Lake Erie West
REGIONAL COUNCIL

Economic Development Policy Board Meeting Minutes

Friday, August 7, 2026

Submitted for approval on November 6, 2026

Board members and alternates present: Mike Aspacher, Quinton Babcock, Jamie Beier-Grant, Mitch Blonde, Brian Dicken, Don Douglas, Nichole Fifer, Bill Frankart, Wade Gottschalk, Wendy Gramza, Bob Gross, Beth Hannam, Ashley Helmstetter, Mark Hummer, Cher Johnson, John Kreuz, Stephanie Kuhlman, Scott Miller, Dean Monske, Dan Nester, Charlene Page, Bryce Riggs, Sharon Speyer, Andrew Stocking, John Strah, Lee Wilkinson, Thomas Winston; **Guest(s) present:** Matt Heyrman, Greater Toledo Community Foundation**; Lake Erie West staff present**: Marissa Bechstein, Sandy Spang, Jennifer Allen

Welcome & Introductions – The Lake Erie West Economic Development Policy Board met on Friday, August 7, 2026, at 9 a.m. in the Lake Erie West Board Room. Board Vice Chair Lisa Sobecki called the meeting to order. Introductions were made around the room.

Approval of Minutes – A ***motion*** was made by Sharon Speyer and ***seconded*** by Scott Miller to accept the minutes as submitted. ***The motion passed unanimously***.

Elect Board Chair and Vice Chair – Alan Filipiak was promoted to a new position and relocated to Pennsylvania. As a result, the committee discussed the chair and vice chair seats. Vice Chair Lisa Sobecki expressed an interest in serving as chair. There were no additional nominations from the floor. A ***motion*** was made by Sharon Speyer and ***seconded*** by Scott Miller to close nominations and vote in favor of Lisa Sobecki chairing the board. ***The motion carried unanimously.*** Nominations were sought for the vice chair seat. Seeing there were no nominations from the floor, a ***motion*** was made by Thomas Winston and ***seconded*** by Wade Gottchalk to close nominations and nominate Wendy Gramza for board vice chair. ***The motion carried unanimously.***

CEDS & EDD Staff Update – Marissa Bechstein announced that Lake Erie West had received a Regional Achievement Award from the National Association of Regional Councils for the CEDS Summit that was hosted in March. She gave an update on Lake Erie West's application for EDD designation, which is currently in cue to be reviewed by the USEDA Chicago Region. In the meantime, staff recently applied for an EDA planning grant to supplement its economic development activities. A dashboard has been created for the 2026-2030 Lake Erie West CEDS to track goals, strategies, and timeframe for strategies.

CEDS SWOT Analysis – Mrs. Bechstein led the group in a discussion regarding the CEDS strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats that were previously developed with input from regional stakeholders. She shared the SWOT analysis on the projection screen. It was noted that strengths and weaknesses are internal factors that cannot be controlled. For example, cold winters is an external factor and not a weakness that can be controlled. It was suggested that comparative

data be obtained to objectively review, support, approve, or disapprove strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats and to consider variables that feed into strengths and weaknesses.

Strengths: Internal factors that are within an organization's control or influence.

- Consolidate some bullets points (libraries, parks, recreation, etc.)
- Identify 5 or 6 primary strengths
- NOTE: Affordability, cost of living advantages rings true for some but not fall all
- Remove competing bullets; quantify bullets
- Tourist economy in our region; welcome congestion.
- Is climate a strength?

Weaknesses: Internal factors that can be controlled over time. It was noted that weaknesses are anything that create a hurdle to development that can't be addressed or quantified.

- Combine workforce and housing priorities
- Consolidate some bullets points when it makes sense to do so
- Us vs. Columbus, what are our region's weaknesses?
- Congestion during tourist season (Ottawa County), Congestion during JeepFest (Lucas County); Is it limiting economic development?
- Foreign investors buying up housing and driving up the cost of rent
- Should regional operating performance be a category?
- Difficulty in finding matching funds for grants should be included in SWOT analysis.

Opportunities: Internal factors are tied to a need that has been quantified, along with unique assets to meet the need.

- Lake Erie workforce, industry, tourism
- Multimodal assets are a strength (Is the demand for capacity increasing tariffs?)
- Macroeconomic factors that work to our benefit: land and water. Example: huge demand for data centers)
- Challenging technology
- Proximity to Canada is a strength (What opportunities do we have as a result of proximity?) Proximity to Canada vs. access
- Aging and declining population—focus on opportunities such as knowledge transfer.
- Connectability to deliver goods is an opportunity as Columbus is growing.
- A dry climate creates a water shortage everywhere else except our region.
- Ohio is moving toward getting AI and robotics knowledge.
- Identify matching funds for grants in areas that need to grow. Lake Erie West advocating for matching funds.
- The Economic Development District (EDD) will bring funding to the region.
- What are the strengths and weaknesses that push towards opportunities?

Threats: External factors that are beyond our control and there's nothing that can be done about it but to plan around them to reduce their impact.

- Consolidate some bullets points when it makes sense to do so
- What are unique external opportunities that we can leverage?
- The demand for multimodal capacity increases tariffs
- Aging and declining population is a true threat as a condition of our environment that we don't have control over. Costs are associated with this. The retirement rate is higher and there are a lot of implications.
- A dry environment in Canada affecting our region's air quality.
- Route 23 to Columbus—great highway access but not coming from northwest Ohio.

- Connectability to deliver goods is a threat as Columbus is growing.
- AI and Robotics: The region doesn't have the knowledge it needs to be able to capitalize and generate wealth in the future.

A redline version of the SWOT document that incorporates suggestions from the meeting discussion will be provided at the next board meeting. Mrs. Bechstein will schedule a meeting with Lisa Sobecki and Wendy Gramza to review the comments provided during the SWOT analysis discussion.

CEDS Goals – Mrs. Bechstein will forward the board the document that contains the current CEDS goals, objectives, and strategies. The board will finalize the SWOT Analysis before reviewing the goals, objectives, and strategies. The goals, objectives, and strategies should: 1) address weaknesses, 2) expound on strengths, and 3) mitigate weaknesses.

CEDS Annual Report – A list of potential items to include in the CEDS annual report was shared with the board.

Any and All Other Business – Board members who completed Lake Erie West's regional housing study survey were thanked by staff. Board members who have not had an opportunity to complete the survey were encouraged to do so and to share the link with other stakeholders in the region. As part of the study, focus groups consisting of Lake Erie West's governmental members and private sector partners will be convened in each CEDS county for input.

Sandy Spang gave an update on the Route 23 Connect Study. Brian Dicken reported on a public meeting that he had attended yesterday in Delaware regarding Route 23. The public comment period ends September 1st. A QR Code was provided for board members who wish to submit comments.

Marissa Bechstein reported on brownfield funding updates. Board members with projects were asked to see Mrs. Bechstein after the meeting. She also reminded the group that Lake Erie West can provide CEDS alignment letters to strengthen their projects and grant applications, which helps to align their project with funding opportunities.

Public Comment Period – There were no members of the public were present for comments.

Next Meeting/Adjournment – The next board meeting is scheduled to take place on Friday, November 6th at 9 a.m. The location of this meeting will be announced prior to this meeting. Anyone interested in hosting the venue for the next meeting was asked to contact Marissa Bechstein. The chair adjourned the meeting.

Lisa Sobecki, Board Chair
Lake Erie West Regional Council

Marissa Bechstein, Dir., Regional Development
Lake Erie West Regional Council