56.6 percent, respectively. For context, Kent campus retention was just over 80 percent before the COVID-19 pandemic. Growth has occurred at the Colleges of Aeronautics and Engineering and Business and Entrepreneurship.

Parking lot proposal would uproot community garden in Akron's Middlebury neighborhood (November 2023)

Proposed zoning changes in Akron's Middlebury have some residents worried about how the community will be affected. Fairmount Properties and Summa Health Systems plan to redevelop a lot on South Adolph Street into a parking lot for the YMCA, displacing a community garden managed by Let's Grow Akron. A representative from Summa said it was understood that the garden could exist on that space until Summa needed the land, and that they have proposed three alternate locations for the garden. The

properties are mostly owned by Summa Health Systems, but some residences on Ivan Place are included.

Ohio eyed for federal CHIPS Program (November 2023)

Ohio, already a \$20 billion winner with Intel's decision to build two factories near Columbus, is in the running to become one of two semiconductor manufacturing clusters being developed as part of the federal CHIPS Act, according to U.S. Commerce Department officials. While there is broad interest from states in the \$52.7 billion in subsidies available from the bill, called the Creating Helpful Incentives to Produce Semiconductors in America, only a few states are in the running to become clusters of leading-edge logic fabs by 2023. According to the Commerce Department, each cluster will include a robust supplier ecosystem, R&D facilities to continuously innovate new process technologies, and specialized infrastructure. Each cluster will employ thousands of workers in high-paying jobs. In addition, the goal is to have U.S.-based workers develop and scale the technology underlying future generations of chips and that each CHIPS-funded fab will be supported by an ecosystem of reliable suppliers committed to operating and innovating in the U.S. The development of the clusters also is meant to ensure the military has access to leading-edge chips made in the U.S. The \$52.7 billion bill offers subsidies for companies to research, design and manufacture semiconductors and to help with workforce development, including \$39 billion in manufacturing incentives. Intel has applied for money for its New Albany campus along with its three other big U.S. campuses in Arizona, New Mexico, and Oregon. Intel said Thursday that investments at all four sites represent \$100 billion. Commerce expects to make awards in the coming months.

Canton area could play key part in Appalachian Regional Clean Hydrogen Hub (November 2023)

A Stark Area Regional Transit Authority and Dominion Energy Ohio project could produce hydrogen for regional transportation as part of a federal initiative to reduce carbon emissions and create jobs. The Office of Clean Energy Demonstrations hosted a recent webinar to share new details about the early-stage Appalachian Regional Clean Hydrogen Hub, which includes a proposed Canton-area project. On October 13th, the U.S. Department of Energy announced that \$7 billion, funded through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, will go toward seven Regional Clean Hydrogen Hubs (H2Hubs). The Appalachian hub involves a mix of hydrogen projects across Ohio, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia. The Appalachian Hub will receive up to \$925 million in federal funds to complete several projects, which will increase American hydrogen manufacturing and use. The proposed sites consist of seven in West Virginia, five in Ohio, and three in Pennsylvania. The Ohio projects are: MPLX, a partnership formed by Marathon Petroleum, would develop a storage facility and connective infrastructure in eastern Ohio. Dominion Energy and SARTA would build a production and carbon capture facility in the Canton area. Plug Power and Amazon would create a distribution center with a hydrogen fueling station near Cleveland. First Mode would build a manufacturing facility in Northeast Ohio to retrofit mining trucks with a hydrogen fuel cell power system. Independence Hydrogen would establish a production facility using industrial off-gas as fuel in the Ashtabula area. SARTA, Midwest Hydrogen Center of Excellence, Dominion Energy and Cleveland State University formed the Ohio Clean Hydrogen Hub Alliance, a coalition of public and private individuals and organizations to advocate for available funding. They later joined the campaign for the multi-state Appalachian hub. Battelle, the Columbus-based applied science and technology company, is the program manager for the Appalachian hub.

