

Vibrant NEO 2040 – Vision Session Q&A Transcript
Northeast Ohio Sustainable Communities Consortium

PARTA Kent Central Gateway (Kent, OH)
October 15, 2013

Panel: Hunter Morrison, Executive Director NEOSCC (HM)
Joe Hadley, Executive Director, Northeast Ohio Four County Regional Planning (JH)
Bill Currin, Mayor, Hudson (BC)

Question/Comment: Overall I agree with much what has been presented here today. However there are some established small cities throughout the region that have been dying. One example might be Ashtabula which was built on industry supported by Lake Erie. That industry has moved away. The community, the infrastructure, the downtown are dead. Drugs have moved in and the schools are struggling. Why continue to support some of the cities like they are with Detroit? Continue to pump money into those areas if they are dying. Instead why not support new growth and emerging industries that maybe causing new areas to grow?

A:That is a good question. Commissioner Peggy Carlo of Ashtabula has been very involved in these discussions. We are addressing the fact that industry has left some of these areas and what should they do next? One of the things we have suggested is identifying assets to build on. In Ashtabula one of those assets is its Harbor. The Harbor District which includes a railroad site. They also seem to be connecting with the downstream part of the shale industry. There is also opportunity to connect them with the rest of the region.

You have to make some difficult choices. Must be more diagnostic in approach. In Youngstown, they focused on housing types in low demand and started to tear them down. Areas that are coming back are near the university. The lesson is to find the asset. What can we build on in each area?

A:Two major economic development projects have been announced in the last two months in Ashtabula related to shale. We really do have to focus on the core.

The new development at the edges does have a cost. We need to understand that there are cost. In Medina, they are finishing what they have already started. Develop what you have. Sometimes repurposing what is existing and what we have paid for already.

Question/Comment: Former Mayor of Cortland and on planning commission in Kent – seeing a large problem with former rental homes for students in Kent are being abandoned by out of town owners and they are standing empty. Now we are looking at homes that need to be taken down and don't have the money to do so.

A:We have some ideas. You have to ask some hard questions what properties can last into the next century. Kent, Akron, Youngstown have historically rely on the private market. Some properties are pretty beat up. You need to find the budget to tear it down. Whether it is coming from the county land banks. The first thing is to establish the scale of the nature of the problem.

Question/Comment: Mayor of Lyndhurst – where does schools fit into the sustainable communities program. Schools are not addressed in this whole thing.

A:We deliberately did not get into schools and workforce development. It deserves its own analytics. The make-up of our board does not focus on schools and workforce. It is clear that schools are a driver for communities. We are focused on the more physical aspect of schools related to place and transportation. The other aspects related to workforce, what is often overlooked is how do we get people to these jobs. We are taking a piece of the puzzle how you would locate and make more accessible. Linking assets more closely with schools and universities.

Are you referring more to primary education? Both. There are obviously changes in schools when you have a loss of population. To bring them up to the standards is the function of the state and local communities.

Question/Comment: I would like a little more clarity on who is the Consortium. How do you get involved? Is Kent involved or Kent State? Who makes it up?

The City of Kent is not a direct member. At this point, we have 33 members that includes the MPO's and two Councils of Government. The requirements as part of the Federal grant included an in-kind contribution. A number of our counties decided not to become members. Several cities including Youngstown, Elyria, Cleveland, and Akron signed on early. Others were unable to sign-in. Through the MPO's, we are engaging many members of the communities.

Youngstown State, Cleveland State and LCCC has been involved but not Kent State or Akron. We have involved the Kent State University Design Center. We think it is very important to anchor with those educational institutions.

As Director of NEFCO, Kent is a member of our board, we have been communicating almost monthly at our board meetings. These are done through progress reports at the NEFCO meetings. NEOSCC also visited the city of Kent during its board meeting day in Portage County.

Even though Kent is not formally a member, we have tried to communicate with them through a variety of means.

Question/Comment: Scott Lynch, Councilperson at the City of Euclid: Can you describe for us how you will implement Vibrant NEO? Can you also comment on the need to re-conceptualize some fiscal boundaries. When you get into some of these smaller jurisdictions there are still some turf wars.

A:NOACA is beginning to utilize this information in their five county strategic planning. This will allow them to align their work for a more sustainable approach. That agency and other MPO's are required to create Long Term Transportation Plans. This becomes a data source and identifying critical issues. One of the other areas of collaboration are some of the different tools and data from across the region. By collaborating on the modeling, you get a high level of collaboration and communication.

Starting today we are meeting with the Transit agencies as one of the communities of practice areas. How can we share information? How can these different agencies talk to each other, for example Parks to Transit.

