Memo to Ohio 2016 Political Candidates

Policy Platform for Economic Regeneration and Sustainable Prosperity in Ohio
January 2016

Greater Ohio Policy Center (GOPC) is a non-profit nonpartisan organization based in Columbus and operating statewide. GOPC develops and advances policies and practices that enhance Ohio’s metropolitan regions as vibrant economic centers and preserve the state’s open space and farmland. GOPC has identified key policy areas oriented towards sustainable economic development and revitalization, as well as a general list of policy recommendations that will strengthen our economically competitive communities.

I. The Importance of Urban & Neighborhood Revitalization within Ohio:
   • Ohio’s center cities and multi-county metropolitan regions surrounding them are the economic engines of our state. 81% of all Ohioans live in one of the state’s 16 metropolitan areas (see Map), which, together have 84% of the state’s jobs and produce 87% of the state’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP).i
   • There is a growing shift in household dynamics fueled by the demand for more walkable neighborhoods where housing, work, and amenities intermix. Data from the Urban Land Institute indicates 63% of millennials plan to move in the next 5 years, and 40% of them indicate a preference of living in medium or large cities.ii
   • Revitalization policies that attract and retain businesses and residents are key, and Ohio has the unique physical assets that will help our communities capitalize on these market shifts and become attractive, economic hubs where small businesses and entrepreneurs thrive and employees want to live.iii
   • As a state, we can continue this momentum by creating sensible development policies that will help sustainably rebuild some of our hardest hit communities and protect existing investments.
   • Ohio can enhance its economic opportunities and local quality of life by supporting the redevelopment and revitalization of existing communities that can include orphaned residential properties, and even brownfield sites.

Policy Recommendations/Solutions:
1. Establish fast-track foreclosure process (HB 134 and other language in development). Expediting the foreclosure process on blighted properties will provide responsible end-users access to foreclosed properties quicker, and help alleviate the spread of blight currently marring so many communities.
2. Amend public nuisance statute to give local governments the ability to address blighted industrial and commercial properties and reduce unnecessary and expensive demands on the court system. There is a demand for more options for stakeholders working to return blighted properties to productive use.
3. Require owners of abandoned property to register with the county auditor similar to how rental property owners in populous counties are required to register accurate information in case of code violations.

4. Request the Ohio Attorney General enforce existing laws that require LLCs to be registered with the Secretary of State when purchasing property or paying property taxes. Unscrupulous real estate investors often do not register an agent with the state, making it difficult to find a responsible party when a problem occurs, such as code violations.

5. Establish a New Brownfield Redevelopment Program that is complementary to current programs, but offers a new and creative approach to finance cleanup. It’s estimated that over 600 acres of undevelopable land remains within Ohio’s urban and rural regions, which could be utilized for business growth.

II. The Market Wants Diverse Transportation Options throughout Ohio:

- A diverse and robust transportation system is essential for attracting and retaining businesses whose employees utilize a wider range of modes of transportation than just cars.
- Accommodating a range of uses and users can facilitate the safe and efficient movement of people and goods, and thus increase Ohio’s economic competitiveness.

Policy Recommendations/Solutions:

1. Flex a minimum of $50 million of Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) funds annually to transit and target those revenues to vehicle replacement. ODOT currently flexes $20 million. This reallocation would decrease state highway funding by 1% and boost public transit funding by 49%.

2. Use $10 million of Transportation Development Credits (TDC) annually to provide the 20% local match for FHWA funds. This adjustment will assist local communities in accessing available federal funds that require local funds.

3. Adopt and implement policies that make ODOT-controlled roads safe for all users, including bicyclists, pedestrians, and those with disabilities. These policies would be sensitive to context and match design to rural, urban, and suburban roadways.

III. Modernized Water and Sewer Infrastructure Will Make Ohio Safe and Competitive:

- Ohio’s water and sewer systems are in need of an estimated $25 billion over the next 20 years for system upgrades and modernization improvements.

- Economic and Environmental Health: Algae blooms have the potential to remain an ongoing challenge for Ohio, which is why revitalization decisions must strike a balance between public health concerns, basic system maintenance, and potential economic opportunities. Water and sewer infrastructure quality and upkeep can have a far-reaching impact on the health of Ohio’s residents and the attractiveness of its communities to the business sector.

- Affordability: Because water and sewer systems are funded almost solely by ratepayers, increasing utility costs is the only viable way to generate additional revenue. However, the anticipated cost associated with upgrades to current water/sewer systems will put a significant strain on ratepayers.

Policy Recommendations/Solutions:

1. Create new, innovative financing programs that support infrastructure modernization. GOPC recently completed the first phase of a study that assesses Ohio cities’ water and sewer infrastructure needs and found that current options for upgrades are often insufficient.
and/or financially infeasible. Recommendations for new financing approaches are targeted for release later in 2016 after GOPC completes additional research. (For more details please contact GOPC.)

Map: Ohio’s 16 Metros

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http://www.brookings.edu/~/media/Programs/metro/images/Innovation/InnovationDistricts1.pdf


http://www.ncdot.gov/strategictransportationinvestments/