



# CUYAHOGA COUNTY FIVE- YEAR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Interim Update 2024-2028

June 1, 2024

Chris Ronayne, County Executive  
Cuyahoga County Economic Development Commission  
Department of Development  
Cuyahoga County Council

## **Economic Development Commission Members**

### **Erik Janas**

Chair

Chief of Staff, Cuyahoga County, representing County Executive Ronayne

### **Thomas McNair**

Economic Development Director, City of Cleveland, representing Mayor Bibb

### **Jack Schron**

Vice - Chair

County Council Member, Chair of Economic Development Committee

### **Leonard DiCosimo**

Executive Secretary, North Shore Federation of Labor AFL-CIO

### **William Friedman**

President and CEO, Cleveland Port Authority

### **Brian Hall**

Investor, Representative of Nonprofits

### **Baiju Shah**

President and CEO, Greater Cleveland Partnership

### **Mayor Edward Kraus**

City of Solon, Mayors and Managers

### **Marc Byrnes**

Chairman Emeritus, Oswald Companies

### *Staff*

#### **Debbie Berry**

Deputy Chief of Integrated Development, Cuyahoga County

#### **Paul Herdeg**

Director of Development

#### **Vaughn Johnson**

Deputy Director for Economic Development

## Overview

This 2024 Interim Update reflects Cuyahoga County's current economic development strategy. A consultant has been selected to engage with County leadership, Economic Development Commission members, and regional economic development stakeholders to comprehensively refresh Cuyahoga County's Five Year Economic Development Plan. The refreshed plan will be an important component of Cuyahoga County's overall strategic planning, now underway.

While rent and price inflation have abated somewhat since 2023, labor shortages persist. Downtown and countywide office markets remain very soft, reflecting a persistent shift in office work patterns from in-person to remote and hybrid work. Labor force participation remains low, with barriers keeping a significant number of working age adults from full time employment with family sustaining earnings.

We face these challenges with many significant economic resources – a favorable location with abundant fresh water and low risks from major natural disasters; mature transportation and logistics networks including water, rail, and highways; cultural and recreational assets to support our talent attraction efforts; nationally ranked hospitals and universities generating a stream of medical innovations; entrepreneurs and small business owners driving regional growth and hiring locally; well-organized philanthropic institutions with expertise in understanding and addressing the social determinants of health and work; and last but not least, new leadership at both the City of Cleveland and Cuyahoga County dedicated to advancing equity, regionalism, and opportunity in the urban core and countywide.

Cuyahoga County continues to embrace Integrated Development, which can be defined as a deliberate approach to connect the design, delivery and evaluation of programs across disciplines and sectors to produce an amplified, lasting impact. Integrated Development draws on county level resources in housing and community development, economic development, sustainability, transit and mobility, planning, and infrastructure / public works to execute key strategies for economic development. This advances our mission, set forth in the County Charter:

**The County shall have as a primary responsibility the promotion and enhancement of the economic well-being and prosperity of the County and all of its residents. In furtherance of that purpose, the County shall... develop and implement policies, programs and activities for the expansion and enhancement of economic activity in the County so as to create and preserve jobs and employment opportunities for and available to residents of the County.**

## Alignment with Existing Economic Development Strategies

Cuyahoga County executes its economic development work aligned with existing strategies of other regional economic development initiatives, including:

- Cleveland Innovation Project
- Greater Cleveland Partnership “All In” Plan
- Team Northeast Ohio Strategic Plan
- Cleveland Talent Alliance Strategy
- Workforce Development – significant planning is now underway:
  - Workforce Development Board strategic plan
  - Workforce Funders Group strategic plan
  - Green Economy and Climate Jobs planning
  - Built Environment Initiative
  - Greater Cleveland Career Consortium

## Metrics

Four types of measurement relate to this Economic Development Plan. Currently Cuyahoga County is finalizing its performance measurement system to focus on measures which have timely available data at the county level. Measures include:

- Community level indicators such as county GDP (Gross Domestic Product), median household income, median household net worth, poverty rate, and labor force participation rate, all dis-aggregated by race whenever feasible.
- Countywide economic development specific measures such as net new business starts, number of business attraction and business growth “wins”, working age population, early stage funding, and total capital invested.
- Outcome measures for county operated economic development programs, such as numbers of businesses assisted, amount of funding provided, additional funding leveraged, new jobs created, and jobs retained.
- Outcome measures for county operated workforce development programs, such as workers trained on the job, and entry level workers placed in jobs.

