



5 County CEDS Project Team Meeting #3

July 18, 2025

Agenda

- I. Review of Focus Group Data
- II. Survey Review
- III. SWOT Discussion/Prep
- IV. Next Steps
- V. Upcoming Meetings
- VI. Homework

Phase II. Focus Group Summary

5-10 Year Vision

Live, work, play here/ quality of life/ safety/amenities/ eliminate blight	Communicated, unified plan for economic development, account for unique community needs	Diversified workforce/diversity of jobs and business base (not just manufacturing)	Workforce housing and affordable housing
Connect rural and city (for daycare, employment, transportation, etc.)/better transportation in Van Wert	Target younger students to promote staying/working here, develop communities they want to come back to	Quality of life for aging population	Vibrant downtowns with full buildings and support of these businesses and promote experiences
Grow young entrepreneurs, more creators, innovators	Reverse decline in student population, see steady overall population growth	Communities that value diversity and grow diverse population, educate children to see/experience diversity	Market communities as day trips/destinations, use recreational assets

Phase II. Focus Group Summary

Overall Region Strengths & Assets – Allen, Hancock, Hardin Counties

Collaborative
Environment

Cities, Non-Profits,
Government on similar
pages

Less regulations,
permitting, time delays
or efficiency

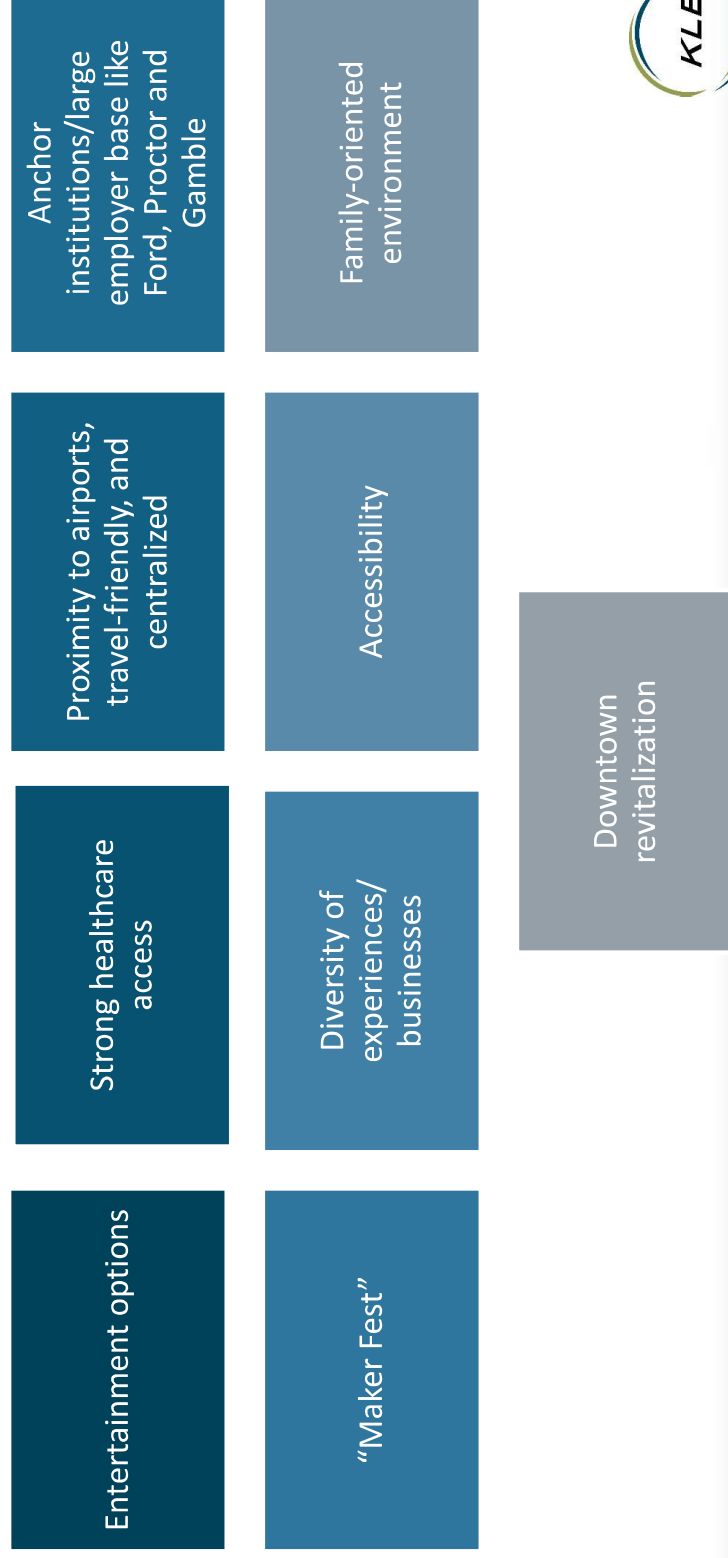
Good Trust Among
Partners

Population that could
have second careers or
flexibility to keep
employees working part
time in retirement

Brand as Greater Lima
Area, not Toledo

Phase II. Focus Group Summary

Allen County Strengths & Assets



Phase II. Focus Group Summary

Hancock County Strengths & Assets

Proximity to customer base	Good healthcare, good employee base	Large employer base – Marathon, Whirlpool	Right off I-75 – convenient location
Flexible, accommodating residential zoning	Collaborative culture/nature	Transparency	“Pitch Fest”
	Downtowns	Lower than state and national commute time	

Phase II. Focus Group Summary

Hardin County Strengths & Assets

Downtown
revitalization

Excess
infrastructure
capacity in Ada

Exceptionally
strong school
system

Greenfields

Rail sites
available

Broadband

Phase II. Focus Group Summary

Putnam County Strengths & Assets

Well-maintained, safe
communities

Downtown
investments and
revitalization
momentum

Solid industry base

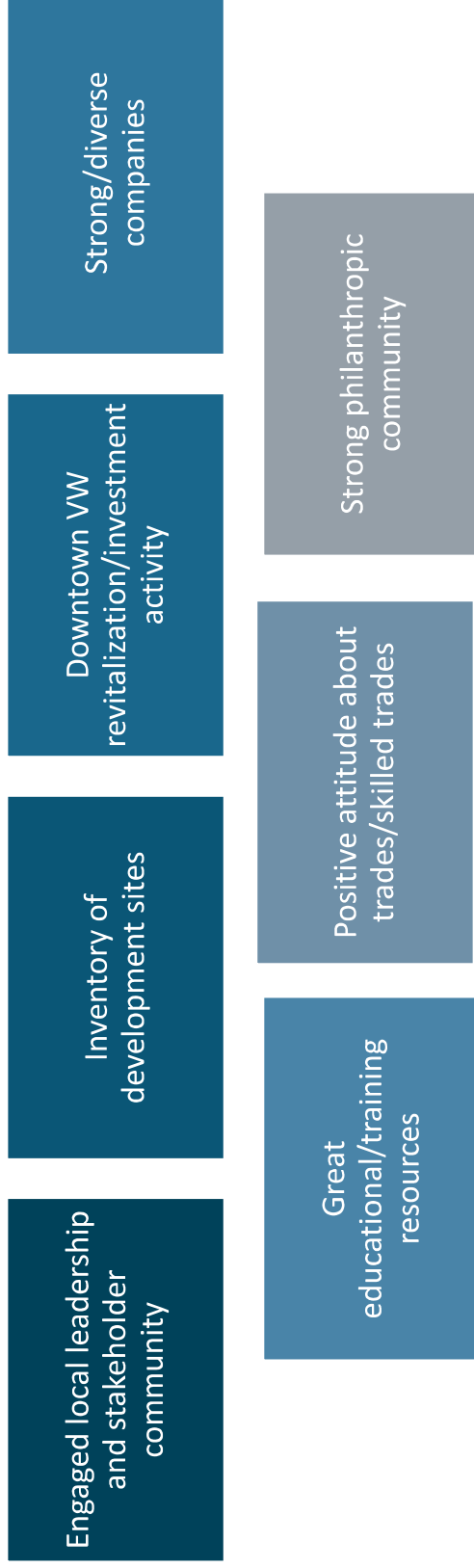
Exceptionally strong
school systems and
thriving workforce dev.
initiatives

