

2015 CEDS – Strategic Direction

The Buckeye Hills region and the communities which constitute the membership have a history of cooperation and coordination to achieve mutual goals of community and economic development. These partnerships are growing in importance as the regional economy continues to grow and change.

Below are general goal areas of concern identified during the CEDS planning process, along with identified objectives intended to make advances in the specified area. Not all goal areas have identified objectives as part of the CEDS plan, as activities relevant to those items are inherent to the day to day workings of local economic development parties, local officials, and other stakeholders.

Prioritized Regional Goal Areas

Based on information presented in the SWOT analysis, and derived from conversation with local economic development professionals, local elected officials, private businesses, and the public at large, the following goal areas have been identified.

1. **Workforce**
2. **Infrastructure**
3. **Economic Diversification**
4. **Education**
5. **Community Challenges**

Strategies and actions pertaining to addressing identified issues in each of these areas will be discussed below.

1. Workforce – Amid the many conversations held during the CEDS revision process with committee members, local officials, and other interested parties, it was clear that workforce issues were a vital concern. Of particular concern were three specific issues; addressing the need for soft skills, addressing transportation challenges, and creating an information network between workforce organizations and other regional parties. Based on these concerns, the workforce goal for the region is below.

Ensure that the workforce of the Buckeye Hills region has all the skills necessary to participate and succeed in the 21st century workforce.

Objective: Buckeye Hill staff will participate in a minimum of five (5) outreach activities with local educational institutions or workforce organizations, within the next five years, to communicate the importance of timeliness, professionalism, and reliability as key qualities of a productive member of the workforce.

Objective: Buckeye Hills RTPO staff will select three (3) areas within the district for multimodal transportation system analysis by December 2015. Buckeye Hills will complete the multimodal analysis activities by June 2017.

Objective: Buckeye Hills will serve as an information resource between workforce organizations (WIB/WIA/One Stops) and local development professionals, providing at least six (6) points of contact annually detailing available programs, current needs, and new opportunities.

2. Infrastructure – In the rural eight county region, infrastructure continues to be a primary focus to ensure local communities are able to capitalize on economic development opportunities. Discussion during the planning process focused on the realization that new infrastructure development is being prioritized at a lower level by local parties than the maintenance and update of existing infrastructure. This seems to be true across all utilities, but especially true for critical water and waste water assets. Many of these systems are rapidly aging and deteriorating, providing challenges to system owners and municipalities to insure these systems remain functional and providing benefits to the region.

Several comments were also received about telecommunications infrastructure, and the practice of installing conduit or other telecommunication infrastructure in open trenches as projects are taking place. Buckeye Hills staff was not aware of this taking place in the region due to additional costs and contracting challenges during construction. When further information was sought about this topic from a local engineering firm, concerns were raised about damaging the telecommunications infrastructure during periods of repair or maintenance, which adds additional liability to those companies completing the work.

Provide the residents and businesses of southeastern Ohio with utility infrastructure that will satisfy current demands, and scale to meet the needs of the future.

Objective: Buckeye Hills staff will complete and disseminate at least one (1) Local Government Innovation Fund study by winter 2016, outlining the potential scenarios for the utilization of low power and no power water treatment systems in communities of less than 250 residents.

Objective: Buckeye Hills RTPO staff will complete one (1) prioritized Transportation Improvement Plan project listing for the region to be submitted to ODOT by June 2017.

Objective: Buckeye Hills staff will hold at least one (1) informational/ training session per year in each county providing current information regarding available public infrastructure financing and program guidelines.

3. Economic Diversification – During committee meetings, issues of economic diversification were discussed, and several points were widely agreed upon. Primarily, that rural communities – including those in the Buckeye Hills region, still largely depend on one or a few major employers as the economic anchor of the area. Along the same lines, many local economies coalesce around a single product or natural resource (polymers, metals, natural gas, etc.). These realities do pose a higher risk of disaster to those economies if any disruptions in those supply chains or markets does occur.

Work collaboratively to continue diversifying the regional economy to lessen the impact of any external threats to the traditional economic base.

Objective: Buckeye Hills staff will participate in the completion of one (1) study which will analyze the impacts of shale gas exploration in eastern and southeastern Ohio. This study will provide additional cluster analysis for future CEDS documents and will be completed by winter 2016.

4. Education – Among the members of the committee, there was a perception that the Buckeye Hills region has a competitive advantage over other locations in the state in the area of educational assets (public schools, post-secondary institutions, and trade/training facilities). These facilities play an important role in ensuring that industries in the region are able to meet the demands of a changing workforce. The committee felt it was important that these institutions were continually included in the information network between local officials, economic development professionals, and workforce representatives.

It was also expressed that it is becoming increasingly important to educate students about pathways to careers, especially those careers that are projected to have employment shortfalls in the Buckeye Hills region. Many of these careers do not require a four year degree, but do require a worker that has certified trade skills that can be obtained at community colleges, career centers, or local specialized training programs.

Support opportunities for residents to capitalize on meaningful career opportunities within the Buckeye Hills region.

Objective: Buckeye Hills staff will participate in a minimum of one (1) professional pathway outreach activity with a local educational institution per year, for each of the five years in the CEDS update cycle. A minimum of five (5) activities will be completed by April 2020.

5. Community Challenges – Members of the committee identified several community based issues related to economic development that are proving to be challenges for local officials and stakeholders. Based on these discussions and other interactions with local officials, housing is a growing concern for stakeholders in the region. Specifically the availability and affordability of housing. Concerns were voiced regarding some communities being very heavy populated with student housing, and fewer options for young professionals and families. Concerns also continue to grow regarding the affordability of rental housing across the region as oil and gas

activities continue to grow. Some communities are reporting an increase in rental costs, as well as increased home prices for those looking to purchase. The concern is that as these costs rise, residents who need low cost housing will be unable to obtain it, causing a potential short term homeless situation. Members felt this particular issue was difficult to address, due to the lack of resources available to local governments to provide assistance, and the general lack of political motivation to become involved in housing projects.

Members also identified access to health care as a continuing concern, but did recognize that good progress on this had been made in at least two counties in the region during the past two years. New health care facilities have been established in Belpre Ohio (Washington County), and near Pomeroy Ohio (Meigs County), providing much needed services for residents of the area.

Serve as a resource and a facilitator to local communities addressing quality of life challenges for residents.

Objective: Buckeye Hills staff will prepare and publish one (1) public data compendium containing regionally important data for use by local communities as they research solutions to pertinent issues. The first edition of this compendium will be released by winter 2015.

Objective: Buckeye Hills staff will annually fulfill a minimum of 100 data requests fielded from local officials, community representatives, stakeholders, and local citizens, free of charge.