NEFCO adopts Vibrant NEO 2040 Regional Vision Objectives

Over the past three years, citizens in Northeast Ohio were asked the question: “What do we want the future to look like?” The Vibrant NEO 2040 Regional Vision asks (and answers) a related question: “Where should we go together?”

In January, Hunter Morrison, Executive Director of the Northeast Ohio Sustainable Communities Consortium (NEOSCC) presented to NEFCO’s General Policy Board the Vibrant NEO 2040 Vision. Funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development in a unique, 12-county effort led by the region’s Metropolitan Planning Organizations, Regional Planning Commissions and NEFCO, the Vision is the result of three years of public engagement. This Vision was created with extensive feedback from Northeast Ohio citizens on various land use and other planning scenarios to articulate a path for our collective futures in the 21st century.

The result is a series of eight broadly-shared Objectives that are important to the region’s future:

- Promoting investment in Northeast Ohio’s established communities;
- Protecting Northeast Ohio’s soil, water, air, and ecologically sensitive areas;
- Improving Northeast Ohio’s regional fiscal health;
- Developing Northeast Ohio’s regional economy with accessible employment opportunities;
- Enhancing Northeast Ohio’s regional transportation network;
- Cultivating and celebrating Northeast Ohio’s local assets and places of public value;
- Expanding Northeast Ohio’s parks and open-space network; and
- Preserving and valuing our prime farmland as a regional economic asset.

At its February meeting, NEFCO’s General Policy Board adopted the Objectives of the Vibrant NEO 2040 Vision, Framework and Action Products to promote community stability, economic prosperity and a high quality of life for the residents of Northeast Ohio. The NEOSCC has just released an Executive Summary of the Vibrant NEO Guidebook, now available at [http://vibrantneo.org/](http://vibrantneo.org/). This summary describes the Process, Objectives, Recommendations, Priority Initiatives and Indicators of the full Vibrant NEO 2040 report to be published in March. The 20-page document includes maps of each of the major vision themes and summaries of the Action Products. The NEOSCC Board formally adopted this Vision on February 25, 2014. Next steps in this regional effort will be discussed in the next NEFCO Forum newsletter.
Balancing Growth and Conservation along the Little Cuyahoga River

Development versus conservation is often seen as conflicting viewpoints in the battle to protect and restore local water resources. This does not have to be the case for communities that are proactive in planning for both community development and natural resource protection. Communities protect their environment while stimulating economic growth. To promote this concept, Ohio has developed a Balanced Growth Program which is a voluntary, incentive-based planning process aimed at protecting Ohio’s waterways to assure long-term economic competitiveness, ecological health, and quality of life.

Using the Balanced Growth model, NEFCO is working with communities in southwest Portage County and southeast Summit County to strike a balance between conserving important natural resources while smartly developing/re-developing areas within each community. Communities within the watershed are the Cities of Akron and Tallmadge; the Villages of Lakemore and Mogadore; and Brimfield, Randolph, Springfield, and Suffield Townships. Working with these communities, NEFCO is identifying and mapping priority areas for conservation and development/re-development.

NEFCO’s goal is to have a Balanced Growth Plan draft report completed for the Little Cuyahoga River Watershed by the summer of 2014 for review by the watershed communities and other interested stakeholders. The Balanced Growth Plan will need to be approved by 75 percent of the communities representing the population and area in the watershed. Once approved by the local communities and NEFCO, it will be submitted to the Ohio Lake Erie Commission for review and State approval. Once approved, all communities that supported the Plan will be eligible for over 25 state incentives to assist communities in funding and planning for conservation and development efforts.

For more information regarding the Little Cuyahoga River Balanced Growth plan, visit the webpage on NEFCO’s website (http://www.nefco.planning.org/little_cuy.html) or contact Eric Akin (Eakin@nefco.planning.org) or 330-252-0337.
Summit County Brownfields Coalition Update

NEFCO has completed the Phase II environmental site assessments of properties located at 1659 and 1701 South Front Street in Cuyahoga Falls. Triad Communications plans to redevelop a former machine shop on 1701 South Front Street to consolidate two of its offices in one location. Clean-up activities will remove soil contaminated by an underground storage tank which was previously removed. Other site assessments were completed for the former Edwin Shaw Hospital and two properties in the City of Tallmadge. Ongoing site investigations include the following properties: 25 West Miller in Akron, 1745 South Front Street in Cuyahoga Falls, and 8997 Darrow Road, Twinsburg. For a list of completed reports, see the “Brownfields” link on NEFCO’s website (www.nefcoplanning.org).

NEFCO recently submitted an application to the U.S. EPA requesting funds to continue the Summit County Brownfields Program. Applying on behalf of a Coalition consisting of NEFCO, the Development Finance Authority of Summit County, and Summit County Public Health, NEFCO seeks $600,000 to assess brownfield properties in Summit County and to build an inventory of brownfield sites. Brownfields are defined as real properties, the expansion, redevelopment, or reuse of which may be complicated by the presence or potential presence of a hazardous substance, pollutant, or contaminant. Since the start of the program in October 2012, NEFCO has funded environmental site assessments of seven properties. Site assessments must be undertaken in order to determine the extent of contamination of a property and what needs to be done to clean up the pollutants. The program does not fund clean-ups.
2014 General Policy Board Officers

Chairman: Thomas A. Tatum, Housing Rehabilitation/Human Resources Administrator, City of Akron

First Vice-Chairman: Richard Regula, Stark County Commissioner

Second Vice-Chairman: Todd Peetz, Director, Portage County Regional Planning Commission

Secretary: Bob Breneman, Mayor, City of Wooster

Treasurer: Craig Stanley, Director of Administrative Services, Summit County

Congratulations, 2014 officers!

2014 NEFCO Board Meeting Dates

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These meetings are held at the Summa Health Center in Green at 8:30 a.m.

Incoming 2014 Chairman Thomas A. Tatum (left) presents an award to the 2013 outgoing Chairman Todd Peetz (right).