Positive attitudes
about technical/skilled
trades careers, many
opportunities

Housing development
progress

Phase II. Focus Group Summary

Van Wert County Strengths & Assets



Phase II. Focus Group Summary

Overall Challenges - Allen, Hancock, Hardin Counties

Transportation	Childcare	Housing Market (Availability and Affordability)	Gaps in resources for businesses/entrepreneurs	Workforce quality, availability, turnover, lack of soft skills
More industry in communities	Lack of infrastructure and high cost of utilities, need for better collaboration on utilities	Delay in commercial project approvals, permitting, zoning and differences between incorporated and unincorporated areas	Sometimes hard sell, due to transportation, housing, workforce	Attracting new families
Working with existing property owners, generational property owners and some bias with new technology, NIMBYs	"Career Tech Desert"	Health of residents	Funds, support for existing businesses/ retention, not always just job creation/new businesses	Infrastructure in smaller communities (water, road)

Phase II. Focus Group Summary

Overall Challenges - Putnam County

Retaining/attracting families & attracting younger generation

Internet connectivity and cell service affecting residents, businesses, tourists

Lack of career tech center and workforce training hub in county

Resources to grow entrepreneurs, innovators, creators

Site development challenges: infrastructure cost hinders growth opportunities

Diversify business climate, not just manufacturing

Transportation, no 4-lane highways

Phase II. Focus Group Summary

Overall Challenges - Van Wert County

Rural healthcare

Housing

Childcare

Attracting/retaining residents and workforce

What if property taxes go away?

High cost of infrastructure

Phase II. Focus Group Summary

Overall Planning Priorities/Aspirations - Allen, Hancock, Hardin

Business attraction
readiness and strategy
aimed at business sector
diversification/education
for public

Workforce development
(high school age, college,
age, later years,
boomerang)

Population growth

Bringing in a big
employer

Diversified workforce,
especially healthcare

Phase II. Focus Group Summary

Overall Planning Priorities/Aspirations - Allen, Hancock, Hardin

Tall Timbers and CR 99 for commercial (Hancock)

West Park, North End, CR 99 for residential (Hancock)

East side of Lima, related to amenities (Allen)

Projects that eliminate slum and blight (brownfield dollars for commercial/industrial) Project 129 residential in Lima)

Open up communication/education of public about land use, types of businesses

North and south side have most opportunities of Lima (Allen)

Phase II. Focus Group Summary

Overall Planning Priorities/Aspirations - Putnam

Improve cell / internet
connectivity

Explore post secondary
education options and
adult training
opportunities in PC

Make Putnam County
and its communities
destination for outdoor
recreation and activities
– and market that

Enhance top sites for
development

Continue increasing
access to housing and
childcare

Target agribusiness, R&D,
engineering, medical
companies with 80-100
jobs that don't compete
with existing businesses

Phase II. Focus Group Summary

Overall Planning Priorities/Aspirations - Van Wert

Development past
southern border of
Vantage CC

Bonowitz Avenue
Ext for
industrial/office

Shannon Station
for retail

West Vision Park,
South Industrial
Park

Leammley
property,
Dickenson Farms
and Elk Drive

North & South
Washington

Continued
investment and
growth in
downtowns

Phase II. Focus Group Summary

Overall Equity & Inclusion

Re-entry program

Inclusivity of
education and
industry exposure

Support for
individuals
experiencing
barriers

Support for English
as second language
speakers



MEETING AGENDA

5-COUNTY NW OHIO 2025 CEDS

IN-PERSON / MICROSOFT TEAMS (RECORDED)

