



SPRING 2026

# COUNTY LEADER



## FEATURING

Spring Legislative Session Progress

Ohio's Constitution Provides a Deliberate Path to the Ballot

What's Going on with Data Centers?

Child Care is an Economic Development Issue and Counties have a Role to Play



**COVER:** The 2026 CCAO Board of Directors pictured at the January organizing meeting.

**3:** Commissioners and engineers in the CCAO/CEAO Central District visited the newly renovated Logan County Animal Shelter during the March meeting.

**ABOVE:**

- 1:** The CEBCO Board of Directors at the 2026 Annual Meeting.
- 2:** CORSA joined Fairfield County's HR training in April at the Levacy Center, named for sitting Commissioner Dave Levacy. Pictured: First row: Levacy, Ben Humphrey, County Administrator Aundrea Cordle, CORSA's Frank Hatfield. Second row: Fairfield County Commissioner Jeff Fix, Fairfield County Commissioner Steve Davis, and Deputy County Administrator Jeff Porter.

- 4:** CCAO staff attended the Delaware County State of the County event, where Commissioner Barb Lewis was recognized for her leadership and 12 years of service ahead of her retirement at the end of this year. Pictured: CORSA Managing Director John Brownlee, CCAO Executive Director Cheryl Subler, Commissioner and CEBCO Board Member Jeff Benton, Lewis, Commissioner and CCAO Board Member Gary Merrell, and CORSA Assistant Director Frank Hatfield.

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# A MESSAGE FROM 2026 CCAO PRESIDENT



## Denise Driehaus

CCAO President, Hamilton  
County Commissioner

Counties are the frontlines of service.

We provide a framework for public safety, services to find healthy homes for children, and infrastructure to conduct elections. We support seniors, individuals with disabilities, and community members struggling with mental health and addiction. We operate jails, answer 9-1-1 calls, and mitigate emergencies and disasters.

These services are not luxuries; they are essential for Ohioans to survive and thrive in our communities.

The County Commissioners of Association of Ohio (CCAO) continues to advocate for and on behalf of counties and the services that they provide. Amid this year's capital budget cycle at the Statehouse, CCAO is at the table for conversations surrounding SNAP administrative costs, jail funding, and property tax relief.

CCAO is also supporting counties through involvement in Ohioans to Protect Public Services: a statewide coalition of more than 65 organizations standing in opposition to the the proposal to abolish property taxes. Eliminating property taxes would put the services we provide to our communities in jeopardy and put our residents at risk.

As County Commissioners, we have a duty to tell our stories. Stories of children's service workers, 9-1-1 operators, and sheriff deputies. Stories of children aging out of the foster care system, individuals rescued from an overdose, and seniors receiving meals and personal care services inside their own homes. Stories that emphasize and convey the vital work that counties do and the people that we serve on a daily basis.

I look forward to hosting all of you in Hamilton County for our 2026 Summer Symposium. You will have many opportunities to experience our rich culture and county assets as well as engage in our local traditions, including going to a Reds game and touring our local breweries! We will also discuss key issues facing counties and strengthen connections with fellow Commissioners from across the state of Ohio.

See you then!



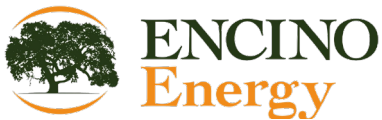
# THANK YOU

to our Corporate Partners for their support!

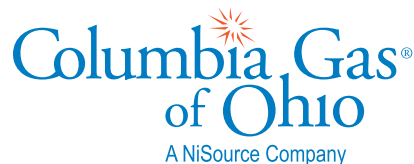
## ★ ★ PINNACLE ★ ★



## ★ PREMIERE ★



## PARTICIPATING



# LETTER FROM CCAO EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

## Counties at the Center of Change



**Cheryl Subler**  
CCAO Executive Director

Ohio counties are navigating growth, innovation, and rising public expectations while managing increasing fiscal pressures.