Akron seeks \$12 million to raze Firestone plant, 4 other aging buildings (November 2023)

Akron city administrators are applying to the Ohio Department of Development for \$9 million, which would require a \$3 million local match, to demolish five commercial buildings. Any remaining funding would be put toward a list of 193 condemned homes located throughout the city. The Firestone Building is owned by the city of Akron and includes one million square feet. It was built in 1910 and once

employed about 1,800 workers. It closed in 1981. Demolition of the Firestone Building is estimated at \$7.5 million. After demolition, city officials plan to build a 200,000-square-foot spec building marketed to a yet-unknown commercial user who would outfit the facility to suit their business needs. Demolition of the 69,199 square-foot Rankin Elementary School is estimated at \$1 million. Rankin closed in 2012. The Word Church, a 263,000-square-foot facility on 29 acres, has been vacant since 2018. Demolition is estimated at \$1.5 million, and the city has no immediate redevelopment plans. Demolition of the 7,452-square-foot Kenmore Annex, which is owned by the City, is estimated at \$1.3 million. Following demolition, the City plans to transfer the property to the Akron Metropolitan Housing Authority as part of the Summit Lake reconstruction project. Demolition of the 277,864-square-foot Morley Health Center, also owned by the City, is estimated at \$350,000.

Breeze Airways to add route to Raleigh-Durham to roster of CAK flights (November 2023)

Breeze Airways has announced a new route from the Akron-Canton Airport to Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina. The service will begin February 2, 2024.

UA offering students free industry credential courses (November 2023)

The University of Akron (UA) is offering three dozen online certificate and industry credential courses to all faculty, staff, and students for no extra charge. With this opportunity, students can earn their degree but also tack on one or several certificates that make them more marketable to employers. Some courses take a few hours, while ones like project management are closer to 70 hours. All the courses are self-paced, so students could take one over winter break or spread it out over the course of a semester — whenever is most convenient for them. The online courses are through a third-party company called Coursera. UA is offering unlimited courses to alumni at a discounted rate of \$99 a year, while the general public can get unlimited courses through UA for \$59 a month. Bulk rates are also available for businesses looking to partner with the university to offer a series of courses for employees. More than 70 students have taken advantage of the program so far. About a third are earning certificates or credentials in business-related courses, a third in data science, and another third in computer science. The university is looking to expand the program to offer it in partnership with high schools, especially as a complement to Akron Public Schools' College and Career Academies.

Akron wins regional tech hub status, will compete for millions in federal funds (November 2023)

Akron could be eligible for up to \$70 million in federal funding after being designated a Regional Technology and Innovation Hub by the U.S. Department of Commerce. Akron was one of 31 tech hubs selected from a pool of nearly 400 applicants. The hub will build on Akron's leadership in the rubber industry and position the region to lead in producing sustainable polymers — the next generation of rubber and plastics. Akron will compete with the other 30 hubs for awards to be presented in the spring. Based on their development plans, five to 10 hubs will receive \$20 million to \$70 million each to carry out their missions. The Greater Akron Chamber leads the consortium, which was awarded a \$400,000 strategy development grant. The tech hub designation and strategic development grant will accelerate the region's efforts to advance the work in sustainable polymers. The creation of regional hubs is part of the bipartisan CHIPS and Science Act of 2022. The tech hub program is designed to drive regional innovation and job creation by strengthening a region's capacity to manufacture, commercialize and deploy technology that will advance U.S. competitiveness. The program invests in high-potential regions and aims to transform them into globally competitive innovation centers.

Jackson Township, North Canton moving ahead with economic development deal (November 2023)

Jackson Township and the city of North Canton see opportunity and potential in a proposed 50-year economic development agreement. By the end of November, the two sides expect to approve their new deal, intended to end the annexation battles of the past. Under the deal, both the city and the township would foster economic development in an area north of where Whipple Avenue NW crosses the Akron

Metro-owned railroad tracks north of Everhard Road NW. Any properties in the designated area annexed into North Canton would remain in Jackson Township. State law allows annexed properties to be in a city and an adjoining township at the same time. The city would collect all income taxes and the township would collect all property taxes in perpetuity. Both the township and the city would jointly provide services to annexed properties in the designated area. Both the city and township agreed not to seek to induce businesses to move from one entity to the other.