MEETING DATE: **7/15/25**

MEETING TIME: **10:00AM-11:30AM AND 1:00PM-2:30PM**

FOCUS GROUP MEETINGS: **ALLEN/HANCOCK/HARDIN COUNTY MEETING**

ATTENDEES: Wendy McCormick, Ronda Lehman, Annette Heslep, Jesse Blackburn, Tricia Valasek, Kurt Shepard, Nicky Taylor, Keith Horner, Josh Unterbrink, Rebecca Phillips

COLLABORATIVE: Cindy Leis-Allen County, Tim Fitzpatrick-Allen County, Matt Gilroy-Findlay-Hancock County, Holli Underwood-Hardin County, Lauren Falcone-Kleinfelder, Nichole Fifer-BGSU CRD

Four Phases

- Research
- Interviews complete
- Focus groups in each county
- Survey launches on Friday

Vision for Economic Growth (Next 5 – 10 Years)

- Live, work, play
- Not a clear unified plan (at least not being communicated)
- Diversified workforce – not just manufacturing
- Workforce housing
- Connecting rural and city
- Transportation, daycare, employment

Key Priorities & Aspirations

- Diversified workforce, especially healthcare
- Bringing in a big employer
- Population growth
- New organizations moving in

Regional Advantages

- Collaborative environment
- City, nonprofit, and government are on a similar page
- Good trust among partners

Allen County Advantages

- Entertainment options
- Proximity to airports, travel-friendly, and centralized

- For businesses/investors: strong healthcare access, don't need to leave area

Hancock County Advantages

- Right off I-75 – convenient location
- Large employer base – Marathon, Whirlpool
- Good healthcare, good employee base
- Proximity to customer base
- Collaborative culture

Anchor Institutions

- Marathon, Whirlpool, General Dynamics, Procter & Gamble, Ford

Challenges – Workforce

- Candidate pool sometimes lacking
- Hard workers want to stay in the area
- Quantity of applicants is a major challenge
- Criminal involvement and substance abuse among some individuals
- One-on-one and soft skills training needed

Challenges – Childcare & Transportation

- Most people work in city, live in rural areas
- Childcare is expensive, far away, or unavailable
- Public transit in Lima is minimal
- Transportation for medical appointments lacking

Housing Market

- No rentals – 150 applicants for every opening
- Need 150 houses in Hancock over next 5 years

Barriers to Residential Development

- Available turnkey properties scarce
- Critical infrastructure issues
- High cost of utilities – gas bill nearly \$1 million
- Zoning is not an issue in Hancock County

Gaps in Resources for Businesses/Entrepreneurs

- Infrastructure (especially gas)
- Permitting delays and approvals
- Need more flexible subdivision development
- Lack of communication between jurisdictions

Business Attraction Readiness

- Need for clear communication and education
- Public resistance to growth/change
- Need broadband, library, hot spots

Workforce Development

- Soft skills are a major issue
- High initiative workers limited
- Need better regional alignment of plans and vision
- CNC machinists in demand
- Successful apprenticeship models exist (Europe-style)
- Construction, cashiers, truck drivers are hard to hire

Projects and Priorities

- Better alignment of all moving pieces: industry, training, education
- Need more employer partnerships with schools
- Broadband, workforce exposure, and transportation key
- Gordie Howe Bridge presents regional opportunity
- Anchor institutions need retention incentives, not just attraction

Equity and Inclusion

- Consider re-entry programs
- Ensure inclusivity of education and industry exposure
- Support for individuals experiencing barriers

Final Thoughts

- Is there anything we have not covered that you think is important to include in the CEDS?
- Who else should we be talking to as part of this process?

