

ANNUAL REPORT

2024



SERVING SOUTHEAST OHIO

Dear Friends,

As we reflect on the past year, we are proud to share the impact of Buckeye Hills Regional Council's work in Southeast Ohio. Through collaboration, advocacy, and a commitment to strengthening our communities, we continue to expand access to essential services and resources across our eight-county region.

In 2024, our Development & Planning Division helped communities secure \$97.9 million in funding to support 53 local projects, improving infrastructure, transportation, and economic development. Programs managed by our Aging & Health Division, such as the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program, provided fresh, local produce to more than 3,400 older adults, while home modifications and repairs allowed 38 individuals to remain safely in their homes. More than 4,100 older adults benefited from essential services funded by the Older Americans Act, while our Home Care Division's Medicaid Waiver Programs helped over 1,200 Southeast Ohioans age with dignity at home and in their communities.

This year also marked major milestones, including \$132 million awarded through the Appalachian Community Grant Program to revitalize communities and create economic opportunities across the region. We strengthened regional partnerships, engaging more than 200 stakeholders in the development of Buckeye Hills Forward, our 2025-2030 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy. These accomplishments earned our Development Division recognition as Community Development Department of the Year from the Ohio Conference of Community Development at its July 2024 Summer Meeting.

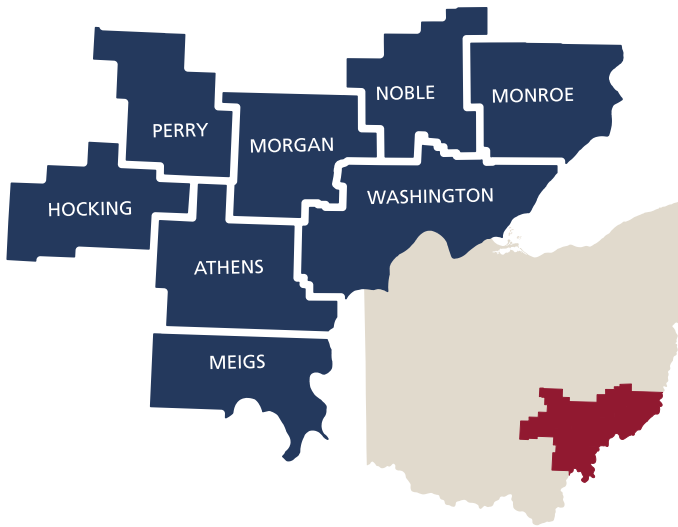
These achievements are possible because of the dedication of our local partners, elected officials, and community members who share our vision for a stronger Southeast Ohio. As we look ahead, we remain committed to advocating for policies, programs, and funding that uplift our region and improve the quality of life for all.

Thank you for your continued support.

Lenny Eliason
President

Chasity Schmelzenbach
Executive Director





Our Membership & Leadership

Buckeye Hills Regional Council’s mission is to improve the socioeconomic conditions of the region by promoting the interests and needs of our constituents to persons and agencies empowered to create positive change.

»»»
SERVING RESIDENTS
& COMMUNITIES
across **8**
counties

The General Policy Council functions as the overall governing body of Buckeye Hills. The Council is comprised of representatives from across the region, two-thirds of whom are elected public officials. The remaining one-third represent various interests such as business, industry, agriculture, education, health, and issues related to the needs of our vulnerable populations including low-income, older adults, and disabled persons.

The Executive Committee The 15-member Executive Committee consists of regional representatives including: four non-elected representatives; one minority representative; mayors of the district’s two largest cities; and eight representatives appointed by the eight boards of county commissioners.