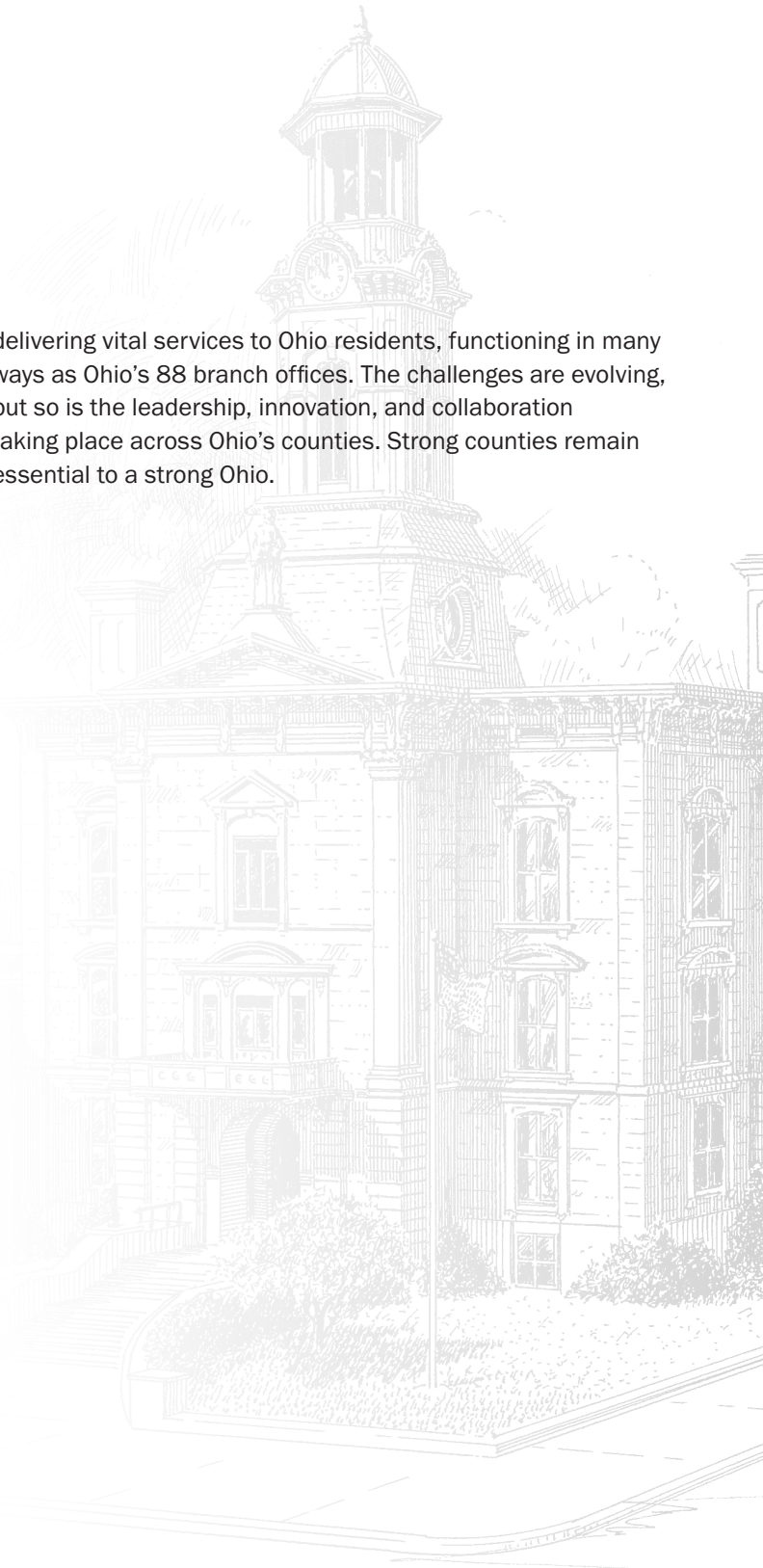
Economic development today is moving at a faster pace and greater scale than many areas have experienced in decades. Counties are increasingly navigating complex conversations surrounding land use, infrastructure capacity, permitting efficiency, energy consumption, and the long-term impacts of emerging technologies and data centers. These opportunities can create jobs and investment, yet they also require thoughtful planning and collaboration among local leaders.

At the same time, counties continue to face growing pressure on the systems and services residents depend upon every day. Rising costs in areas such as public safety, courts, human services, infrastructure, and technology are colliding with broader debates surrounding property taxes and local government funding. As discussions continue regarding reform proposals, including the citizen effort to abolish property taxes without a pragmatic proposal for how to fund services going forward, county leaders remain focused on ensuring residents continue receiving essential services in a responsible and sustainable manner.

This issue of County Leader highlights the increasingly multifaceted realm of county government, including both the challenges and opportunities facing counties. The articles in this edition reflect the growing complexity of county leadership, from economic development and infrastructure planning to fiscal stewardship, public engagement, and emerging technologies. They also reinforce the importance of strong leadership by county elected officials and key staff, along with collaborative partnerships that often extend well beyond geographic boundaries.

Through all of these changes, one thing remains constant: counties continue serving as the state's essential partner in

delivering vital services to Ohio residents, functioning in many ways as Ohio's 88 branch offices. The challenges are evolving, but so is the leadership, innovation, and collaboration taking place across Ohio's counties. Strong counties remain essential to a strong Ohio.