Next Steps

- Continued community engagement –SWOT meetings, Public Input meetings/survey
- Draft CEDS Report on data/research, public engagement/input, benchmarking
- CEDS Report summary presentation and 30-day public comment period, followed by adoption of plan



MEETING AGENDA

5-COUNTY NW OHIO 2025 CEDS

IN-PERSON / MICROSOFT TEAMS (RECORDED)

MEETING DATE: **7/10/25**

MEETING TIME: **1:00PM-2:30PM**

FOCUS GROUP MEETINGS: **PUTNAM COUNTY**

ATTENDEES: Rosemary Buerger, Jacqueline Langhals, John Recker, Kelly Theisen, Nick Verhoff

COLLABORATIVE: Amy Sealts-Putnam County CIC, Claire Beech-Putnam County CIC, Jamie Beier Grant-Kleinfelder, Nichole Fifer-BGSU CRD

Regional Vision & Priorities

- What do you consider to be the region's greatest strengths or assets (e.g., workforce, location, infrastructure, institutions)?
- What is your vision for economic growth in the region over the next 5-10 years?
 - Seeing Main Street buildings full and sustainably supporting businesses in our downtowns
 - Grow the young entrepreneur base throughout the county
 - Housing study is being used to reach out to developers to gain interest in larger-scale developments/unit construction – 180 lots that are under development/in some part of the development process
 - Over the last 12 years, student population has dropped by about 17% (declining birth rates)
 - Farmland is typically not for sale which has impacted housing development – schools want population growth
 - Communities where young, educated people want to come back to (need housing, vibrant downtowns, quality schools, etc.)
 - Communities that value diversity and sees the needle move on growing a diverse population (even to educate our children to see/experience diversity)
 - Empowering/engaging the young generation to help drive change
 - Pitching small communities as a safe place to live, grow, build a business, lower cost
 - Diversity and change is happening at a slow, steady pace
 - More diversity in our business base, not just manufacturing
 - Attract more creatives, innovators
 - Steady population growth
 - Need to market communities for day trips/make it a destination – Piqua, Bellefontaine as examples
 - Bike trail from Gilboa to Ottawa; outdoor spaces; Parks District (Lagrange, IN) – ultimate goal is to connect multi-modal throughout 5-county region (trails, kayak landings, bike trail)

Strengths and Assets

- What unique advantages does the region offer to businesses or investors?
 - Well maintained communities; quality students/exceptionally strong school systems
- Which industries/employers anchor your local economy today?

Challenges and Barriers

- What are the biggest challenges or barriers to economic development or business growth (e.g., available/turnkey properties, infrastructure, workforce, zoning, other)?
 - Younger folks and the way remote work can be done/accommodated now, does that help to keep or attract people back vs having to work in the urban areas?
 - Terrible cell phone service is a huge issue – personal, business, visitor issue; seems to be a big issues in Ottawa for small/medium businesses
 - No one has tackled it from a business/services perspective
 - Communities are maxed out on public infrastructure services – small town infrastructure prevents growth/ED opportunities
 - One company coming into Ottawa/Leipsic/Grove City could take up all of existing capacity
 - Lack of available workforce has preventing county from competing for business attraction
- Are there gaps in resources or support systems for businesses/entrepreneurs (small, startup, medium, large)?

Infrastructure, Sites and Resources

- Where is development best suited in your community (e.g., proximity to highways/corridors, downtowns, large parcels)?
- Are there areas to avoid (e.g., lack of infrastructure, natural habitats, buffer zones, etc.)?
 - Large industrial development in Putnam County is basically off the table because of lack of infrastructure/workforce
 - If these industries are not our target, what is our target? 80-100 or less jobs is sweet spot, businesses that do not competing with existing businesses in the county
 - Looking at agribusiness, R&D/engineering, medical , cold storage food facilities – these are not here and would not compete with the existing workforce
 - Lack of interstates running through the county – knocks you out for many projects/leads
 - 65/613 in Leipsic
 - 30 access near Columbus Grove
- What is needed to make properties/sites development-ready?
- Are there infrastructure improvements needed to support economic growth (e.g., broadband, transportation, alternative transportation, utilities)?

- What role does housing availability and affordability play in the region's economic development priorities?