2024 General Policy Council & Executive Committee

Athens County

Charlie Adkins
County Commissioner

Tom Cangemi
City of Athens
City Manager

Chris Chmiel
County Commissioner

Sam Crowl
City of Athens
City Council President

Lenny Eliason
BHRC President
County Commissioner

Gary Goosman
Village of Amesville
Mayor

Jeff Jenkins
Private Sector

Neil Lane
Private Sector

Steve Patterson
City of Athens
Mayor

John Simpson
Private Sector

Solveig Spjeldnes
City of Athens
City Council Member

Hocking County

Jason Despetorich
Common Pleas Judge

Jeff Dickerson
Private Sector

Jason D’Onofrio
County Commissioner

Greg Fraunfelter
City of Logan
Mayor

Michael Linton
County Commissioner

Meigs County

Don Anderson
Village of Pomeroy
Mayor

Brian Howard
Private Sector

Zachary Manuel
County Commissioner

Jimmy Will
County Commissioner

Monroe County

Bill Bolon
County Commissioner

Carol Hehr
Village of Woodfield
Mayor

Mick Schumacher
County Commissioner

Ken Stewart
Private Sector

Morgan County

John Finley
Village of McConnelsville
Mayor

Cecil Mayle
County Commissioner

Ron Moore
BHRC Vice President
Private Sector

Adam Shriver
County Commissioner

Noble County

Darrell Crum
Village of Caldwell
Village Administrator

Allen Fraley
County Commissioner

Perry County

Ben Carpenter
County Commissioner

Eric Emmert
Village of New Lexington
Mayor

Tom Johnson
Village of Somerset
Mayor

Dick Newlon
Private Sector

Scott Owen
County Commissioner

Fred Redfern
Council Member
Village of Crooksville

Bev Trovato
Private Sector

Washington County

Susan Abdella
City of Belpre
Mayor

James Booth
BHRC Treasurer
County Commissioner

Kevin Ritter
County Commissioner

Josh Schlicher
City of Marietta
Mayor

* Executive Committee
Members noted in red

2024 Snapshot



\$97.9 million

TOTAL PROJECT COSTS

Local Communities and private business leveraged \$20.9 million (21%) against the \$77 million (79%) provided through state and federal funding resources for planning and community development to support 53 local projects.



9,695 households

The Appalachian Regional Commission and Governor's Office of Appalachia supported 8 projects totaling \$36.9 million that brought improved water and sewer service to 9,695 households and 232 businesses in communities across the region.

WATER & SEWER



The Clean Ohio Greenspace Conservation program provided grants totaling \$1.6 million for 7 projects in Hocking, Athens, Perry, Belmont, and Muskingum counties to preserve and improve access to green space and enhance river and stream corridors.

60 roads



OHIO PUBLIC WORKS

More than 60 local roads in Ohio Public Works Commission District 18 were resurfaced or improved in round 38 of the program, which awarded \$9.2 million in the district for 25 projects totaling \$29 million. These projects also helped the villages of Chauncey, Crooksville, and Bellaire make improvements to their drinking water and wastewater systems.

8 projects



TRANSPORTATION



The Surface Transportation Block Grant program provided \$1.7 million in support to 8 projects totaling \$10.8 million that helped improve safety, accessibility, and active transportation in Caldwell, Nelsonville, Woodsfield, Racine, Coolville, Murray City, Crooksville, and Hocking County.



3,418
enrollees

SENIOR FARMERS' MARKET NUTRITION PROGRAM



In partnership with the Ohio Department of Aging and U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program provided 3,418 individuals with \$50 in vouchers to purchase fresh, nutritious, local produce from more than 40 local farmers and markets across Southeast Ohio.

4,261
calls

Our Information & Assistance team answered 4,261 calls from individuals seeking assistance and guidance on Medicare enrollment, Medicaid Waiver eligibility, long-term care options, caregiver support, and more.



38
homes

HOME MODIFICATION & MINOR REPAIR



The Ohio Department of Development's Housing Assistance Grant Program provided emergency repairs and home modifications that improved accessibility and safety, enabling 11 individuals to remain in their homes. The PASSPORT Medicaid Waiver program supported minor home modifications for another 27 individuals.



1,205
individuals

WAIVER PROGRAMS

More than \$16 million in services were provided through Ohio's PASSPORT and Assisted Living Medicaid Waiver Programs. These services allow individuals to age in place in their own homes and communities—and at a significant savings to taxpayers and families when compared to the cost of care in a nursing facility.



4,191
older adults

OLDER AMERICANS ACT

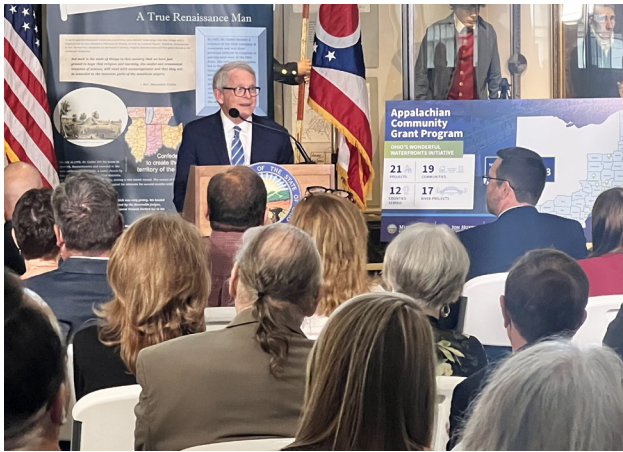
The Older Americans Act provided 4,191 older adults across the eight-county Buckeye Hills region with more than \$2.4 million in services, including meals, in-home support, transportation, adult day care, support for family caregivers, and more.