# POLICY UPDATE Spring Legislative Session Progress



## Adam Schwiebert

CCAO Managing Director of Policy

As the Ohio General Assembly moves through the spring legislative calendar, the CCAO policy team continues to track the implementation of significant property tax reforms enacted late last year. These changes represented one of the most substantial updates to Ohio's property tax system in recent years and were a major focus of CCAO's advocacy efforts throughout 2025.

Now, with several months of experience under the new framework, attention has shifted toward how these reforms are operating in practice. The enacted measures, many of which CCAO supported, are intended to provide relief to taxpayers while helping prevent sharp, unvoted tax increases driven by rising property values.

While the most immediate legislative activity has subsided, the broader property tax conversation is not over. Lawmakers and stakeholders continue to assess the impact of last year's reforms, and there remains the potential for additional changes. CCAO will remain engaged to ensure any future changes strike a balanced approach that protects taxpayers while preserving counties' ability to deliver essential services.

A key development earlier this spring was the General Assembly's appropriation of \$12.5 million in state funding in House Bill 730 to support county administration of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). This investment follows sustained engagement by CCAO members and county job and family services directors to highlight the growing fiscal pressures associated with administering this critical program.

Counties administer SNAP eligibility on behalf of the state, ensuring that eligible Ohioans receive timely access to food assistance. However, the One Big Beautiful Bill Act reduced the federal share of administrative funding, shifting a greater portion of costs to the state and counties starting this October.

In that context, the General Assembly's decision to allocate \$12.5 million is both meaningful and appreciated. While it does not fully offset the increased costs counties are facing, it represents an important step toward recognizing the state's role in supporting the program it supervises. It also reflects a shared understanding that counties are essential partners in ensuring SNAP operates effectively and efficiently.

Adequate administrative funding remains critical to program

integrity. Counties are responsible for complex eligibility determinations, case management, and compliance with federal requirements, all of which require sufficient staffing and resources. CCAO will continue working with state partners to ensure future funding discussions consider workload demands and support continued improvements in technology and service delivery.

CCAO has also maintained a strong focus on securing funding for county jail infrastructure as part of the upcoming state capital appropriations bill. Across Ohio, counties are facing increasing challenges in maintaining and improving jail facilities that are central to local public safety systems.

Many county jails are aging and require significant investment to remain safe and operational. At the same time, construction and renovation costs have risen considerably in recent years, making it more difficult for counties to address both routine maintenance needs and larger capital projects. Expenses related to facility systems, security upgrades, and general upkeep continue to place pressure on county budgets.

CCAO, alongside the Buckeye State Sheriffs Association, has been advocating for a meaningful state investment in county jail infrastructure. Continued funding through the capital budget would help counties move forward with critical improvements while managing rising costs in a responsible manner.

As we look ahead, CCAO will continue to engage with the General Assembly on these and other priorities that impact county government. We appreciate the engagement of CCAO members across Ohio whose input remains essential as we work to advance policies that strengthen counties and support the effective delivery of services to Ohioans.

# FEATURE Lucas County's Proactive Site Development Program Aims to Speed Process of Attracting New Business Investments

by Kent Cahlander, Guest Writer

Lucas County can boast as the Ohio home of the Jeep assembly plant, but county leaders aren't being idle when it comes to attracting more industrial development to the area.

Hence the county's creation of LCReady, a three-phase site readiness certification program administered by the Lucas County Economic Development Corporation (LCEDC).

Lucas County Commissioner Pete Gerken described the program as a proactive approach officials have embarked upon to better compete for industry partners looking for sites with a minimum 20 acres or buildings of at least 50,000 square feet.

"Like every other county, we're in competition and we want growth here," he said. "We want business development here and we're always looking to find the appropriate role government plays in business development and expansion."

"Within that framework, we said: 'What makes people select sites somewhere?'"

The answers: people want sites that are ready to go and don't face a lot of barriers when they decide to make investments to build or expand, Gerken said. As such, the goal of the program is to improve the process of preparing and offering "shovel-ready sites" that reduce risks for developers and increase the speed of getting projects off the ground.

The county's announcement of the initiative said it is "designed to proactively position sites for industrial and manufacturing investment by certifying the locations through a rigorous process that aligns properties with the expectations of modern site selectors and corporate decision-makers."

That's accomplished through LCReady's three-phase structure:

- LCNavigate to establish a baseline understanding of site conditions and infrastructure availability.
- LCEvaluate for confirming development readiness through due diligence and technical validation.
- LCCertified to position fully vetted sites for active marketing and competitive project attraction.

The program's phases aim to address barriers to development at all levels, from zoning challenges and infrastructure needs at the start of the process, to site readiness determinations, and finally LCReady Certification that leads to direct marketing to site selectors and potential certification by JobsOhio. Projects can take advantage of various entry points in the process depending on their status.

"We're looking for advanced manufacturing, logistics, larger-scale investments," Gerken said, adding: "This is not a data center program."