Timken acquires Houston manufacturer (November 2023)

The Timken Co. has announced the acquisition of Houston-based Engineered Solutions Group. The company, also known as Innovative Mechanical Solutions (iMECH), manufactures thrust bearings, radial bearings, specialty coatings and other products mainly used in the energy industry. The deal is expected to close in the fourth quarter and will be Timken's fifth acquisition this year. iMECH employs about 70 people and is expected to generate about \$30 million in revenue this year. Timken had \$4.5 billion in sales in 2022 and employs more than 19,000 people globally. Earlier this year, Timken acquired the Nadella Group, American Roller Bearing Co., Des-Case Corp., and Rosa Sistemi S.p.A.

SARTA looks to open new Massillon transit center in March or April (November 2023)

The Stark Area Regional Transit Authority bus station in Massillon is set to open in early 2024. The \$5.1 million project began last winter and will serve the nearly 500 daily bus passengers in Massillon. The new station will also have two electric car charging stations and a 20-car parking lot.

Akron wants to lead revolution in sustainable polymers and plastics (December 2023)

In October, the Greater Akron area was as one of 31 tech hubs designated in the U.S. Akron is the only tech hub in Ohio and it will concentrate on innovating a new generation of sustainable polymers and plastics – ones derived from sustainable natural sources that do not pollute or affect human health. Leaders in the industry say Akron is perfectly positioned to drive that innovation. Akron is building an ecosystem for innovation and financial backing to commercialize ideas to market. The University of Akron, the world leader in polymer science and engineering, has expanded its polymer studies program to undergrad students, graduate and doctoral students, in part to provide a pipeline of talent at all levels for the area's rubber and plastics companies. Undergrads majoring in polymer science and polymer engineering can also specialize in sustainability. UA officials explained researchers are searching for plants or even bacteria that can make new polymer products greener, finding alternatives to chemical compounds that may be harmful to the planet and our health, and looking at new ways to reuse everyday plastics.

Akron aims to bounce back, using its rubber and plastics history as springboard to future (December 2023)

Could Akron be the rubber capital of the world – again? Not just rubber for tires, but for all the polymers and plastics that create so much of what we depend on today. Leaders say Greater Akron could soon drive a tidal wave of innovation spurred by millions of dollars in new state and federal investments aimed at helping local businesses and research institutes compete globally. There are about 150 polymer-related companies in Summit and Portage counties, and 350 more throughout Northeast Ohio. Additionally, both Bridgestone and Goodyear have research and development facilities in Akron. The University of Akron is a world academic leader in polymer science and engineering. The Akron Polymer Industry Cluster, led by the Greater Akron Chamber, aims to bring together all the expertise. Much of its focus is developing safer and more sustainable products. The group is hoping to receive new state Innovation Hub funding. In October, the region was awarded a U.S. Economic Development Administration Tech Hub Designation and \$400,000 strategy development grant. The polymer cluster will now compete with 30 other tech hubs for about \$500 million in funding from the bipartisan CHIPS and Science Act. Between five to 10 of the hubs will receive up to \$75 million each. A Polymer Industry

Advisory Council – a coalition of more than 40 companies, academic institutions, economic development organizations and representatives from the polymer cluster – has been meeting monthly since April 2021 about what the cluster needs to thrive. The group estimates it will take about \$200 million in investments over the next 10 to 20 years to lift the polymer research and manufacturing here to its full potential.

Stark County Manufacturing Workforce Development Partnership awarded grant (December 2023)

The Stark County Manufacturing Workforce Development Partnership (SCMWDP) was awarded an Industry Sector Partnership grant from the state of Ohio. The SCMWDP was one of 26 grant recipients across the state. The Industry Sector Partnership grants are intended to support regional workforce strategies and teamwork among businesses, educators, and community groups. The funding for the SCMWDP will support existing efforts, such as the annual Manufacturing Day for high school students, manufacturing plant tours for local educators, and a summer camp for middle school students. The Stark County Manufacturing Workforce Development Partnership was formed in June 2021 by area manufacturers, the chamber, Stark Economic Development Board, and the Manufacturing Advocacy and Growth Network. It aims to develop a skilled manufacturing workforce through training and education.