## 2024 Economic Development Initiatives

Led by County Executive Chris Ronayne, Cuyahoga County is undertaking significant economic development initiatives in the following areas in 2024:

- Freshwater Institute – fully developing and utilizing our abundant fresh water resources, including riverfront and lakefront activation, as well as our plentiful supply of fresh water, to attract new residents and businesses.
- Cuyahoga Green Energy – leading innovation and commercial development of new technologies including microgrids, to mitigate the impacts of climate change, reduce harmful emissions, and preserve our precious fresh water.
- Transit Oriented Development (TOD) – creating opportunities for more Cuyahogans to live and work in connected places with robust transportation options by developing a county-wide TOD implementation plan.
- Workforce development for jobs of today and tomorrow – aligning early childhood programming, public K-12 education, post-secondary education, and workforce training, to fully prepare all residents for jobs of the future.
- Welcoming newcomers – supporting newcomers as they take their place in our economy, as workers and as business owners, including culturally competent workforce development and business services, to restore our county population and supply needed talent for industries.
- Placemaking – from vibrant waterfront locations to other significant centers of entertainment, recreation, and social interaction, creating places that will attract talented new residents and energize local economic activity, with sustainable living opportunities all our residents can afford.
- Office of Small Business, launched 2024 –supporting entrepreneurs as they start new businesses, and supporting the growth of our small businesses.
- Development site assembly – supporting our municipalities to position their currently vacant land for productive, job-creating, re-uses, including support to win funding for site assembly and environmental remediation.

## Objectives, Strategies, and Activities

Cuyahoga County will use its own staff and funding, and will engage with other members of the regional economic development “ecosystem,” to advance the following objectives, strategies, and activities for economic development.

### Objective 1: Promote County assets for business attraction and growth

#### Strategy 1.1: Carry out key County activities to re-establish standing as a regional and national economic hub

Activity 1.1.1: Build on existing investments of Cuyahoga County’s own funds, available due to receipt of American Rescue Plan funding, to support transformative activities and projects with lasting impact.

Activity 1.1.2: Partner with the County’s education stakeholders to improve the County’s educational attainment and competitive position. This includes Pre-Cle, K-12 education providers, Say Yes, and Tri C.

Activity 1.1.3: Promote key regional business assets, including NASA Glenn Research Center, JumpStart, university research offices, and our major hospital systems, to drive innovation and development.

Activity 1.1.4: Support regional branding and marketing for business and talent attraction.

Activity 1.1.5: Partner with early-stage business assistance and funding organizations to foster new industries, particularly where Cuyahoga County has a competitive advantage. Examples include industries related to water, advanced manufacturing and health care.

Activity 1.1.6: Partner with Cuyahoga County communities, Team NEO, the County Planning Commission, and the County Land Bank to assemble, make ready for development, and market sites for job creating traded sector activities, including supply chain for electric vehicle and computer chip manufacturing.

Activity 1.1.7: Fully use and leverage available public and private sector investment capital, including capital to make brownfield sites economically viable, and leveraging the Opportunity Zone tax incentive.

Activity 1.1.8: Extend affordable access to broadband to every county resident, as a path to digital technology literacy and innovation, for full workforce participation, and to enhance the education system.

## Strategy 1.2: Support business attraction, retention and expansion

Activity 1.2.1: Assist Cuyahoga County's 59 member communities to assemble, make ready, and market their key real estate sites to attract national and regional traded sector businesses. Support existing systems such as Site Ohio, while advocating for regional and statewide site promotion efforts to include Cuyahoga County sites. When appropriate, support development of very large industrial sites in adjacent counties for job creating traded sector uses that will provide supply chain business opportunities for Cuyahoga County firms and employment for Cuyahoga County residents.

Activity 1.2.2: In a collaborative marketing effort, promote Cuyahoga County's assets including affordable housing, quality of life, and skilled workforce, to attract both regional and national business relocations.

Activity 1.2.3: Continue partnerships with Ohio Means Jobs, Team NEO, and municipal economic development staff, to coordinate targeted, strategic business-calling programs among these regional actors, municipalities, and the Workforce Development Board's employer services, to accelerate business growth in Cuyahoga County.

## Strategy 1.3: Support manufacturing, including international exports, and promote innovation among small and medium manufacturers

Activity 1.3.1: Recognize and support legacy industries, including steel, automotive, and machine tools, as well as the growth of newer industries including electric vehicles, renewable energy, and aerospace.

