Bits and Atoms Innovation Center Receives $2.5 million Award

The U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration (EDA) has awarded the Akron Global Business Accelerator with a $2.5 million Public Works grant. Funds will renovate an existing building in downtown Akron to launch the Bits and Atoms Innovation Center (BAIC). The idea behind the BAIC is to provide assistance to individuals to make product prototypes and start a business. Programs will be offered in ideation, prototyping, business development and acceleration, and other training/education. The project’s total cost is $4.5 million. The BAIC will provide state-of-the-art maker space and access to entrepreneurs-in-residence and mentors to help those with great ideas. The program will fill gaps in the community for entrepreneurs to fabricate a product prototype and launch a new business.

With NEFCO’s assistance, the Akron Global Business Accelerator has received several EDA grants over the past decades, and is considered among the nation’s most successful business incubators. For this recent funding request, NEFCO again provided assistance to the Accelerator with EDA’s application process.

A preliminary drawing of the Bits and Atoms Innovation Center, to be located in downtown Akron (Courtesy of Hasenstab Architects)
The Benefits of Redeveloping Brownfields

- Productive use of vacant properties improves a community’s tax base
- Cleaning up a contaminated site keeps pollutants out of our precious waterways and natural environments, and prevents contact that would be harmful to humans
- Developing sites that are already close to existing services (roads, sewer, businesses) is an efficient use of land
- Jobs and opportunities created by businesses locating on a former brownfield are good for the local economy
- The re-use of properties in urban centers promotes walkability and improves health
- Encouraging development in our urban cores reduces leap-frog development and sprawl, preserving open space and farmland

NEFCO Begins Brownfields Assessment Program Outreach to Communities

In October, NEFCO began its second Brownfields Assessment Coalition grant, funded by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. As we finish work on our first grant, we have begun to inform individuals, businesses, and communities about the availability of funds to perform environmental assessments of former industrial/commercial properties that are suspected brownfields sites. The Coalition guiding this program consists of NEFCO, (the lead agency and program manager), the Development Finance Authority of Summit County, and Summit County Public Health. While its focus remains on the economic end use of brownfields properties, the Coalition will consider “green” end uses that return brownfields to a productive use and which improve the sustainability of our communities. Only properties in Summit County are eligible for the program. Since mid-2013, NEFCO has assessed 11 properties. Stark County also received funds for a brownfields assessment program. For more information on NEFCO’s program, visit www.nefcoplanning.org.

NEFCO’s most recent use of its brownfields assessment funds provided the Village of Peninsula with an Analysis of Brownfield Cleanup Alternatives. This document was needed for the Village’s application for a U.S. EPA Brownfields Cleanup Grant for the Peninsula Players Barn.

Shale Energy Strategy Update

NEFCO has partnered with The Ohio State University Extension and three additional Economic Development Districts to develop an economic strategy focused on assessing potential business growth related to the Utica shale development industry. Our main concern is to help identify opportunities for local businesses that may benefit from shale development, and to reduce the negative impacts of the economic bust cycle of this resource. NEFCO’s Regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy committee and interested individuals have attended meetings and provided guidance in our first steps toward developing a business survey. Please contact Sylvia Chinn-Levy for more information.
Great Lakes Regional Training Initiative to offer training opportunities

The Great Lakes Regional Training Initiative, an effort by six University Centers funded by the Economic Development Administration, will soon offer webinars on various topics relevant to Region 5 (Ohio, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin). As a board member of this initiative, NEFCO provides feedback and helps to shape the activities of the group whose goal is to fill educational gaps that would make economic development practitioners, local/ regional government agencies, and economic interests more effective. A University Center Showcase will be held in Cleveland in April (see sidebar), giving participants an opportunity to learn of the excellent services offered by Region 5’s University Centers, many which are provided free of charge.

Reducing Nutrients in our Inland Lakes

Nutrients and water quality have been much in the news in our Ohio lakes in recent years. This is a public health and safety issue whether it is the burden of processing drinking water or primary contact in terms of recreation. NEFCO has been working with the City of Alliance Water Plant Superintendent to map potential priority nutrient reduction areas for the Deer Creek/Walborn Reservoir watershed where the drinking water supplies have experienced taste and odor problems and increased water treatment costs. Smaller areas (subwatersheds) within the watershed were delineated to determine sampling sites. These sites are being compared to land use practices in the subwatersheds to identify potential sources of nutrients and prescribe possible solutions for nutrient reduction. Some solutions being discussed include the use of cover crops and avoiding manure applications on frozen ground in agricultural areas; sewering or replacing failing septic systems in neighborhoods with failing home sewage treatment systems (HSTS); and the reestablishment of riparian vegetation as green infrastructure filtering nutrient runoff.
2015 General Policy Board Officers

Chairman: Richard Regula, Stark County Commissioner

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

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

Secretary: Bob Breneman, Mayor, City of Wooster

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

Congratulations, 2015 officers!

2015 NEFCO Board Meeting Dates

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

NEFCO Forum is published by the Northeast Ohio Four County Regional Planning and Development Organization
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www.nefcoplanning.org

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Richard Regula
NEFCO General Policy Board Chairman

Joseph Hadley Jr., Executive Director

Sylvia R. Chinn-Levy, Editor Production - Rebecca L. Morgan

WE’VE MOVED!!

NEFCO’s new office is now located in Room 211 of the Ohio Building. Please see below for our new address and contact information. If you’re in the area, please stop by.

OHIO BUILDING
175 S. MAIN STREET, ROOM 211
AKRON, OH 44308
PHONE: 330-643-8514
FAX: 330-643-5046

After celebrating NEFCO’s 40 years of service, staff packed up and moved 40 years’ worth of critical documents.