



2025 Summer General Assembly

City Caucus Notes

Friday, August 8, 2025

Call to Order/Welcome/Introductions – The City Caucus met on Friday, August 8, 2025, at 8:45 a.m. in Heritage Hall Room 157 at the Owens Community College Toledo area campus in Perrysburg, Ohio. Ed Schimmel, mayor of Northwood City, Chair of TMACOG, and the caucus moderator, called the meeting to order and welcomed everyone present. Introductions were made around the room.

Caucus members in attendance included:

Mike Aspacher, Mayor, City of Bowling Green
Marcus Hansen, Council Member, City of Sylvania
Pat Jones, Deputy City Administrator, City of Perrysburg
Eric Keckler, Safety Service Director, City of Fostoria
Kevin Laughlin, Administrator, City of Northwood
Joel Mazur, Administrator, City of Oregon
Don Mennel, Mayor, City of Fostoria
Simon Nyi, Commissioner of Grants and Government Affairs, City of Toledo
Angie Ruiz, Council Member, 3rd Ward, City of Fremont
George Sarantou, Council Member At-Large, City of Toledo & Vice Chair, TMACOG
Ed Schimmel (Moderator), Mayor, City of Northwood & Chair, TMACOG
Jim Sleek, Council Member, 2nd Ward, City of Fremont
Maddie Stearns, Administrative Assistant, City of Fostoria

Guests in attendance included:

Gary Click, 88th District, Ohio House of Representatives
Harper Cromley, Engineer, OHM Advisors
Gabrielle Huff, Mgr., Local Government Affairs, Toledo Regional Chamber of Commerce
Steven Loveland, Engineer, OHM Advisors
Archie Lunsey, Deputy Director, Ohio EPA
Patrick McColley, Deputy Director, ODOT District 2
Kim Priestap, Regional Director, Office of Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost

TMACOG staff in attendance included:

David Gedeon, Director of Transportation
Lisa Householder, Transportation Program Manager

Caucus Overview – Ed Schimmel gave an overview of the caucus.

Discussion of Topics/Issues – Caucus members discussed the following topics:

Topic 1 – Lack of Affordable Housing Stock

- The City of Fostoria applied for the Welcome Home Ohio grant and the construction of several houses is currently underway. The city applied together with Seneca County, and they are splitting the \$2.75 million award.
- House Bill 313 is currently in committee. The purpose is to create a grant program for pro-housing and is considered for \$50 million.

- Toledo has a few apartment complexes under construction now, but construction and interest costs are up.
- BG has a housing shortage for all income levels; one subdivision is under construction with two more being planned.
 - Residential tax abatement incentive/contemplating extending them for another term and moratorium.
 - Zoning codes were updated a few years ago, and new codes are benefiting these newer developments. There are new mixed-use zoning codes near the downtown.
- Fostoria has also reviewed zoning code to benefit land bank lots, especially in established neighborhoods.
- Fremont has tax abatement, with taxes based on the cost of the house before improvements, effective for 15 years.
 - Dedicating lots for Habitat for Humanity, as well as providing more mixed-use options (businesses downstairs/housing upstairs).
- Toledo is rewriting its zoning code. Appraisal gap financing is an issue. The city is also using improved floor plan templates to expedite some of the approvals. There are beneficial programs through HUD, but reductions in CDBG grant funds are troublesome (issues competing with many smaller communities).
 - Toledo is seeing more development downtown with increased populations. The Revitalizing Downtowns Act is sitting in committee (composed of office to residential conversion tax credit), which will benefit Toledo.
 - Federal cutbacks are difficult to contend with. The city lost the East Side safety grant.
- Historic tax credits have been useful in attracting developers.
- Everyone is using a variety of tax credits to spur development.

Topic 2 – Local Government Fund

- Northwood is taking some hits.
- Toledo has used local government funds for police and fire, but there have been reductions in recent years while costs have increased.
 - Suggestion to reframe the narrative and call them public safety funds to keep public support.
- Visit Columbus and talk about this issue for municipalities of all sizes.
- In Wood County, there has been a change in the formula that has a big impact on cities. It would be beneficial if discussions at the County Budget Commission keep the cities in the conversation for that funding distribution.
- Challenges for smaller/growing communities include: growth is fast and there is a need to provide more services than ever before; costs are high; it is hard to balance community needs with what is available in funds; and stress on school systems.