Activity 1.3.2: Through economic development partners like MAGNET, and maker spaces like ThinkBox, work to strengthen, grow, and accelerate advanced manufacturing through innovation and advanced technologies including Manufacturing 4.0, 3D printing and digital manufacturing, while simultaneously supporting workforce development of skilled workers to fuel that growth.

Activity 1.3.3: Support the Port of Cleveland's "Cleveland to Europe Express" which offers regional manufacturers reliable and local means to export products to international markets, and to continue to refine a holistic export strategy including goods, services, and tourism.

## Strategy 1.4: Create an innovation / entrepreneurship continuum supported by place-based strategies including electric supply Microgrids

Supporting the innovation economy in Cuyahoga County and Northeast Ohio will continue to be a key economic priority. The County will continue to support Team NEO's efforts in advancing innovation clusters. This effort is a critical component of positioning regional economic growth with respect to the industries of the future.

Activity 1.4.1: Form partnerships with public and private entities to ensure funding for startup and early stage businesses creating jobs of the future in, for example, the technology and health care sectors. Strive to include minority entrepreneurs and organizations in these partnerships and funding streams.

Activity 1.4.2: Create opportunities for both young people and adults in all neighborhoods and communities to begin to transform business ideas into operational plans. Focus on driving innovation as a cultural aspiration to under-served parts of the County. Examples are the partnership with the County Libraries to open Innovation Centers at key locations and the Cleveland Innovation Project's explicit focus on engaging minority and female youth in STEM career preparation.

Activity 1.4.3: Provide and leverage funding for innovative small businesses, both high-tech and conventional, to start and grow, particularly in neighborhoods. Support technology transfer from NASA Glenn Research Center, in partnership with the Ohio Aerospace Institute and others. Support the creation of Innovation Hubs in strategic locations including the Aerozone, Downtown, the Health Tech Corridor, and in historically underserved neighborhoods and communities.

Activity 1.4.4: Build upon existing assets and our existing supply chain network to foster manufacturing of component parts for wind, solar, and storage industries.

Activity 1.4.5: Utilize existing assets, including Greater Cleveland's strong health technology innovation system, and the major hospital systems, to attract health care businesses to the region.

Activity 1.4.6: Through the county owned utility Cuyahoga Green Energy, in collaboration with municipalities, develop Microgrid districts in multiple locations across the county. Power supply reliability and local generation of sustainable power will attract and retain business in these areas.

Activity 1.4.7: Leverage innovation resources such as the Ohio Third Frontier and Ohio Fund to magnify the impact of locally generated funding for support of startup and early stage technology innovation firms. As these firms mature, provide resources to encourage and support their growth within Cuyahoga County.



## Strategy 1.5: Emphasize place-based development

Economic development and community development are inextricably linked. Place-based development reduces the public expense of economic development by capitalizing on the region's existing human capital, infrastructure, community and neighborhood assets, institutional and industrial strengths, and cultural resources that are already in place.

Cuyahoga County boasts assets that would be the envy of other regions: cultural institutions that are unmatched, access to abundant fresh water and existing infrastructure (from roadways and an international port to information superhighways) with capacity to accommodate growth.

Activity 1.5.1: Maintain and continue to enhance Cuyahoga County's high quality natural and cultural assets, including its parks, its nationally renowned arts organizations, and its major professional sports teams.

Activity 1.5.2: Expand and leverage the economic value of public access to the Lake Erie waterfront through coordinated planning, resource assembly, and execution of transformative lakefront access projects.

Activity 1.5.3: Continue to engage with the County Planning Commission to identify priority areas for transit oriented development, and leverage unique municipal assets to resource place based economic development projects which have potential for positive economic development impact on a regional scale. As part of this work recommend needed zoning changes to facilitate appropriate development projects.

## Strategy 1.6: Address Climate Change through a Climate Action Plan

Cuyahoga County is currently updating its Climate Action Plan. As this evolves, economic development strategies focused on renewable energy and sustainable manufacturing will complement the final plan.

## Objective 2: Increase skilled talent supply by attracting skilled residents, retaining college graduates, and increasing labor force participation.

### Strategy 2.1: Facilitate the creation of a workforce that is a competitive advantage for Northeast Ohio.

**Activity 2.1.1: Support business growth and profitability through a workforce system that encourages youth and adults to learn the skills needed to have a sufficient and steady supply of qualified candidates at all skill levels to keep jobs filled.**

Workforce Connect: In collaboration with the Cleveland-Cuyahoga County Workforce Development Board, sustain a shared systems-level focus on eliminating the demand-supply gap for in-demand jobs now and in the future in a sustainable way. Utilize a variety of approaches, including leveraging intermediary, provider, and sector partnerships, to achieve specific targets and systems-level strategies; access reliable & dynamic data; and create results at scale and accountability for eliminating the demand-supply gap for in-demand jobs in each sector.

