

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- **Ohio University Ridges Development Advisors** | Buckeye Hills Regional Council and Community Building Partners have been selected as the successful bidders for the Ohio University-issued RFP to serve as Development Advisors for the Ridges. We will work to identify development opportunities within the Historic/Ridges Green, which currently is home to more than 700,000 gross square feet of buildings, some of which have been renovated for university programs. Our goal will be to rehabilitate existing buildings to maximize and enhance current occupancy and address community needs with mixed use activity and programming to support a vibrant extension to the core campus. Example uses include housing, retail, and space for corporate partners that complement the academic mission of the University.

We intend to use the Ridges Framework Plan, released in 2016, to develop an impact investing model incorporating the multiple economic resources available, including those likely to be initiated in the near term by the federal government as a plan of economic recovery. These resources include various tax credits, affordable housing programs, CARES Act and American Rescue Plan funds, grants from public sources and private foundations, as well as in-kind donations from private parties.

Instead of a financial requirement from the University in return for the services, we will require a commitment from the University to include a Development Advisory fee in future contracts for implementation of the Staged Action Plan. We have included an option for the University, upon review of the final recommendations, to extend the scope of work of the contract to engage our Development Team's services to implement the recommended Action plan as well. Whether the University chooses to exercise the option, or select a different entity to implement the distinct phases of development, it is intended that the selected entity will be responsible for these fees.

CURRENT INITIATIVES

- **Regional Mobility Management** | Working in close partnership with ODOT, BHRC is starting the process of creating a Regional Coordinated Plan, which is a locally developed transportation plan identifying community resources for transportation and mobility, understanding the gaps and unmet needs within those resources, and determining the approach to addressing those gaps and unmet needs. Using Washington County's plan as the base, we will begin the process of gathering data, information, and input from both Noble and Morgan counties from various constituencies, including seniors, individuals with disabilities, representatives of public, private, and nonprofit transportation and human services providers and other members of the public. Our goal is to have the first part of a regional coordinated plan, inclusive of Washington, Noble and Monroe Counties, completed by the end of 2021 and mobility management programs formally starting up in Noble and Monroe Counties in January of 2022, and continuing for the second year in Washington County.

STATE UPDATES

- **Ohio Budget and Legislative Updates**

Transportation Budget (HB 74) – ORDA Amendment NOT Accepted | Governor Mike DeWine signed the state's two-year transportation budget, so it will go in effect in 90 days.

Legislative work on the measure (**HB 74**) was finalized in the House after members voted 86-8 to concur in Senate changes to the more than \$8 billion bill that was stripped of several of the governor's priorities. The bill invests more than \$6 billion in road and bridge projects

Unfortunately, an amendment to remove the word "planning" in the Regional Transportation Planning Organization grant program was not accepted in the omnibus amendment. Therefore, in the final version of HB 74, the language still reads the "Regional Transportation Planning Organizations shall use the funds for a regional transportation planning grant program."

The executive version of the budget contained a steep cut in funding for public transit. However, the House was able to restore much of the funding, and the Senate boosted funding even further by adding an additional \$13.85 million in GRF dollars in each year of the biennium.

The compromise between the two chambers ultimately led to the removal of language that would have allowed local governments to complete more transportation projects in-house and the reinsertion of a provision to provide for eight-year driver's licenses.

Broadband Expansion (HB 2) | GROUPS CALL FOR ELIGIBILITY FOR GOVERNMENTAL ENTITIES AND URGE LAWMAKERS TO AIM HIGHER IN DEFINING ADEQUATE BROADBAND SPEEDS

The Senate Financial Institutions and Technology Committee heard testimony from the Ohio Economic Development Association and AARP pushing eligibility for governmental entities in the Broadband Expansion bill (**HB 2**).

"We are very concerned about the bill's explicit prohibition against awarding grants to any government or quasigovernmental entities," AARP Associate State Director Jason Smith wrote. "This limitation on the use of valuable funding would be a major step backward for Ohio's broadband policy and could prove to be a barrier to the creation of new public-private partnerships."

AARP also urged lawmakers to aim higher in defining adequate broadband speeds. The bill is currently framed around the federal definition of 25 megabits per second for downloading speed and 3 Mbps for uploading, which the group called "an unambitious benchmark."

The Ohio Economic Development Association also asked for language barring government participation to be axed, arguing that lawmakers should not limit or impede the number or type of potential providers that may participate.

"We encourage Ohio's policy leaders to recognize that the private sector alone, even with the availability of last mile grant funding, cannot quickly and comprehensively close the digital divide, particularly when considering issues of equity," the group argued. "Ohio needs an 'all hands on deck' solution."

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The group cited several examples of governmental or quasigovernmental entities who have played a successful role in broadband expansion, including efforts in Zanesville, Gahanna, Fairlawn and Medina.

"OEDA suggests making municipalities, counties, and other political jurisdictions, utilities, community-based organizations, councils of governments, federal economic development districts and similar entities eligible for this and future broadband access programs," the group wrote.

"Similarly, OEDA recommends removing language which makes governmental and quasigovernmental entities ineligible, particular given the bill's provisions which permit municipal corporations, townships, and counties to levy special assessments for broadband projects," the group added.

Additional Bill Tracking | Buckeye Hills Regional Council is currently monitoring several additional bills that have implications for local governments, broadband connectivity, transportation, and older adults and their caregivers. You can find a current Bill Status Report [HERE](#).

FEDERAL UPDATES

- **American Rescue Plan Act**
[Guidance for Counties, Cities, and Villages from Ohio Office of Budget and Management](#)

Ohio OBM Director Kim Murnieks has said her office will be sending out info and scheduling webinars once they have guidelines from the federal government regarding local government relief funds appropriated by the American Rescue Plan Act. **So far, the U.S. Treasury has not issued any guidelines or information regarding these funds.** We are hearing that it could take several weeks. **Until additional guidance is available, Director Murnieks recommends that local communities not finalize their plans for the funds.**

Additionally, U.S. Treasury has not published the official allocations, so amounts that have been published so far are estimates from other sources (for example from Congressional committees, not from Treasury).

The federal law says that the new fiscal relief funds can be used to:

- Respond to the public health emergency or its negative economic impacts, including assistance to households, small businesses, and nonprofits, or aid to impacted industries such as tourism, travel, and hospitality.
- Provide premium pay to essential employees or grants to employers to provide premium pay. Premium pay cannot exceed \$13 per hour or \$25,000 per worker.
- Provide government services affected by a revenue reduction resulting from COVID-19, relative to revenues in the fiscal year prior to the pandemic. (This is the "revenue reduction" provision. It's not clear how U.S. Treasury will interpret this, but it is clear that the dollars cannot just replace the general fund, according to Director Murnieks. States and local governments will need to show a revenue loss.)
- To make investments in water, sewer, or broadband infrastructure.

OBM will be posting info to grants.ohio.gov once they have more details.

American Rescue Plan Additional information & Resources:

See the links below for additional analysis by:

- **[National Association of Counties COVID-19](#)**
- **[U.S. Conference of Mayors](#)**
- **[National Conference of State Legislatures](#)**
- **[Greater Ohio Policy Center](#)**

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