To help move the process along, the county is putting up \$100,000 annually on a first-come, first-served basis to help developers cover due diligence costs. LCEDC likely would start with a low-cost desktop review to obtain a clear understanding of development feasibility, validate readiness, reduce risk and accelerate development.

Gerken said the audits cover environmental, utility and engineering evaluations as an extra incentive for program participants.

"If you're willing to sign up with LCReady, we're willing to take on some of those pre-development costs," he said.

Sarah Elms, communications director for the Lucas County Commissioners, said LCReady will be augmented with a web-based navigation tool to streamline the process for property owners, developers and others involved in the projects. The county has allocated \$126,000 to develop the permitting software.

The tool will help program participants coordinate their efforts across government entities and regulatory bodies versus having to deal with them individually, she said.

"Anyone from a major developer to a homeowner, when it's all said and done, will be able to use this technology to bring it all together and help navigate easily through the regulatory process."

*Continued on next page*

The initiative reflects the county's renewed focus on retaining and expanding businesses in the county, which the Department of Economic Development created in late 2024.

Karen Poore, Lucas County's interim economic development director, said the project will help all parties involved in projects navigate the maze of regulatory hurdles that can arise.

"In a lot of communities, the permitting and regulatory process is oftentimes not always as expedient and efficient as it can be in order to help a development project go from an idea to inception," she said. "A lot of people don't understand the complex and different permissions and different agencies that you have to go through to get your project ready to put shovels in the ground – especially in a county."

Poore, who previously worked with Toledo, said a city's development landscape can be easier to deal with because the agencies involved are contained in a single government entity.

"When you're in a county, an end user many times has to interact at the township level, and then with a county engineer who is a different elected official, and then the building regulations department and in some cases the health department," she said.

Poore is currently overseeing inquiries sent through the LCReady website, with a focus on commercial and industrial projects.

"We try to get people on the front end before they start a project, and our team convenes all the government entities and brings them together with the business," she said. "We have pre-meetings to talk about the project, discuss preliminary site plans and get everyone at the table from the Ohio Department of Transportation to the health department if needed, to building regs, the engineer's office, the zoning office, the township to talk about things early on."

The web-based navigation tool under development, with a target rollout date of the first quarter in 2027, will have a broader application for projects of all sizes to deal with regulatory permitting.

"Navigating through that can sometimes be hard to figure out," she said. "We hear that frustration and – especially with technology the way that it is today – we can build something that can help, whether it's the homeowner living in a township who wants to do an addition on their home, to building a new manufacturing or warehouse facility."

"It's one place that can help them do that, so they don't get tied up in one area or another," Poore added. "It's only going to get better with time."

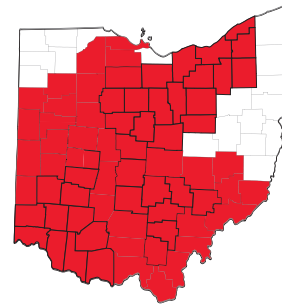
Commissioner Gerken said part of the impetus in developing the program is to use the county's resources to help some of its smaller government entities lure more business development.

"The smaller communities, the municipalities and townships, they don't have the staff to do this for developers. We do and we want to have a partnership with them."



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# GUEST COLUMN Ohio's Constitution Provides a Deliberate Path to the Ballot



## Frank LaRose

Secretary of State

Ohio's Constitution gives citizens an extraordinary level of authority over their government. One of the most powerful tools it provides is the ability to amend the state Constitution through a vote of the people. But while that power is broad, the process to place a constitutional amendment on the ballot is intentionally structured, with clear steps, timelines, and safeguards that ensure transparency and public confidence. This year, there are a number of potential amendments that Ohioans may see on the ballot, so it is important to understand how they get there.

In Ohio, constitutional amendments can reach the ballot in two ways: through the Ohio General Assembly or through a citizen-initiated petition.

When lawmakers propose an amendment, the process begins with a joint resolution introduced in the General Assembly. To advance, the proposal must receive a three-fifths vote in both the Ohio House and Senate. Once approved by the legislature, the proposed amendment is filed with the Secretary of State and scheduled for the next eligible election. State law requires that this filing occur at least 90 days before the election at which voters will consider the proposal.

From there, the Ohio Ballot Board plays an important role. The board is responsible for approving the official ballot language that voters will see in the voting booth. This language must be finalized no later than 75 days before the election to allow county election officials sufficient time to prepare ballots and voting systems. Ultimately, the amendment is adopted if it receives a simple majority of votes statewide.

Citizen-initiated constitutional amendments follow a longer and more rigorous path — one designed to ensure both accuracy and broad statewide support.