\$116.8 MILLION INVESTED IN SOUTHEAST OHIO

2024 Highlights



Appalachian Community Grant Program Awards \$132M



Ohio's Appalachian region is set for major economic growth with \$132 million awarded through the Appalachian Community Grant Program. Announced in May by Governor Mike DeWine and state officials, these investments will enhance waterways, revitalize historic downtowns, boost tourism, and improve residents' quality of life.

The Appalachian Downtowns and Destinations Initiative allocated \$38 million to seven projects in the Buckeye Hills region, including \$6.5 million for the Athens Central Business District Beautification Project and \$4.6 million for the Monroe Theatre Restoration. Ohio's Wonderful Waterfronts Initiative invested \$51 million in eight communities, with \$9.4 million for Marietta's Levee Park Improvements and \$10 million for Racine's Riverfront Redevelopment.

Buckeye Hills Regional Council is working with lead applicants Ross County and the Ironton-Lawrence Community Action Organization to administer and support 16 projects across the region, totaling over \$95 million. These initiatives will drive economic development and enhance the region's appeal as a destination.

Community Health Worker Expands Support to All Ages

For over 50 years, Buckeye Hills Regional Council has supported older adults and caregivers across Southeast Ohio. Now, in partnership with Bridges to Wellness at AccessTusc, the agency has expanded its services by adding a Community Health Worker to its team. This role enhances care coordination and support for residents of all ages. Courtney Briggs joined Buckeye Hills as a Community Health Worker serving Monroe and Noble counties. She connects individuals and families with essential services, including transportation, food, healthcare, and more—helping them live, feel, and be healthier.

A Community Health Worker assists individuals through 21 pathways to improve their health and help position them towards the path of wellness. A Community Health Worker is a frontline public health worker who is a trusted member of the community and has a close understanding of the community served. Community Health Workers serve as partners, advocates, and coaches for their clients, guiding them through a process to identify risks, assign them to pathways so solutions can be achieved, and remain available to support clients to completion of pathway objectives. This trusting relationship enables the Community Health Worker to serve as a liaison, link, and intermediary between health and social services, and improve the quality and cultural competence of service delivery.

As an Area Agency on Aging, Buckeye Hills has long provided support to older adults and individuals with disabilities. Through the Community Health Worker program, individuals of all ages in Monroe and Noble counties can now turn to Buckeye Hills for assistance with pregnancy support, housing, food, smoking cessation, job training and education, and more.

Buckeye Hills Earns OCCD Community Development Department of the Year Award



The Ohio Conference of Community Development recognized Buckeye Hills Regional Council's Development Division as the Community Development Department of the Year for its significant impact in Southeast Ohio at its Annual Summer Meeting in Columbus.

Buckeye Hills Regional Council's Development Division has played a crucial role in advancing community planning and securing funding for Southeast Ohio. Through extensive stakeholder engagement and strategic planning, the team helped communities prepare for historic funding opportunities like the \$500 million Appalachian Community Grant Program. In 2024, the Development Division's work also included an eight-part workshop series to help develop Buckeye Hills Forward, the region's 2025-2030 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), engaging over 200 stakeholders and gathering 2,000 data points to assess regional strengths and opportunities.

This community-driven approach earned the Development Division three 2023 Impact Awards from the National Association of Development Organizations. Additionally, the team has helped rural communities secure millions in funding for infrastructure, small businesses, and community projects. In the previous year, the Development Division's efforts facilitated \$184 million in investments across Southeast Ohio, supporting workforce development, infrastructure, and regional tourism.

Introducing CarFit to Southeast Ohio



To help the 10,000 Americans turning 65 every day and all senior drivers find a better "fit" with their cars for comfort and safety, Buckeye Hills Regional Council has joined with mobility experts across the country to host a safety program designed to help older drivers and their families.

CarFit is a national program developed by AAA, AARP, and the American Occupational Therapy Association and is designed to give a quick yet comprehensive check on how well an older driver and their vehicle work together.