Sector Partnerships will continue to focus on talent needs of Manufacturing and Health Care, with additional work to support the Built Environment, Hospitality, Early Childhood Education, and Mental Health Services for Youth as a specific focus within Health Care.

**Activity 2.1.2: Assist residents with employment barriers that keep them outside the pipeline to attain employment that is career and wage pathway focused.**

Use a variety of approaches to redefine workforce system “success” as a career pathway leading to a family sustaining wage and employment benefits without public support. Use existing career pathways and establish new pathways in tandem with business leaders, service providers, labor unions, and educational institutions to train workers for in-demand jobs in each sector as part of a sector partnership approach (above). Continue Skill-Up program services to private sector employers.

Cuyahoga County will support existing workforce development programs to promote rehabilitation and social reintegration of the re-entry population and will encourage private-sector employers to remove bright-line barriers to employment for job-seekers with criminal records.

**Activity 2.1.3: Build alignment among public, private and philanthropic funders to invest our workforce dollars in ways that advance shared goals and priorities, and measure success by shared outcomes and impact.**

Continue support for the Workforce Funders Group, participating in creating shared systems-level goals and priorities that drive better coordination and guide all local and regional workforce planning and funding decisions. Leverage the Workforce Development Board’s substantial federal resources and leadership within the broader workforce development system to advance county workforce goals.

## Strategy 2.2: Attract and retain residents with in demand skills

Activity 2.2.1: Actively promote Greater Cleveland as an immigrant friendly community. Partner with appropriate organizations including Global Cleveland to foster an environment that supports immigrants’ effective immersion into the Greater Cleveland community. Advocate for national policies that allow immigrants full economic participation.

Activity 2.2.2: Fully engage and support the Cleveland Talent Alliance’s work to attract and retain talent, especially persons with in-demand post-secondary educational credentials.

## Strategy 2.3: Improve transportation, labor mobility, and job access

Activity 2.3.1: Partner with the Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority, the Northeast Ohio Areawide Coordinating Agency, the Fund for our Economic Future, and the City of Cleveland to advocate for transportation improvement, growth, diversification, and connectivity. Implement innovative solutions to the “First Mile” and “Last Mile” problems that make job access via public transit difficult and time consuming for workers.

Activity 2.3.2: Implement Vibrant NEO 2040's recommendation to increase affordable public and other transportation options better connecting communities to workplaces, particularly in Cuyahoga County's suburbs. Align this work with ongoing research into Job Hubs as a tool for focusing reinvestment in the urban core and appropriate transportation infrastructure.

## Objective 3: Embrace equity as a driver of countywide economic growth

### Strategy 3.1: Implement Economic Development Equity Initiatives

Cuyahoga County has activated its Equity Commission in conjunction with its Citizens Advisory Council on Equity. With the formation and staffing of a Department of Equity, Cuyahoga County maintains its ongoing commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion as an employer, and also through all of its programs, services, and activities. Economic Development equity initiatives include:

Activity 3.1.1: Support implementation of the Cleveland Innovation Project, which emphasizes inclusion and resource access to minority tech-based businesses and talent.

Activity 3.1.2: Through Cuyahoga County's Office of Small Business, provide ongoing funding to small business support partners for their focused support to minority and women-owned businesses, including working capital lending.

Activity 3.1.4: Research and as appropriate establish affirmative minority hiring and minority business contracting goals for direct county economic development borrower.

Activity 3.1.5: Support development of jobs accessible to residents of distressed communities.

Activity 3.1.6: Direct public sector resources to support economic opportunities for residents and businesses in Cuyahoga County's Equity Zones.

### Strategy 3.2: Implement the Housing Policy through the Housing Program

Activity 3.2.1 Through a strategic planning process led by the Director of Housing and Community Development, update the existing Housing Policy and identify additional housing development resources.

Activity 3.2.2. Cuyahoga County will operate the Cuyahoga County Housing Program to provide resources for implementation of Housing Plan components, specifically, Access to Capital and Confidence in the Housing Market. The Program includes the Cuyahoga County Land Reutilization Corporation as a partner and runs through 2025. Thirty million dollars allocated to the Housing Program over six years focuses on expanding and creating programming for home repair, low dollar mortgages, and other activities to increase property values throughout the County.