The process begins when petitioners submit the proposed amendment, along with a title and summary, to the Ohio Attorney General. This initial filing must include at least 1,000 signatures from registered Ohio voters. Within ten days, the Attorney General reviews the submission to determine whether the summary is a fair and truthful representation of the proposed amendment.

If that certification is granted, the proposal moves to the Ohio Ballot Board. The board must determine whether the petition

contains a single constitutional amendment, as required under Ohio law. Once approved, supporters may begin circulating petitions statewide.

To qualify for the ballot, organizers must gather signatures equal to at least 10 percent of the votes cast in the most recent gubernatorial election. Those signatures must come from at least 44 of Ohio's 88 counties, and each of those counties must contribute signatures equal to at least 5 percent of its vote for governor.

Petitions must be filed with the Secretary of State no later than 125 days before the election. State and county election officials then verify the signatures. If the petition falls short, supporters receive a ten-day "cure period" to submit additional signatures.

Only after all signatures are verified and the required thresholds are met does the issue move forward for placement on the ballot.

During a public hearing, the Ohio Ballot Board must prescribe the ballot language for the proposed amendment and certify it to the Secretary of State not later than 75 days before the election. Issue numbers are assigned in the order in which issues are certified to the ballot, and do not reset until Ohio surpasses Issue 500. Proponents and opponents of the initiative submit formal arguments to be distributed to the public along with the ballot language and full text of the issue.

This deliberate process reflects an important principle: while Ohio's Constitution empowers citizens to shape their government, it also requires that proposed changes demonstrate meaningful public support and meet clear legal standards.

The result is a system that protects both the people's voice and the integrity of Ohio's elections — ensuring that when constitutional amendments appear on the ballot, voters can have confidence in the process that put them there.

Have questions about other dates and deadlines this year? The full 2026 Ohio Election Calendar can be found at [VoteOhio](https://www.voteohio.gov).

# **GUEST COLUMN** Local Leadership, Statewide Impact: Ohio Counties Fuel Economic Growth



## **Darnita Bradley**

Director of Local Government Affairs & Engagement at JobsOhio

Ohio's economic momentum over the past decade did not happen by accident. It has been driven by a coordinated strategy focused on business attraction, workforce development, and long-term competitiveness. The latest IMPLAN analysis of JobsOhio, the state's private economic development corporation, outlines its impact from 2011 through 2024, underscoring just how significant that strategy has been for the state. According to IMPLAN, the 4,275 projects supported by JobsOhio and its regional network partners generated more than 305,000 direct jobs, nearly \$20 billion in payroll, and \$137 billion in capital investment across Ohio. The broader statewide impact is even larger. When supply chain activity and household spending are included, those projects supported approximately 740,000 jobs statewide and generated \$46.5 billion in total payroll.

The findings highlight the multiplier effect that economic development projects create throughout Ohio's economy. Every new facility or expansion investment supports a broader network of suppliers, contractors, transportation providers, retailers, restaurants, and service businesses. IMPLAN found JobsOhio projects produced an average employment multiplier of 2.3, meaning every direct job created supports an additional 1.3 jobs elsewhere in the economy. The fiscal impact has also been substantial. IMPLAN estimates JobsOhio-supported projects generated approximately \$28 billion in cumulative state tax revenue from 2011 to 2024, representing a 15-to-1 return on investment for the state.

That level of return reinforces the role economic development plays not only in job creation, but also in strengthening infrastructure, education, public services, and community investment across Ohio. Equally important is the geographic reach of that growth, with every region recording measurable economic gains. From manufacturing and logistics growth in Northwest Ohio to advanced aerospace and defense investments in the Dayton region and expanding technology infrastructure in Central Ohio, the impact has been felt across urban and rural communities alike.

The IMPLAN analysis also arrives at a pivotal moment as JobsOhio advances its five-year "JobsOhio 2030: Let's Grow,

Together" strategy. The initiative is designed to position Ohio as the No. 1 state in the Midwest and a top-five state nationally for high-quality jobs, economic resilience, and shared prosperity. A central component of the strategy is a focus on five super sectors: semiconductors and microelectronics, advanced aerospace and defense, life sciences and biotech, artificial intelligence, and energy. Rather than viewing these industries independently, JobsOhio sees them as interconnected ecosystems capable of driving exponential growth across the state's economy.

The strategy does not abandon Ohio's traditional industry strengths. JobsOhio continues to support 10 industry sectors, while leveraging the growth of emerging technologies and advanced industries to strengthen the broader economic landscape. Workforce development is also a top priority, particularly as Ohio faces a projected shortage of more than 540,000 workers by the end of the decade. In response, JobsOhio has launched several major initiatives to help employers attract, develop, and retain talent.