Canal tours, more shopping, a Ferris wheel, an Akron sign: Residents reimagine downtown (December 2023)

The Downtown Akron Partnership (DAP) will release the updated Downtown Akron Vision and Redevelopment Plan 2022+ in the next month. The DAP's consultant, MKSK, will finalize the report and action plan for developers and officials using private research and input collected from virtual comments or through in-person meetings, focus groups and from residents at ward meetings. The 2018 version bet big on the conversion of office space to apartments — a profitable portion of recent mixed-use development projects still struggling to fill storefronts with businesses and retailers. The revised plan will continue to reflect the changing needs and desired uses of a downtown emerging from years of Main Street construction and a battering pandemic. The plan is to form individual task forces to implement eight "high-level initiatives" to meet the evolving needs of a more resilient downtown neighborhood of more than 1,000 residents: more residential conversion; convention-adjacent hotel; retail curation and programming; trail connections; enhance University Avenue and Canal Park corridors, alignment of neighborhood plans; better marketing of assets; and develop business, innovation in polymer industry. Public comments included a desire for canalboat tours, a giant "Akron" sign, Ferris wheel, thriving downtown with more shopping, grocery store, repair of parking decks, and preservation and adaptive reuse of empty buildings.

Developers wager downtown's future on new apartments as commerce lags (December 2023)

The five tallest buildings in Downtown Akron are either vacant, barely half full, or soon-to-be entirely empty. After FirstEnergy empties its headquarters on Main Street, it is estimated that eight buildings in downtown will account for nearly 2 million square feet of empty space for lease or redevelopment — most of it former office space. The office occupancy rate in Akron is 84.7 percent, slightly better than the national average, but down one percent from last year. Developers are scrambling to repurpose hotels and office buildings as residential. As the city rolled out new and aggressive tax breaks for residential construction, downtown developers lined up apartment projects. Developers and city officials now see the new apartments, and more of them, as the means to save struggling retailers, to fill stubbornly empty storefronts, and to create a "visiting economy" of tourist and entertainment attractions that have helped other cities recover more quickly from the pandemic. Today, apartments are still leasing fast despite an unprecedented level of recent development. Three buildings reopened since 2021 — The Landmark, The Goodrich, and 159 Main in the former Law Building — offering 340 new

apartments and sometimes waiting lists to get in them. Other redevelopments include the former YWCA Building and the CitiCentre Building, which has plans for 117 apartments.

Downtown dilemma: What's happening with these 5 vacant Akron buildings? (December 2023)

Downtown Akron is now home to five vacant or nearly empty buildings totaling one million square feet of mostly office space: City Center Hotel, CitiCentre Building, Quaker Square, former Beacon Journal building, and Morley Health Center. This does not include the FirstEnergy Building, 1 Cascade Plaza, or the Huntington Tower. FirstEnergy is buying out its lease on its 15-floor headquarters and moving to White Pond Drive. The 28-story Huntington Tower has been on the market since 2019. The Development Finance Authority has plans to sell 1 Cascade Plaza for redevelopment as offices or residences in the next couple of years. After originally having plans to redevelop the former City Center Hotel into 146 luxury lofts, Testa is now looking into redeveloping the building into more affordable apartments. Plans to redevelop CitiCentre into apartments, offices, and retail have been modified. The City is now working with Welty Building Co. – who also renovated The Bowery project – to redevelop CitiCentre into strictly apartments. The future of the siloed Quaker Square complex is uncertain, as the University of Akron and other tenants have vacated. The future of the former Beacon Journal Building is also uncertain after City Council denied Capstone Development's request to demolish the building. The City is seeking funding from the Ohio Department of Development to demolish the Morley Health Center. Potential plans for the Morley site include a new STEM High School for Akron Public Schools or a new police station.