Workforce and Education

- How well is the current workforce meeting employer needs?
 - Overall seeing a decline in number of students going to 4-year schools; more districts than not seeing opportunities right out of graduation; career tech
 - No post secondary in Putnam County
 - All 9 districts have agreements with ESCs outside the county – more likely to live/raise a family in area vs moving away
 - ESC looking at how to do a career training center for students and county residents
- Are there existing skills gaps in the labor force? What workforce skills does the region need to prioritize to meet future business needs/opportunities?
 - Vantage CC had to turn away 139 students in 2024 because there is no space available!
 - Mfg, machining, HVAC, utilities, construction don't care what skills students have coming out of HS...they will train you; just want kids to show up/be reliable
 - Some of those jobs that were popular 40 years ago, no one is learning that trade/skill now (tool & die, pipefitters, maintenance machinery) and current workforce is retiring
 - Many businesses are doing OJT/incumbent workers in house and train/promote from within; 12 month credentials/short term trainings
 - Not enough capacity in those programs in the region
- How can regional partners better support talent attraction/retention?
 - PC Workforce Partnership is going to be tracking students, where they go to school, if they come back
 - PC Workforce Partnership working on getting countywide VoAg program; possibly at the ESC; 3 districts (Miller City, Kalida, Leipsic) have VoAg and it is going well; OG considering a similar program
 - Likely difficult to get a Vantage CC, Appollo, or Millstream satellite location
 - County needs post-secondary education option(s)

Resilience and Inclusion

- Are there underrepresented voices (e.g., rural, minority-owned businesses, youth, organizations) that should be included in economic development discussions?
- Are there vulnerable groups or geographies that need more focused attention?
- How can the regional economy become more resilient to disruptions (e.g., economic downturns, automation, AI)?

Projects and Priorities

- What projects or initiatives do you think are most critical to the region's future economic success?

- Need more medical specialties/facilities/specialty clinics – 11,000 baby boomers; most need to travel to get services
- Need hospital/medical facility
- Is this a regional/multi-county collaboration that could be initiated?
- Making Putnam County and its communities a destination
 - Paved walking/bike trails that connect communities
 - Create unique activities that build us up as a destination for day trips; 2 days
- Cell phone coverage is a major issue
- Are there “quick wins” that could build momentum or long-term investments that need to begin now?

Final Thoughts

- Is there anything we have not covered that you think is important to include in the CEDS?
- Who else should we be talking to as part of this process?

Next Steps

- Continued community engagement –SWOT meetings, Public Input meetings/survey
- Draft CEDS Report on data/research, public engagement/input, benchmarking
- CEDS Report summary presentation and 30-day public comment period, followed by adoption of plan



MEETING AGENDA

5-COUNTY NW OHIO 2025 CEDS

IN-PERSON / MICROSOFT TEAMS (RECORDED)

MEETING DATE: **7/10/25**

MEETING TIME: **10:00AM-11:30AM**

FOCUS GROUP MEETINGS: **VAN WERT COUNTY**

ATTENDEES: Stacy Adam, Seth Baker, Gary Clay, Sue Gerker, Commissioner Thad Lichtensteiger, Bill Marshall, Dean Jon Tomlinson, Rick Turner, Mark Verville

COLLABORATIVE: Brent Stevens-Van Wert Area Economic Development, Jamie Beier Grant-Kleinfelder, Ben Hooper-BGSU CRD

Regional Vision & Priorities

- What do you consider to be the region's greatest strengths or assets (e.g., workforce, location, infrastructure, institutions)?
- What is your vision for economic growth in the region over the next 5-10 years?
 - Need to create an atmosphere to keep/retain/grow residents and workforce well into the future
 - Housing, recreation, diversity of jobs, amenities, quality of life, safety – give them a reason to stay
 - Hit them at the younger level to get them excited about staying/working here
 - Affordable housing
 - People come back because of grandparents – need to accommodate a high quality of life for aging population
 - Can schools do a simple survey (QR code) that asks where they go to school, what their plans are after graduation, etc. to try to quantify
 - Get to a point of not having to write checks to get people to stay or come back
 - Transportation – no public transit; no private transportation; transportation for seniors is very limited
 - County has great bones – great companies, great educational/training resources, a change in attitude to the positive to trades/skilled trades, education locally saves money/keeps kids here; take advantage of every NW State student to keep them here/engage them in community
 - Economic development now goes well beyond traditional ED activities; it includes WF, housing, community development, amenities, quality of life, etc.
 - Continuing to collectively talk about the strategies/barriers/opportunities Stacey has commitments from developers confirming how many units they can construct during the time it takes