In August 2025, JobsOhio launched the JobsOhio Relocation Incentive (JORI), offering up to \$15,000 per qualifying out-of-state STEM or technical hire relocated to Ohio. By April 2026, the program had received more than 290 applications, with 75 companies receiving funding. JobsOhio continued that momentum with several major initiatives: the Biomanufacturing Workforce Initiative to strengthen Ohio's life sciences talent pipeline; the Energy Opportunity Initiative to support infrastructure for projects; and AI Ready Ohio, launched with the Enterprise Technology Association, is preparing Ohioans for AI and emerging technology careers.

Together, these initiatives reflect an economic development strategy focused not only on winning projects today, but also on preparing Ohio for the industries that will shape the next several decades. The IMPLAN findings reinforce that JobsOhio's model has already delivered measurable results — and that the coordinated efforts of Team Ohio are continuing to build on that momentum through strategic investment, innovation, and workforce readiness. Learn more at [JobsOhio.com](https://JobsOhio.com).

# FEATURE Celebrating National County Government Month

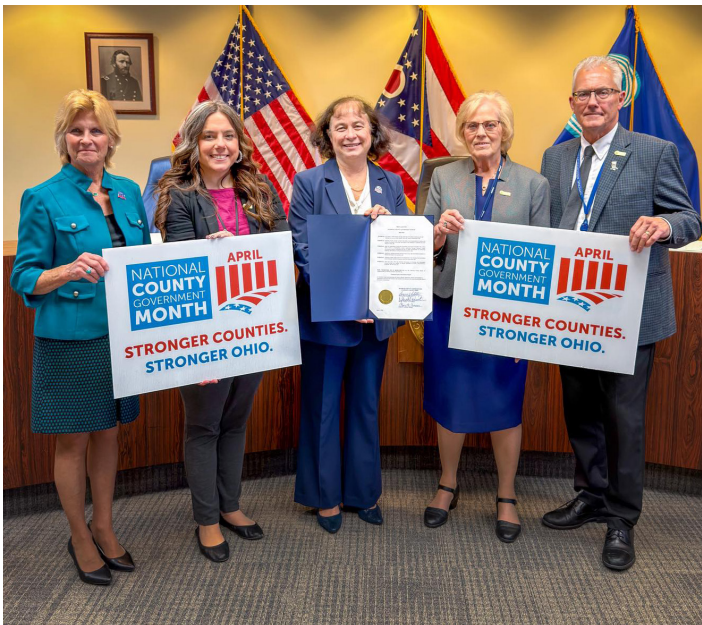
Each April, counties across the nation celebrate National County Government Month (NCGM). It's a time to educate and reflect on the critical services and supports county employees and elected officials provide each and every day. Thank you to those counties who shared photos of your celebrations! If you have photos to share, please send them to [comms@ccao.org](mailto:comms@ccao.org).



The Morrow County Commissioners passed a proclamation celebrating National County Government Month. Left to right: Morrow County Commissioners Jon Mason, Timothy Siegfried, Tim Abraham, Morrow County Clerk Cheryl Heacock.



Madison County Administrator Rob Slane, CCAO Executive Director Cheryl Subler, Madison County Commissioner Chris Wallace, and CCAO Policy Analyst Kenton Dresbach celebrate in front of the beautiful Madison County Courthouse.



The Clermont County Commissioners issued a celebratory NCGM proclamation. Left to right: Clermont County Commissioner Claire Corcoran, Clermont County Deputy Assistant Administrator Angie Livesay, Clermont County Communications Coordinator Ursula Miller, and Clermont County Commissioners Bonnie Batchler and David Painter.



Ross County Commissioners James Lowe, Jack Everson, and David Glass celebrate NCGM at a meeting in April. The Commissioners also issued a proclamation to mark the occasion.



The Licking County Commissioners proudly displayed a NCGM yard sign in front of the beautiful courthouse.



The Tuscarawas County Commissioners and their staff celebrated NCGM with cake!



The beautiful Ottawa County Courthouse pictured with the NCGM yard sign to celebrate the occasion.



The Portage County Commissioners celebrated by passing a NCGM proclamation. Left to right: Portage County Commissioners Sabrina Christian-Bennett, Mike Tinlin, and Jill Crawford.

# FEATURE Comprehensive Land Use: Plan for it, or Plan to Lose out on it



**Kenton Dresbach**  
CCAO Policy Analyst

County governments around Ohio play a central role in shaping growth, protecting farmland, coordinating infrastructure, and preserving community character through comprehensive land use plans. These plans provide a long-term vision for how land should be developed, conserved, and managed. In a state experiencing suburban expansion, rural population shifts, and new forms of development, effective land use planning has become increasingly important for balancing economic development with environmental stewardship and quality of life for residents.

