

NEFCO: A Regional Council

NORTHEAST OHIO FOUR COUNTY REGIONAL PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATION
180 East South Street, Akron, Ohio 44311-2035 (330) 252-0337 • Fax (330) 252-0664
Dr. Peter D. Ferguson, Chairman *Joseph Hadley, Jr., Executive Director*

WHAT IS NEFCO?

The Northeast Ohio Four County Regional Planning and Development Organization (NEFCO) was formed in 1974 as a council of governments by the elected officials within Portage, Stark, Summit and Wayne Counties. NEFCO was created as a voluntary organization to enable local officials to discuss problems facing the Region and to develop strategies to cope with them. NEFCO also serves as a forum through which local, state and federal planning programs can be more effectively coordinated.

HOW IS NEFCO STRUCTURED?

The organization is directed by a General Policy Board which serves as the decision making body and meets monthly. The Policy Board is comprised of representatives from each of the four counties, including the Cities of Akron, Canton, Kent and Wooster. Of the Board's 38 active members, 16 are elected officials, 18 are public officials, and 4 are private appointees.

WHAT DOES NEFCO DO?

NEFCO's primary purpose is to serve the county, city, village and township governments, and the citizens within the four-county area. On behalf of these local units of government, NEFCO produces a series of studies or plans supporting the local plans in order to help maximize the return of federal tax dollars to the Region. Through communication, planning, coordination and technical assistance, NEFCO addresses issues which cross jurisdictional boundaries. Such issues as the environment, economic development, transportation, housing and land development are regional problems which require locally conceived regional solutions.

DO NEFCO'S POWERS SUPERSEDE THOSE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENTS?

No, regional planning organizations, such as NEFCO, do not change the boundaries or authority of existing jurisdictions. However, through NEFCO, a variety of regional issues are discussed and actions taken or recommended. NEFCO does not have the authority to force member governments to comply with its decisions, but it does use a variety of methods to encourage voluntary participation in policy development and implementation. For example, NEFCO prepares and adopts regional water quality management and economic development plans which increase the Region's eligibility for federal funding consideration; it reviews applications for federal funds from local governments and the private sector in Summit County under the Intergovernmental Review process; and it is used by its member local governments to make new development initiatives which are multi-jurisdictional in nature.

HOW IS NEFCO FUNDED?

From its inception, NEFCO has been supported by local dues which are utilized to attract federal and state grants to carry out the planning program. Local governments contribute \$202,055/year on an eighteen cents per capita basis or as determined annually by the Board. Funds supplied by local units of government are used to match those of state and federal programs. These funds come from a variety of sources, including the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA), the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency (OEPA), the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, and from other agencies and local governments.

WHAT ARE SOME OF NEFCO'S ACCOMPLISHMENTS TO DATE?

- The NEFCO Region's designation as an Economic Development District has increased the area's advantage in securing federal grants to develop plans and programs that address economic development problems.
- NEFCO spearheaded the application process which resulted in the awarding of a grant of authority to the Akron-Canton Regional Airport Authority to establish a foreign trade zone at the airport. The foreign trade zone, now an integral part of a nine-county trade consortium (NEOTEC), promotes exporting by area firms and provides the area with an additional and powerful development tool.
- NEFCO has provided technical assistance with the programs of the Economic Development Administration (EDA) to several units of local government and non-profit organizations. Since 2006, NEFCO staff has been instrumental in the award of more than \$7.5 million of federal grants to entities in Northeast Ohio. Awards made in 2006 went to The Ohio State University for the renovation of Pouden Hall at the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center in Wooster, and to the regional entity JumpStart, Inc. In 2010 alone, more than \$4.5 million was granted to several entities in the region by EDA. The City of Barberton; a collaboration between Twinsburg, Summit County, and NEFCO; JumpStart, Inc.; NorTech, and the University of Akron's Research Foundation/Austen BioInnovation Institute received assistance from EDA. Barberton received nearly \$1.6 million for infrastructure improvements needed to develop the Lakeside Innovation Business Park. A joint application submitted by Twinsburg, Summit County and NEFCO will fund a recovery strategy to determine the effects of and actions following the closure of the Chrysler Stamping Plant. JumpStart, Inc. will expand its entrepreneurial business development programs throughout the Midwestern region (with plans to expand in Akron-Summit County). NorTech also received an EDA award for a regional study to determine promising advanced energy sectors in Northeast Ohio. The University of Akron's Research Foundation/Austen BioInnovation Institute was one of 6 recipients nationally to receive an "i6 Challenge" grant to increase innovation and commercialization of new technologies for biomedical products and polymer science industries. Other entities such as the Cities of Akron, Barberton, Canton, and Kent are past EDA grant recipients.
- NEFCO maintains an industrial park inventory for the four county economic development district.

- On an annual basis, the NEFCO General Policy Board adopts a four county strategy: *the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)*. The NEFCO CEDS report serves to summarize and assess the past year's activities and present new or modified program strategies. Every three years, NEFCO completes a *Revised CEDS*; which evaluates the area's economic situation based on the analysis of relevant data of the area and surrounding region. The *Revised CEDS* evaluates the existing and potential assets and liabilities of the NEFCO region that may affect new development and business/job retention. The most recent CEDS was completed in January 2010.
- Prepared a watershed action plan for Nimishillen Creek which has been endorsed by Ohio DNR and Ohio EPA. This endorsement enhances the area's eligibility and attractiveness for various environmental grants and loans.
- Consistency with the NEFCO Clean Water Plan (208 Plan), certified by the Governor and approved by USEPA, to prescribe how their area's wastewater should be handled when Ohio EPA considers discharge permits and enables local governments to be eligible for sewage treatment construction/improvement loans to assist them in meeting clean water requirements.
- NEFCO staff has assisted several of the region's communities in the preparation of their groundwater protection programs, including the Cities of Barberton, Rittman, Orrville and Wooster, Portage County (Shalersville) and the Villages of Canal Fulton, Minerva, Waynesburg, Navarre, Mantua, Marshallville, Lakemore, Doylestown, and Bolivar.
- NEFCO was named by the Director of the Ohio EPA to the Cuyahoga Coordinating Committee, which is charged with the responsibility of preparing the remedial action plan, or cleanup plan for the Cuyahoga River's Area of Concern.
- NEFCO has conducted several watershed studies designed to better understand actual or potential pollution threats. These studies are used to qualify these areas for federal and/or state grants. Examples include Sippo Lake and Nimishillen Creek (Stark County), Upper Tuscarawas River, Middle Cuyahoga River, and Yellow Creek (Summit County), and Killbuck and Sugar Creeks (Wayne County).
- NEFCO also provides coordination and technical assistance in the areas of population and economic studies, rural planning, human services, and open space and recreation.
- As an affiliate of the Ohio Department of Development's Office of Strategic Research and depository for census data, the dissemination of various material continues to remain a fundamental task of NEFCO in order to heighten public awareness and encourage public participation.

For information on any of these accomplishments, please call NEFCO, (330)252-0337; FAX (330)252-0664.