New housing complex planned for Canton Inn site, free food market opens on Shorb (December 2023)

Plans and funding are set for a new family housing complex on the site of the former Canton Inn. The planned housing follows the opening of a market offering free fresh food on Shorb Ave. Canton officials have committed more city and federal funds to the Shorb neighborhood to help homeowners improve their homes and to help developers build new ones. Canton For All People, a nonprofit development corporation formed by Crossroads United Methodist Church and the Lemmon and DeHoff family foundations, has been leading the change over the past two years in the Shorb neighborhood, which has among the highest poverty and crime rates in the city. Roughly \$3.9 million of the \$5 million in federal funding that Canton City Council has set aside for the Shorb area has been directed to Canton For All People's planned projects in the neighborhood between W. Tuscarawas Street and 12th Street NW and between McKinley Avenue NW and Monument Road NW. Council also reallocate \$2.1 million in federal funds to help Canton For All People build the new housing complex on the former Canton Inn site, called the Newton Family Apartments. Canton For All People has partnered with Woda Cooper Companies, a Columbus-based developer that focuses on housing for low-income residents, to build a 52-unit apartment complex, commercial space, and a playground. The project is estimated to cost \$18.4 million. Canton's Planning Department has launched a Housing Development and Beautification program to help Shorb-area residents improve their homes and build new ones. The city has allocated \$100,000 in grant funding has been set aside to reimburse homeowners who take advantage of at least one of the three categories under the program: exterior façade home repair, interior improvements, and new construction.

Hall of Fame Village announces name of indoor water park (December 2023)

Gameday Bay is the name of the football-themed water park scheduled to open late next year at the Hall of Fame Village. The name, which was decided in a public voting campaign, beat out Legacy Lagoon, Champions Cove, and Legends Lagoon. The 144,000-square-foot indoor park, which will feature swim-up bars, areas for both children and teens, large televisions, a wave pool, lazy river, water slide tower, and other rides and amenities, is scheduled to be completed in fall 2024. According to corporate officials, Gameday Bay will be the only football-themed water park in the country. Construction on the adjacent,

180-room Hilton Tapestry hotel is expected to start soon. Officials are optimistic that a two-story parking deck across from the water park will be constructed soon. The \$117 million water park project is part of the overall more than \$600 million Hall of Fame Village phased development, which local leaders are hoping will become a year-round destination.

'Reckoning with the mistakes of the past': Akron seeks path forward for failed Innerbelt (December 2023)

The City of Akron released a report on making recommendations for the future of the Innerbelt and apologized for the project's historical failures. The report acknowledges the highway project, which began in 1970, had devastating consequences to a predominantly Black neighborhood, displacing many residents and businesses, leaving emotional scars, and eliminating the possibility for building generational wealth. The report includes short- and long-term recommendations. Short-term recommendations include collaborating with other cities going through similar processes, releasing a request for qualifications for a master plan team with experience that aligns with key issues identified in the report, issuing an apology from the city, creating a more consistent communications framework, and more. Long-term recommendations include converting some city-owned land into a nonprofit community land trust, approaching redevelopment in phases, and embracing the Ohio & Erie Canal Towpath Trail as a connector. The report follows the public engagement process, "Reconnecting Our Community," which began in June and aimed to produce plans for a 30-acre decommissioned stretch of the Innerbelt. For more information visit akroninnerbelt.com.

Canton eyes multimillion-dollar upgrade for Memorial Civic Center (December 2023)

Canton is proposing \$2.5 million in improvements to the 72-year-old Canton Memorial Civic Center. Improvements will include upgrades to the civic center's lighting, plumbing and piping, audio, HVAC and mechanical systems, and power systems. The repairs, if approved by council after the design is completed, would be paid for using American Rescue Plan Act funds. The civic center hosts a variety of regional events, ranging from pro wrestling to Pro Football Hall of Fame enshrinement activities to the Akron-Canton Regional Food Bank's Celebrity Cuisine fundraiser.