- Lightcast has data tracking for HS graduates and post-secondary (NWSCC can pull this data), but Lightcast is sourcing the data and is not collecting it/tracking it on their own

Strengths and Assets

- What unique advantages does the region offer to businesses or investors?
- Which industries/employers anchor your local economy today?

Challenges and Barriers

- What are the biggest challenges or barriers to economic development or business growth (e.g., available/turnkey properties, infrastructure, workforce, zoning, other)?
 - Rural healthcare is a challenge and is going to continue being a challenge (keep the wives happy); also applies to C-level
 - Housing
 - Brent has/is bringing housing developers from outside the region that he is bringing in to gauge interest in development/constructing in VW County
- Are there gaps in resources or support systems for businesses/entrepreneurs (small, startup, medium, large)?
 - Childcare is a big issue; one provider is leaving/closing
 - Concern for adult students
 - Price and availability is the issue
 - We Care's current capacity is at 50-60% of what they could house; how to maximize the number of children taken in
 - Part of problem is the pay for childcare jobs

Infrastructure, Sites and Resources

- Where is development best suited in your community (e.g., proximity to highways/corridors, downtowns, large parcels)?
 - Past southern border of Vantage CC to open up new development
 - Bonowitz Ave Ext. From Washington St to Menden Road is huge industrial/office development
 - Shannon Station for retail
 - 76 acres in West Vision Park; 150 acres south industrial park (working with JO OSIP and is a target site for broader CEDS); 128 acres Lemly property north of Walmart; retail sized areas around Walmart; Dickensens Farms and Elks Drive; North Washington (bank owns land and has desire to develop) and South Washington – most all is CIC and BDC optioned
 - Combination of turn-key and greenfield sites; greenfield sites have all due diligence/infrastructure to property lines
 - Never pursued developers and pitched projects/properties to developers – need help in how to pitch to developers
 - With South Site, the US 30 access corridor makes traffic congestion/patterns a concern

- Getting the right project in this area is the key – agricultural plant; CIC has option until 2035
- Are there areas to avoid (e.g., lack of infrastructure, natural habitats, buffer zones, etc.)?
- What is needed to make properties/sites development-ready?
- Are there infrastructure improvements needed to support economic growth (e.g., broadband, transportation, alternative transportation, utilities)?
- What role does housing availability and affordability play in the region's economic development priorities?

Workforce and Education

- How well is the current workforce meeting employer needs?
- Are there existing skills gaps in the labor force? What workforce skills does the region need to prioritize to meet future business needs/opportunities?
- How can regional partners better support talent attraction/retention?

Resilience and Inclusion

- Are there underrepresented voices (e.g., rural, minority-owned businesses, youth, organizations) that should be included in economic development discussions?
- Are there vulnerable groups or geographies that need more focused attention?
- How can the regional economy become more resilient to disruptions (e.g., economic downturns, automation, AI)?

Projects and Priorities

- What projects or initiatives do you think are most critical to the region's future economic success?
- Are there "quick wins" that could build momentum or long-term investments that need to begin now?

Final Thoughts

- Is there anything we have not covered that you think is important to include in the CEDS?
 - Cost of infrastructure is very high and resources are not filling the gap
 - What happens if/when property taxes go away? What happens to funding TIFs?
- Who else should we be talking to as part of this process?

Next Steps

- Continued community engagement –SWOT meetings, Public Input meetings/survey
- Draft CEDS Report on data/research, public engagement/input, benchmarking
- CEDS Report summary presentation and 30-day public comment period, followed by adoption of plan