

2011



Ashland Area Council for
Economic Development

2011 New Initiatives

LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

February 9, 2011

Dear Citizen or Prospective Investor in Ashland County:

Whether you have lived here your entire life, have recently started a business here, or are considering Ashland County for your next investment, we invite you to join us in the initiatives outlined below. Ashland County's economy is poised for quality growth and job creation in the near future, and we are keenly focused on leading effective business development strategies. You will notice throughout these ideas a theme of community involvement in the economic development process. Through various committees and outreach activities, 2011 will be a year of renewed prosperity and community pride. We hope one or more of the concepts below are of interest to you. We need your help, your ideas, and your expertise in order to capitalize on the opportunities in front of us. We look forward to hearing from you!

Sincerely,

Evan Scurti, Director

New Business Attraction and Marketing Initiatives

Outreach to the Medical Plastics sector:

Recent discussions with local industrial leaders have shown us that developing close contacts in this growing industrial sector could reap rewards in Ashland County in the coming years. Several local companies have great contacts globally in this field, and we will strive to leverage these relationships. Local assets (primarily, a workforce very skilled in plastics production) will be communicated to a specific target audience.

January – March Research Phase

1. Document the unique services that can be provided to this industry by companies like WIL Research, ToolingDocs, etc.
2. Research site location consultants specializing in this sector
3. Research companies exhibiting “likelihood of expansion”...companies with new product developments, relocation announcements, company acquisitions, etc.
4. Document the strengths of our available workforce, as well as other assets (transportation, geography, business parks, infrastructure, etc.)

March – May: Database and Marketing Piece Development

1. Finalize target list of companies and consultants to receive literature (goal: approximately 100 contacts).
2. Develop and mail brochure.
3. Follow-up calls.
4. Involve local and regional media.

May – June: Track Results

1. Develop internal scorecard to track discussions and/or prepare for a 2nd round with new contacts.

Outreach to Ashland County's Major Industrial Employers in Diverse Sectors:

Throughout 2011 AACED will focus on strategic supply chain-oriented discussions; i.e. are there opportunities for suppliers and customers of our major firms to site a facility in Ashland County?

Retention & Expansion of Existing Industry

AACED has remained focused on regularly surveying the industrial base and deploying necessary resources to address problems or help firms capitalize on opportunities. Known in the economic development profession as a “Retention & Expansion (R&E) Initiative,” we are excited to add new activities in 2011 to our traditional R&E approach.

AACED has recognized how Ashland County and the greater region are transitioning away from an industrial economy that is supported by a handful of large factories. In its place, a healthy variety of niche, medium-sized firms are finding great success. Additionally, we have witnessed many opportunities for these firms (most of which have some form of local ownership) to engage in local commerce through customer and/or supplier relationships with other local businesses. Throughout 2011 AACED will be focused on facilitating even more “local match-making” through the following activities:

February-March: Informational Survey

The first step toward greater flow of intra-county industrial commerce is to learn about the unique skills, products and services at each of our firms. AACED will train a team of 25-30 volunteers who will survey firms in teams of 2. The brief survey is designed to engage C-Level executives in open discussions about their unique services, especially those that might be attractive to other local firms. Findings will be compiled by AACED and assembled into various informational documents and internet-based tools.

March: Form a Communications Committee

Beginning in March AACED will assemble a team of local professionals skilled in communicating messages to the business community. Throughout 2011 and beyond the findings from the initial survey will be effectively communicated to local business leaders. Additionally, products (interactive websites, directories etc.) will be designed for easy access when convenient for the executive.

April-December: Business Roundtables

Based on survey findings AACED will facilitate meetings to more fully develop ideas shared by executives. For example, executives from a certain sector will be able to expand upon their ideas for collaboration, strengthening local supply chain networks, etc. Executives will also have the opportunity to meet with the Communications Committee.

December: Analyze Initiative Effectiveness

Identify success stories (job creation, sales, new strategies) and report out to the general public. Develop strategies for future years.

Real Estate Improvement and Other Product Development Strategies

Brownfields Redevelopment

Throughout 2010 AACED received various inquiries regarding vacant industrial properties, some of which have perceived contamination and/or are undergoing various environmental testing and remediation procedures. Known as “brownfields,” these properties often require creative strategies involving community and State-level leaders, if the properties are to someday be successfully reused.

AACED has identified a handful of properties that, in our opinion, deserve special attention throughout 2011. Many have remained vacant for 10+ years, but nevertheless present excellent redevelopment opportunities due to their location and proximity to adjacent infrastructure. As a starting point for various redevelopment strategies, AACED will form a Brownfields Redevelopment Committee, made up of 12-15 local stakeholders and/or experts in this field. We will begin our work by meeting with State leaders in March, primarily to discuss the critical role often played by the Clean Ohio Fund. The Committee's role will be to guide AACED to the particular project(s) that represent the most need or development potential. It is anticipated that the Committee will meet 4-5 times throughout 2011 in order to lead the community toward one or more tangible redevelopment projects.

Downtown Improvement

AACED strives to build upon other county-wide community planning processes, which have identified "active, livable downtowns" to be an important goal. In 2011 we hope to provide economic development services that might result in increased business activity in downtowns throughout Ashland County. For example, the Mohican Area Growth Foundation (MAGF, a division of AACED) has made this a priority for 2011.

February-April—Interviews with all downtown Loudonville and Perrysville property owners.

MAGF's primary purpose in this project is to determine if one of two issues are inhibiting development: 1) building code or other property issues; and 2) potential businesses' lack of financing or business planning that results in failed start-ups. Beyond addressing these issues, MAGF is focused on working with local citizens and/or those from outside our community to increase downtown business activity.

Throughout 2011: Participate in Ashland Downtown groups

There are a number of existing groups that are studying downtown improvements. AACED will participate in these groups and provide assistance when appropriate.

Entrepreneurship / Small Business Development

Local agencies, including SCORE and the Small Business Development Center (SBDC), do an excellent job of providing counseling to area small businesses. As an economic development office, we not only refer interested citizens to these agencies, but we believe we must play an integral role in furthering our entrepreneurial culture. Specific programs slated for 2011 include:

Social Media marketing opportunities for small businesses

AACED is partnering with Addison's Compass Public Relations and the Salvation Army Kroc Center to offer an insightful series of seminars throughout 2011. These will be targeted to small business owners that would like to increase their marketing efforts through the use of social media and electronic marketing but are unsure where to start.

Introducing local Market Opportunities to Aspiring Entrepreneurs:

Beginning with a May half-day seminar in Loudonville, AACED will strive to connect potential business owners to local leaders that have developed great business skills and have insights into "market gaps". We believe there are many opportunities for creative start-ups in Ashland County's unique communities, and we look forward to coordinating these discussions.

Continued Outreach to the County's Micro-Enterprise Sector:

Micro-enterprises (typically 5 or fewer employees.) are becoming a major component of many local economies. AACED has developed an outreach program to them, which results in customized seminars or specific services from our office. Additionally, in 2011, we will feature more micro-enterprise success stories in our e-newsletter.

Start-Up Analysis and Development Committee:

AACED witnessed throughout 2010 the trend of entrepreneurs or innovators of new products searching for start-up funds (including equity partners) to commercialize their ideas. Many communities have formed advisory committees and/or angel investor groups to meet with such individuals. We have formed a committee of close advisors and are currently scheduling meetings.