Ohio counties can utilize comprehensive land use plans to guide zoning decisions, transportation investments, utility expansion, housing development, and preservation of agricultural land. While local townships and municipalities maintain significant zoning authority under the Ohio Revised Code, county governments often coordinate regional planning efforts through county planning commissions. These commissions help ensure that development decisions are consistent across jurisdictional boundaries of townships and municipalities and aligned with broader economic development goals.

Fairfield County updated its [land use plan](#) in 2024 to address growth from the neighboring metropolitan region, foster stewardship of county resources, and guide local investments for the future. County commissioners and other leaders recognized that unmanaged growth could threaten farmland, lead to increased infrastructure costs, and diminish the rural character valued by residents. In response, the county developed a long-range Development Strategy and Land Use Plan designed to manage growth while preserving community identity and addressing local concerns.

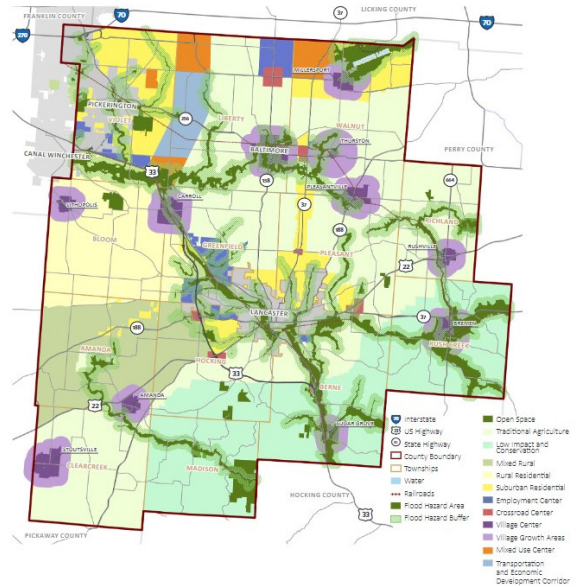
Fairfield County's planning emphasizes several guiding themes: managing growth and economic development, expansion of tax base and attraction of skilled workforce, the finite availability of land, preservation of agricultural heritage and environmental stewardship.

These principles helped shape policies related to transportation, land conservation, housing demand, and economic development. Rather than encouraging unrestricted sprawl, the county identified priority growth areas where

## 1.4 FUTURE LAND USE

### Future Land Use Map

The Future Land Use Map seeks to balance development and conservation into a seamless and integrated growth pattern that responds to the growth potential of Fairfield County. In terms of accommodating future development, the Future Land Use Plan can support about 57,730 new housing units and 40,000,000 square feet of new employment uses over time.



infrastructure and services could support development more efficiently. At the same time, agricultural lands and environmentally sensitive areas were targeted for preservation.

Fairfield County's approach included extensive public participation involving residents, township leaders, businesses, and regional stakeholders throughout the planning process. Public meetings, steering committees, and stakeholder involvement as well as individual meetings with each township and village in the county helped build consensus around the long-term vision. Other counties looking to undertake this process should consider a similar approach to involve community partners.

The county's recent comprehensive planning updates demonstrate how land use planning must adapt to modern economic realities. Rapid population growth in Central Ohio, including nearby technology investments and industrial expansion, has created increased demand for housing and commercial development. Fairfield County's updated comprehensive plan addresses these pressures by identifying appropriate locations for growth while seeking to protect farmland and rural landscapes. The county uses mapping technologies and geographic information systems to evaluate which areas are most suitable for development and which should remain preserved.

*Continued on next page*

“As we worked our way through this process, several themes became really clear to us,” Fairfield County Commissioner Jeff Fix said. “Preserving the land and protecting the taxpayers’ were the most important things to those we met with. We continue to preach that if you plan for it (growth), and manage it, you can take advantage of it, and your constituents will be much better off in the long run. These themes continue in our presentations throughout the county as we move forward in our work with villages and townships to update their plans and zoning codes.”

Counties developing these comprehensive land use plans have access to a range of financial, technical, and administrative resources from state and federal agencies to assist in the process. By leveraging grants, planning assistance, and interagency partnerships, counties can produce more effective and data-driven land use plans. The Ohio Department of Agriculture [recently awarded counties grants](#) for Comprehensive Land Use Plans and Farmland Preservation Plans of up to \$50,000 and \$25,000 respectively. Other resources from the agency’s Office of Farmland Preservation to be utilized in county planning can be found on its [website](#).

Ultimately, effective county land use planning depends on long-term vision, regional cooperation, public involvement, and adaptability. As Ohio continues to experience demographic and economic changes, counties that adopt thoughtful and collaborative land use plans will be better positioned to maintain sustainable growth, protect natural resources, and enhance the quality of life for future generations.

**THE FORWARD**



The year ahead may bring twists and turns for employers. But no matter what obstacles come, the right partner can help you remain steady on the path forward. Sedgwick supports Ohio clients and their employees by simplifying workers' compensation claims. We help mitigate risks, control costs, administer discount programs, share safety best practices, and provide expert program consultation. Taking care of people is at the heart of everything we do.