At a CarFit event, trained volunteers complete a 12-point checklist with each driver. The items checked include the correct position of the driver's seat, the driver's ability to easily reach pedals, and adjustment of mirrors. Occupational therapists are also on hand to provide consultation, if needed, that will teach drivers how to maintain and improve aspects related to their driving health. The therapist can also provide information to participants addressing individual needs to help keep them safe on the road, as well as information about local community resources on exercise, nutrition, and other programs.

In 2024, Buckeye Hills Mobility Managers and Planning Division staff joined community partners in Perry, Noble, Monroe, and Washington counties to introduce CarFit to older adults and train local volunteers. Recognizing the benefits of CarFit for all ages, Mobility Managers have even been taking the program to local drivers education classes to help new drivers ensure their vehicles are properly adjusted.

Collaboration in Monroe & Noble Counties Earns State and National Recognition



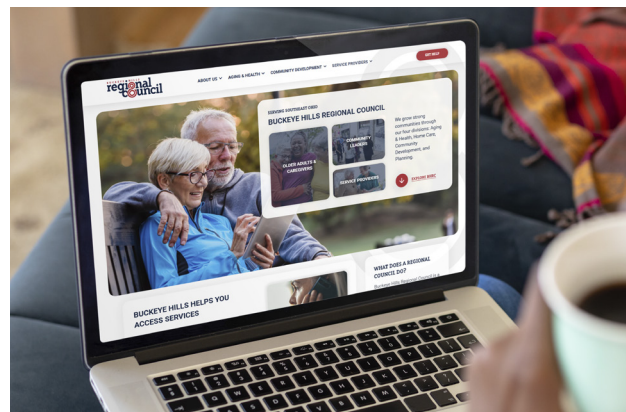
The Monroe and Noble County Commissioners were recipients of a Partnership Award from the Ohio Association of Area Agencies on Aging (O4A). In August and September, Monroe and Noble Counties partnered with BHRC to deliver digital literacy and safety classes to older adults in their communities, supported by Ohio Department of Aging's Healthy Aging Grant Program.

Noble and Monroe counties worked with Buckeye Hills Regional Council to deliver a four-week series of classes to help older adults learn the basics of using a tablet, including internet connectivity, email, social media, online safety, and more, taught by Ohio PC Solutions. Each participant was provided a tablet to take home with them upon completion of the class.

The initiative also earned Buckeye Hills Regional Council recognition from the National Digital Inclusion Alliance as a 2024 Digital Inclusion Trailblazer.

In an increasingly connected society, digital inclusion—access to affordable high-speed internet, devices, and digital skills training—is essential not only to participate in today's world but also to finding greater opportunities to thrive using tools to navigate the internet confidently and independently.

Buckeye Hills Launches New Website and Online Tools



Buckeye Hills Regional Council overhauled its website in 2024. Visitors to buckeyehills.org will find improvements and updates that were informed by the feedback of our members, as well as individuals and stakeholders across our region. Developed by CH Web Agency, the website features a revamped menu with options geared toward older adults and their caregivers, local community leaders, and home- and community-based service providers.

Most notably, buckeyehills.org now includes a searchable Funding Opportunities database for local leaders that is curated by Buckeye Hills Development staff, as well as a searchable Service Provider Directory for older adults and caregivers seeking local aging resources.

The Provider Directory includes information on more than 600 organizations and community-based service providers who offer adult daycare services, adult protective services, assisted living support, housing and apartment information, congregate meal sites, hospice care providers, support groups, and much more.

In the first year of the website's launch, the Provider Directory has already drawn more than 6,800 visitors seeking resources for themselves or an older loved one.

The website also features a live chat option that allows visitors to communicate in real-time with one of our Information & Assistance Specialists. This feature continues to be incredibly popular with visitors, who utilized the live chat more than 1,100 times in 2024 to get help on a wide range of topics.

Medicare Assistance and Fraud Prevention



The annual Medicare Open Enrollment Period, which takes place October through December, is one of the busiest times of year for our Ohio Senior Health Insurance Information Program (OSHIIP)-trained Information & Assistance Specialists. However, their dedication to helping individuals navigate Medicare doesn't stop there. Our staff assists individuals year-round with a variety of Medicare-related needs, including Medicare Savings programs. In 2024, our staff helped 264 individuals save an incredible total of \$165,670 on their Medicare Part D prescription drug coverage.

In addition, through a partnership with Senior Medicare Patrol, our staff provided information about how to identify and avoid potential Medicare fraud and scams to hundreds of individuals at more than half a dozen outreach events throughout Southeast Ohio.

