



Lake Erie West

REGIONAL COUNCIL

Economic Development Policy Board Meeting Minutes

Friday, May 1, 2026

Submitted for approval on August 7, 2026

Board members and alternates present: Katherine Adams, Abby Aldrich, Mike Aspacher, Quinton Babcock, Brian Dicken, Jon Eckel, Terry Farris, Nichole Fifer, Alan Filipiak, Wendy Gramza, Bob Gross, Eric Heintschel, Ashley Helmstetter, Stephanie Kuhlman, Scott Miller, Dean Monske, Charlene Page, Karen Poore, Bryce Riggs, Kate Sommerfeld, Sharon Speyer, Andrew Stocking, Kati Thompson, Lee Wilkinson, Thomas Winston; **Guest(s) present:** Keith Instone, OhioX, Lee Shirey, USED A Chicago Regional Office (joined virtually); **Lake Erie West staff present:** Marissa Bechstein, Annsley Mann, Sandy Spang (joined virtually), Jennifer Allen

Welcome & Introductions – The Lake Erie West Economic Development Policy Board met on Friday, May 1, 2026, at 9 a.m. in the Doecker Center at Terra State Community College in Fremont. Board Chair Alan Filipiak called the meeting to order. Thanks to Terry Ferris for hosting the meeting at Terra State Community College. Introductions were made around the room.

Approval of Minutes – The Chair bypassed reading of the February 6, 2026, minutes since they were sent to the board prior to the meeting. A **motion** was made by Sharon Speyer and **seconded** by Eric Heintschel to accept the minutes as submitted. ***The motion passed unanimously.***

Economic Development Policy Board Operating Procedures: Board Terms – Marissa Bechstein, Lake Erie West economic development program manager, reported that the board operating procedures had been adopted by the Lake Erie West Governing Board. The 2026 roster was updated to show board terms, a copy of which was included in the agenda packets.

U.S. Economic Development Administration (USED A) Presentation – Lee Shirey, US EDA Chicago Regional Office, joined the meeting virtually. Mr. Shirey gave a presentation on the role of EDA and how the agency supports private investments in Ohio through congress appropriations. He highlighted EDA's investment priorities and their core programs. After his presentation, Mr. Shirey answered questions from board members.

GovTech Presentation – Keith Instone, OhioX, gave a presentation on Regional Technology Ecosystems. Mr. Instone explained what technology ecosystems and how they function. He proposed the creation of a GovTech Ecosystem that would focus on local government needs by matching municipalities with tech sector companies with expertise to solve their IT needs.

Both BGSU and UT host AI symposiums, summits, and technology weeks. Owens Community College recently offered a 4-week AI class. The next class starts June 1. Great Lakes AI Week is scheduled the week of November 10-12. Sessions will be held at UT and BGSU. For more details visit: <https://www.joinaiweek.com/greatlakes>. It was noted that JobsOhio recently launched an *AI Ready Ohio* initiative to prepare Ohio's current and future workforce for the intelligent economy. All large, state universities are working on building AI-ready networks to standardize AI education. Stakeholders are advocating for a regional hub system. It was noted that an opportunity hub already exists. However, our region is in need of a technology clearinghouse to locate experts by area of expertise. It was recommended that Lake Erie West staff speak with organizations that already have existing ecosystems to avoid duplication.

Advisory, ad hoc, working group discussion – Marissa Bechstein asked board members if there's a need for advisory, ad hoc, or working groups for relevant topics like economic development, workforce development, etc. In response, it was recommended that the board focuses on work pertaining to the CEDS including "teeing up" projects for the CEDS and thinking ahead of what to accomplish in the years ahead. It was noted that topics of interest could be discussed by the full board at its future meetings.

Staff Report/Updates – Marissa Bechstein provided an update on CEDS implementation work, the March 6th CEDS Summit, as well as the following items.

- A series of strategy workshops will be scheduled with regional stakeholders. Strategies will be developed for each of the 5 CEDS goals. The dates and locations of the workshops will be announced. Board members will be invited to participate in them.
- EDA Technical Assistance: Staff will be meeting with sponsors regarding potential projects list in the application.
- Lake Erie West will submit short planning grants to EDA to supplement program funding while waiting on the EDD designation. (NOTE: Lake Erie West's EDD application is either 1st or 2nd in line to be reviewed by EDA.)
- Board members were reminded that Lake Erie West will provide CEDS alignment letters as well as letters of support for other projects.
- Lake Erie West will be conducting a Regional Housing Study that will examine the connections between housing, workforce mobility, and transportation across a 6-county region, including Lucas, Monroe, Ottawa, Sandusky, Seneca, and Wood counties.
- Lake Erie West recently met with USDA Rural Development. Funding opportunities were identified by their team.
- Lake Erie West Upcoming Events: Summer General Assembly, July 20th from 1:00 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. at Catawba Island Club in Port Clinton. Bike Month kicked off on May 1st. Various activities are scheduled this month. Visit www.LakeErieWest.org for more information.
- The Ohio Attorney General's office offers training on Sunshine Laws, public records, and Open Meetings Act. For a list of scheduled trainings, visit the Ohio Attorney General's website: <https://www.ohioattorneygeneral.gov/legal/sunshine-laws/sunshine-law-training>.

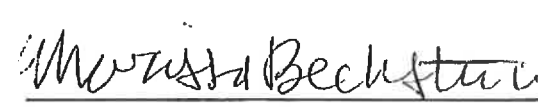
Any and All Other Business – Jon Eckel, Perrysburg Township, thanked Lake Erie West for their economic development initiatives as some townships don't have staff to pursue grant opportunities.

Public Comment Period – Glenn Reihing, Northwest Ohio Passenger Rail Association (NOPRA), mentioned the four passenger rail routes that were selected for study by the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) Corridor ID Program. He noted that the other major metropolitan cities in Ohio have been obtaining most of the resources and advocated for Lake Erie West and ORDC to help secure funding to develop corridors in Northwest Ohio. NOPRA is developing a regional public information bank and organizing roundtables to advocate for passenger rail services with the hope of securing state and federal funding for future rail lines.

Next Meeting/Adjournment – The next board meeting is scheduled to take place on Friday, August 7th at 9 a.m. A dashboard that shows a matrix and other goals that have been accomplished will be shared at the next meeting. The location of this meeting will be announced. Anyone interested in hosting the location for the next meeting was asked to contact Marissa Bechstein. The chair adjourned the meeting.



Alan Filipiak, Chair
Lake Erie West Regional Council



Marissa Bechstein, Program Manager
Lake Erie West Regional Council