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

Lorain County Community College (Elyria, OH)
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Panel: Hunter Morrison, Executive Director NEOSCC (HM)
                Mike Challender, Sustainability Coordinator, Lorain County (MC)
                Chris Horne, Planner, Sasaki (CH)
                Jeff Anderle, Deputy Director of Communications, NEOSCC (JA)

Question/Comment: How do we deal with an aging community? How do we deal with handicapped people, too? How does the plan address this?
H.M: There are some specific recommendations within the framework.

C.H: A very important issue. Specific projects will be pulled out in the report. On a local level, things like repairing sidewalks can help connect. From the policy standpoint, things like revising local building codes to requiring additional consideration for people with disability and enhancing walkability. Walk Score is a tool to measure investments.

Question/Comment: Using open land – one word used was "restricted"? What happens to industries and businesses that want to build on this open land? , What are industries supposed to do that want to build there? That they are not allowed to build on. Seems to me that no additional money will be put the roads and people for the rural areas. It seems to me that you are herding them into urban areas? What about the infrastructure for people who live in rural areas? You are going to use this open land in the International Market that is what the UN is doing under Agenda 21. The land is going to be used as collateral for carbon credits and things we will not be able to use this land for. It is going to belong to a larger concern. You say regional but this is happening all over the country. You are making it sound like Disneyland instead of driving into a parking lot to get to a restaurant, they are going to have to ride a bike. They are going to have to ride a bike 2.5 miles to get to their house that they are struggling to hold on to. You have a handful of people here representing the whole county and you have a set-up here that no matter how it turns out, you guys are going to win. You fulfilled your legal requirement to have a meeting. It scary to think that what is going to happen around here that people are not going to be happy about. Like Portland, Oregon that turns into one of these regional outfits. Then you talk about transportation. Right now we have transportation in cities everywhere. The usage of transportation is nil, it is 0 to 3% usage. People are not going to want to have all this transportation and not be able to utilize their private vehicle. I mean you are talking 20 to 30 years down the road and we are not going to have our freedoms anymore. Part of the UN Agenda and you know that.

H.M: You raise a lot of issues. This is not Agenda 21. This is a regional framework made by locals to address local issues.   Property owners continue to own and will control the properties. There is interest in transit in some areas - not all. We also see we have good transit going by empty lots. This is about utilizing tax dollars wisely. We are glad you are here to raise your concerns. This is a locally-generated effort. We are challenged by a lack of growth in the region. We are saying, "Here is what we are hearing," and we need to talk to each other about what it all costs.

M.C: There are programs available for land owners and property owners to put property in land trusts.

C.H: We are not using eminent domain. The way land could remain open happens in one of three ways: a landowner sells it to a nonprofit or conservancy group; a landowner continues to own the land, but sells the development rights so it stays rural in perpetuity; or it is already publicly owned land.

Question/Comment: In found this very enlightening and I appreciate it. Years ago, I attended an economic development forum on how to redevelopment the Northeast Ohio area at Baldwin Wallace - it is all about jobs. How many people here are public officials? There needs to be more of you. Until people, like a council person, mayor, etc., start to implement ideas to make changes, it won't work. There was another thing missing. Why aren't you thinking about how to get jobs here?   Jobs need to be included. This needs to be pro-growth, pro-jobs. Without the jobs, the other things do not mean a hill of beans.

H.M: We are not doing a separate economic development study since another regional group, the Fund for Our Economic Future, is doing a Regional Economic Competitiveness Strategy (RECS) simultaneous to this process. There is alignment, though. This plays out in the "grow" scenarios. Cleveland State University and Lorain County Community College are also involved. This effort is place-based. Industrial lands, or Brownfields, are dealt with. Manufacturing is continuing in its importance in this region. We are looking at how to reinvest wisely. We've been incentivizing, unintentionally, moving jobs away from transit. We're looking at how we can get ahead of the curve to position the region. To get us ready. Like: Are we linking innovation centers to leverage them regionally? Jobs are the key, but we're talking about locating them near existing transit and infrastructure.

M.C: This is a bad night for public officials due to conflicting council meetings. We are going to try to see if we can have another meeting for them.

Question/Comment: Who attends these meetings? How many people in the audience are from NEOSCC, NOACA, or the NEOSCC Board ore related to the board? This affects the results of the meetings. I suspect that it is weighted against regular citizens. To an earlier point, there is a case of eminent domain in Montgomery County for a bike path. A woman's land was taken up to seven feet from her house. On abandonment, why is it happening? I think it is education, safety, corruption, jobs, so is the strategy flawed in trying to move people back into the cities? What about private property? There is a lot of detail on many other items on the website, and respect for private property is noted as a goal, but there is not much on private property.

H.M: Private property and local decision making underlies all of these discussion. We are a nonprofit with no authority to implement. Drivers of abandonment are the issues that you noted, but there are areas here and elsewhere in the country where urban areas are thriving, though less so in Cleveland. How do we spend money responsibly and balance our budgets?

Note: Anderle also asked for a show of hands per the earlier question of what members of the audience was not a part of NEOSCC staff or Board, or NOACA staff. The majority of the attendees raised their hands.

C.H: Nowhere are we saying we are moving people. People will move where they want to.

Question/Comment: A lack of local officials at these meetings concerns me. How many of these plans have gone anywhere? Are there success stories. What about telecommuting. Who is providing the feedback? What percentage of the region's population is actually giving feedback? People need to be held accountable. I think we need to be doing things like this process and move past the status quo. I live in a rapidly growing area and have problems with flooding from developers cutting corners, but then a new administration in place afterwards and the response is 'it was the other guy, this is not my fault.'

C.H: Jeff could give better answer on the level of engagement.

J.A: About 5,000 people have been engagement – through meetings, ImagineMyNEO, public opinion polls, and other meetings we have gone to and presented at. We know it is a sampling of the population. We are very transparent about how many people were engaged per event or stage of the project. We have gone to Mayors and City Managers meetings, and also sent invitations, letters and emails, to all elected officials in the region for each of the three major rounds of engagement.

H.M: There are four MPOs and a COG [Metropolitan Planning Organization and Council of Governments; in addition to the COG mentioned, there is also an MPO that is also a COG] that have over 175 elected officials on their Boards that are reached. There has been an impact from fiber optic cable in the region. A lot of these issues like flooding and no sidewalks are because zoning codes are out of date.

C.H: 'Hold accountable' is an important point. In Des Moines there has been implementation already due to their effort. We've gotten data on the parcel level to help planners. For Envision Utah [Salt Lake City], which is the textbook case in the last 10 years, they were very skeptical, but are now an international model for regional planning. Des Moines realized they are one job-shed and that luring businesses to hop over a municipal border by offering tax incentives, only to have them skip somewhere else when the credits expired, makes no fiscal sense.

Question/Comment: On one of the slides there was a plan noted as Regional Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice. Who inspired you to put that on there? Why was it on there?

H.M: The Regional AI was a requirement of the grant from HUD. Each entitlement community has to do one of these studies, so to do one together resulted in a better product and saves the communities money and costs less overall. This looks at the 22 entitlement communities throughout Northeast Ohio.

Question/Comment: How much land is included in the AI study?

H.M: These are municipal or county boundaries for the entitlement communities [not parcels], so for the city of Cleveland it would be 75 square miles.