Excellence in Fiscal Management



Buckeye Hills Regional Council recognizes the importance of the stewardship of public dollars. During the May meeting of the BHRC Executive Committee, Susanne Simpson, Southeast Regional Liaison for Auditor of State Keith Faber, presented Buckeye Hills Regional Council Executive Director Chasity Schmelzenbach and Fiscal Director Denise Keyes with a 2024 Auditor of State Award.

The Auditor of State's Office presents the awards to local governments and school districts upon the completion of a financial audit. Entities that receive the award meet the Auditor of State's criteria of a clean audit report, including timely filings, no findings for recovery, material citations, material weaknesses, significant deficiencies, or questioned costs, as well as compliance with public meetings and public records requirements.

EDA Investments in Action

In June, Buckeye Hills welcomed Lee Shirey, U.S. Economic Development Administration's Economic Development Representative for Michigan & Ohio, to the region to see first-hand the impact EDA investments have in Southeast Ohio. This included a visit with the Athens County Economic Development Council and Athens County Port Authority to see the 60,000-square-foot manufacturing speculative building under construction at the Bill Theisen Industrial Park, made possible through a \$5 million EDA grant award.

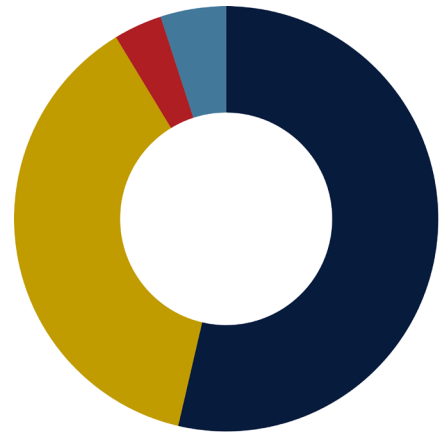


2024 Operations

REVENUE

● Federal Grants and Awards:	\$3,952,105
● State Grants and Awards:	\$2,775,780
● Local Funds:	\$271,511
● Contract Income:	\$369,285

TOTAL: \$7,368,681



EXPENDITURES

● Personnel:	\$3,430,555
● Fringe Benefits	\$1,801,962
● Operations:	\$1,675,349

TOTAL: \$6,907,866

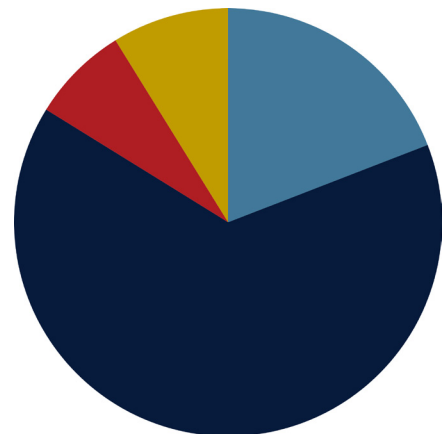
BALANCE: \$460,815



EMPLOYEES

● Aging & Home Care:	44
● Administration	13
● Community Development:	5
● Planning:	6

TOTAL: 68



Leadership Team

CHASITY SCHMELZENBACH

Executive Director
 cschmelzenbach@buckeyehills.org

JENNIFER WESTFALL

Aging & Health Director
 jwestfall@buckeyehills.org

DAWN WEBER

Home Care Director
 dweber@buckeyehills.org

SAM MILLER

Development Director
 smiller@buckeyehills.org

MELISSA ZOLLER

Planning Director
 mzoller@buckeyehills.org

DENISE KEYES

Fiscal Director
 dkeyes@buckeyehills.org

ANGIE LAWRENCE

Human Resources Manager
 alawrence@buckeyehills.org

DREW TANNER

Communications Director
 dtanner@buckeyehills.org

JAMIE LEWIS

Information Technology Director
 jlewis@buckeyehills.org

ABOUT BUCKEYE HILLS

Buckeye Hills Regional Council serves as a forum through which local communities work cooperatively to improve our region. Founded in 1968, we work closely with government leaders, state and federal partners, and community partners to serve Ohio's Appalachian region.

Our organization is a designated Area Agency on Aging, District Liaison for the Ohio Public Works Commission, Economic Development District, Local Development District, Regional Transportation Planning Organization, and Aging & Disability Resource Center.

Since our inception, Buckeye Hills has brought more than \$1.6 billion in programs and services to Southeast Ohio communities.

BUCKEYE HILLS
**regional
 council**

1400 PIKE STREET
 MARIETTA, OH 45750
 800.331.2644

BUCKEYEHILLS.ORG



Improving the quality of life in Southeast Ohio

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