Samsung C&T moving forward with Washington Township solar farm project (December 2023)

Samsung C&T America plans to apply for a state permit in December or January for its proposed solar farm in Washington Township. Samsung's Stark Solar LLC filed initial paperwork with the Ohio Power Siting Board that said the company plans to file an application within 90 days after holding a public meeting on Dec. 6. The solar farm will be on 816 acres leased from property owners as part of a 30-year agreement. Due to an overwhelming number of applications for solar facilities, PJM Interconnection, which oversees the electrical grid in all or parts of 13 states, including Ohio, paused or slowed down the review timelines for projects. PJM has not yet determined how a solar farm in Washington Township that could generate 150 megawatts at a time would fit into the grid. Construction might begin in spring 2025, but it could be 2026 or later.

Merriman Valley Master Plan step closer to fruition following vote by Akron City Council (December 2023)

Akron City Council unanimously passed nine pieces of legislation relating to the city's adoption of a new zoning code for Merriman Valley and the city as a whole. The ordinances are part of the master plan adopted by Akron and Cuyahoga Falls that transforms the Merriman Valley-Schumacher Area into a walkable, environmentally friendly corridor to the Cuyahoga Valley National Parks. The group Preserve the Valley, which opposed the city's plan to develop Theiss Woods, partnered with Akron and Cuyahoga Falls to craft the master plan for the Merriman Valley-Schumacher Area. Akron's new code aims to protect the surrounding environment through the use of two types of conservation districts. The first type, Open Space Conservation Districts, are areas that will remain largely undeveloped with restrictions

on what kind of buildings can be added to the site, and a stipulation that only native vegetation and landscape can be utilized. Trails and associated amenities like boardwalks, for example, are allowed provided they don't interfere with sensitive habitats. The second type, Conservation Neighborhoods, require a preservation of 70 percent of the green space in the area and a maximum of 12 dwellings per acre. The code defines these neighborhoods as walkable with a diverse range of housing options, including single-unit detached homes, duplexes and townhomes that are nearby to permanently protected open space. The areas feature interconnected sidewalks and pedestrian and bicycle trails through the open space to nearby streets or trails. The old zoning code, adopted in 1922, is a use-based system, meaning that the land is divided into separate areas for specific uses. A form-based zoning code focuses on physical character and layout.

Habitat for Humanity to build 16 homes, new park in Akron's North Hill (December 2023)

Habitat for Humanity of Summit County plans to build a new development in Akron's North Hill called Silver Maple Ridge. Families receiving Habitat homes must put in 250 "sweat equity" hours, including making lunches for volunteers on the build site or working on the house themselves. They also have to complete homeowner education courses on mortgages, home maintenance and safety, and more. The development will include a park, which will be Akron's first in 40 years. During the final phases of construction in the spring of 2025, area residents will be able to provide input about what amenities they would like to see in the park. Habitat for Humanity estimates a shortage of nearly 15,000 affordable units in Akron alone. While the Silver Maple Ridge homes will be appraised at approximately \$200,000, they'll be sold to qualifying families for less. Silver Maple Ridge will be built in three phases beginning soon after the lot is cleared and graded, and building permits are secured. After the first six houses are complete in early summer of 2024, construction will begin on the next six.

Tire manufacturer breaks ground on \$10 million building in Brimfield (December 2023)

Martin Wheel, a division of Kenda Tire, recently broke ground on its manufacturing facility in the Maplecrest development in Brimfield. The company hopes to have the plant up and running by the end of 2024. The construction site is on International Drive, just behind the Meijer and Menards stores in Brimfield, across from Hamrick Packaging. The property is located in Brimfield's Joint Economic Development District with Tallmadge. The company got a 60 percent, 10-year tax abatement from the county in 2021. At that time, the company announced plans to invest \$13 million to \$18 million in the new location, including \$10 million in the building itself. Those details have not changed, nor have employment projections to maintain 101 jobs and add at least 24 new employees, said Brad Ehrhart, president of the Portage Development Board. The company has an annual payroll of \$5.6 million. Campbell Construction in Wooster is building the 198,000-square-foot facility. In 2021, a company controller told commissioners that the plant has been in the area since 1960. The company makes more than 12,000 products, including wheels for lawn mowers, yard tractors, and tires for golf carts. The existing building on West Avenue in Tallmadge cannot be expanded.