Topic 3 – AI in Government

- Northwood is using Civic Clerk, which saves time on documentation and paperwork after meetings.
- Toledo Communications is using ChatGPT as a time saving tool, but it's not a substitute for human judgment.
- Data Centers – any perspective?
 - There is a significant benefit from a financial standpoint, but there are other downfalls.

- Oregon discussed the data centers that will be built in the city.
 - They want people/businesses that will use water to flatten the rate for everyone else. Also noted that some places are using cooling air instead of water, so it is more of a cost to electricity. Data centers are taking over a lot of the cost too. Oregon is working on a new power plant near the data center; costs on the generation side will be higher throughout a larger area until more electricity is generated to bring the costs down.
 - Lighting and aesthetics use a lot of resources from the surrounding communities, and new generation of data centers are less impactful than some of the earlier centers.
 - Oregon is zoning for “Advanced Manufacturing.” An architectural review committee reviews the design to address aesthetics and lighting. Payment in lieu of taxes for city and schools are often negotiated in deals with data centers.
 - Something for other cities to keep in mind and ask about: data centers are more inclined to build onsite power generation. They have to build air emissions standards within the facility to keep emissions down. So the data centers will be exploring different ways to provide power.
 - Also recommended looking at other areas of the state, such as New Albany, to ask how established data centers are benefiting their community and what feedback they are receiving.

Topic 4 – Access to New Sources of Federal and State Funds

- TMACOG has a new economic development department and is doing more grant research to disseminate to members. TMACOG is also developing ways for the department to benefit all members.
 - Will provide a database of available grants, have resources to aid smaller communities in writing grants, and can reach out to advise communities when and what to apply for.
- Bowling Green is benefitting from Safe Streets and Roads for All and Safe Routes to School awards.
- TMACOG is a potential lead applicant for grants to benefit larger areas (more than one jurisdiction). There are good optics in doing that regionwide.
- Federal criteria, executive orders, and review of existing grants have been difficult to contend with. The grant review process is going to change to introduce more involvement of review by the administration to make sure applicants are following current administrative priorities.

Topic 5 – Other Topics from Members (4)

- Major redevelopment projects that impact small businesses
 - A redevelopment project in downtown Sylvania is impacting businesses, and they want the city to subsidize lost revenue.
 - Toledo discussed the Broadway Street reconstruction – on a limited basis, the city provided grants to those businesses. During construction on Secor, they went out and talked to business owners to communicate what is going to take place and try to leave at least one lane of travel open. Recommends communication with businesses begin before the project starts and hold community meetings throughout the process.
 - Perrysburg also has a downtown project (ADA compliance), so the city is providing grant dollars to help businesses make sure their entrances are ADA compliant. There is a downtown ad hoc committee working with businesses and council on those issues.

- Proposals to eliminate property taxes.
 - Discussion on what alternatives will replace a property tax if it is eliminated, and concerns for public education funding.
 - Some other states can offset elimination of property tax due to other things (ie Texas has oil and gas, Florida has tourism) or with high growth, which Ohio does not have.
 - Additional concerns for the issue of eliminating renewal levies in the new state budget – this impacts schools, parks, fire/police, etc.
 - TMACOG should help monitor this issue with property taxes and arrange to talk with legislators to answer questions.
- Funding to cities for marijuana revenue
- PFAS class action lawsuit
 - \$18 billion class action lawsuit. Jurisdictions have until the end of 2025 to sign up as a recipient for these funds. Fostoria is looking to sign up for it but using a different attorney. This is treated much like opioid settlement funding.
 - PFAS can show up in wastewater (toward end of the cycle), so every municipality is likely dealing with PFAS.

What legislative action might be helpful? – There was no feedback regarding this agenda item.

Questions for State Lawmakers Panel Discussion – The caucus chose a potential question for the legislative panel discussion:

1. There is a lot of discussion concerning the elimination of property tax. What proposals are being discussed to replace funding for schools, emergency services, infrastructure, etc. that rely on those tax dollars?
2. N/A

Other Business / Next Steps (if applicable)

- Pathways to Public Service (announcement)

Adjourn – Mayor Schimmel thanked everyone for attending the caucus and the session was adjourned.