For additional questions, contact Tony Sharrock at:  
P. 614.376.5450 E. [tony.sharrock@sedgwick.com](mailto:tony.sharrock@sedgwick.com)

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**PATH**



**SUMMER SYMPOSIUM 2026**  
AUGUST 30 – SEPTEMBER 1  
HAMILTON COUNTY  
**REGISTRATION OPENING IN JUNE**

# GUEST COLUMN Ohio 4-H Camps Build Lifelong Skills and Lasting Memories



## David Civittolo

Interim Associate Dean and Director, Ohio State University Extension; and Interim Chair, Department of Extension

Some of the best childhood memories are made at 4-H camp, a place where cabin mates often become lifelong friends and curiosity is nurtured into knowledge. For generations, Ohio 4-H camps have been places where learning feels like adventure and campers develop skills that will shape their lives well after camp ends.

Each year, Ohio State University Extension's 4-H youth development professionals coordinate nearly 200 camp experiences for youth in Ohio's 88 counties. These opportunities include overnight camps, day camps, and multiple specialty camps that collectively reach around 14,000 youth every year. Whether youth are introduced to 4-H for the first time through a camp experience or return to camp as a seasoned 4-H member, each one is designed to spark growth and instill a sense of belonging.

Camps are high-energy environments where youth step away from screens to connect with peers and nature. Campers might challenge themselves on a high-ropes course, learn to braid a friendship bracelet, or explore new interests such as archery, fishing, kayaking, or creaking. These experiences help young people build resilience, try new things, and discover strengths they may not have known they had.

Leadership development is also a cornerstone of the 4-H camping program. Each year, approximately 2,800 teens serve as Ohio 4-H camp counselors, working alongside adult volunteers and Extension professionals to plan and lead camp activities. These youth leaders spend months preparing—building teamwork skills, learning how to encourage younger campers, and gaining valuable experience in communication, responsibility, and problem-solving. Their efforts are supported by roughly 1,300 adult volunteers who assist with training, on-site supervision, and the overall camp experience. Together, these adults and teens create a safe, welcoming environment where every camper feels supported.

Beyond traditional county day and overnight camps, Ohio 4-H also offers several specialty camps that allow youth to dive deeper into specific interests. These include Sea Camp, Space Adventure Camp, Adaptive Adventures Camp, Forestry and Wildlife Conservation Camp, and others. These programs give youth the chance to explore science, nature, and outdoor recreation in unique and memorable ways. More information about specialty camps is available at [ohio4h.org/camp](https://ohio4h.org/camp).



*Youth participate in the Flying Squirrel activity during State 4-H Leadership Camp at 4-H Camp Ohio.*

No matter the setting, Ohio 4-H camps are structured to help youth build meaningful life skills including teamwork, self-reliance, communication, and leadership within a supportive community. Camps welcome both 4-H members and, in many cases, youth who are not currently enrolled in the program, making them an accessible entry point for families interested in learning more about 4-H.

To explore summer camp opportunities in your area, contact the Ohio State University Extension office in your county. County contact information can be found at [extension.osu.edu/lao](https://extension.osu.edu/lao).

# GOLF

## Outing



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12:00 P.M. Registration/Lunch

1:30 P.M. Shotgun Start

### INCLUDES:

- 18 Holes + Cart
- Lunch & Drinks
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# GUEST COLUMN What's Going on with Data Centers?

by Palmer Energy Company

Residents in our communities are asking questions. Do we have enough electric generation? Is the electric transmission grid at its limit? Are data centers driving my electric bills higher? Why are developers so interested in Ohio?

The above sentiments have been echoing across Ohio, with an onslaught of discussions happening in our communities.

Let's start with a review of what data centers are and the purpose they serve. Data centers are not new, but the consumer demand for more, better, and faster access to data continues to increase rapidly in our technology-driven environment. When you ask Siri or Alexa a question, the answer is expected to be instantaneous, requiring more data processing ability.

Physically, data centers are large facilities housing massive amounts of computing equipment requiring advanced electrical and mechanical systems. They operate 24/7/365, creating a constant electric demand. They also require round-the-clock monitoring to ensure the safety and security of the building and equipment, and the sensitive data being processed.

For perspective, the average single-family residence in Ohio consumes approximately 10,000 kilowatt-hours (kWh) per year. A 100-megawatt (MW) data center consumes roughly

876 million kWh per year, or enough to power over 87,000 homes for one year.

So why Ohio?

Virginia has long been the data center hub in the U.S. and globally, but as demand has grown, Virginia is tapped out of transmission and generating infrastructure. Developers and large companies were forced to look elsewhere.

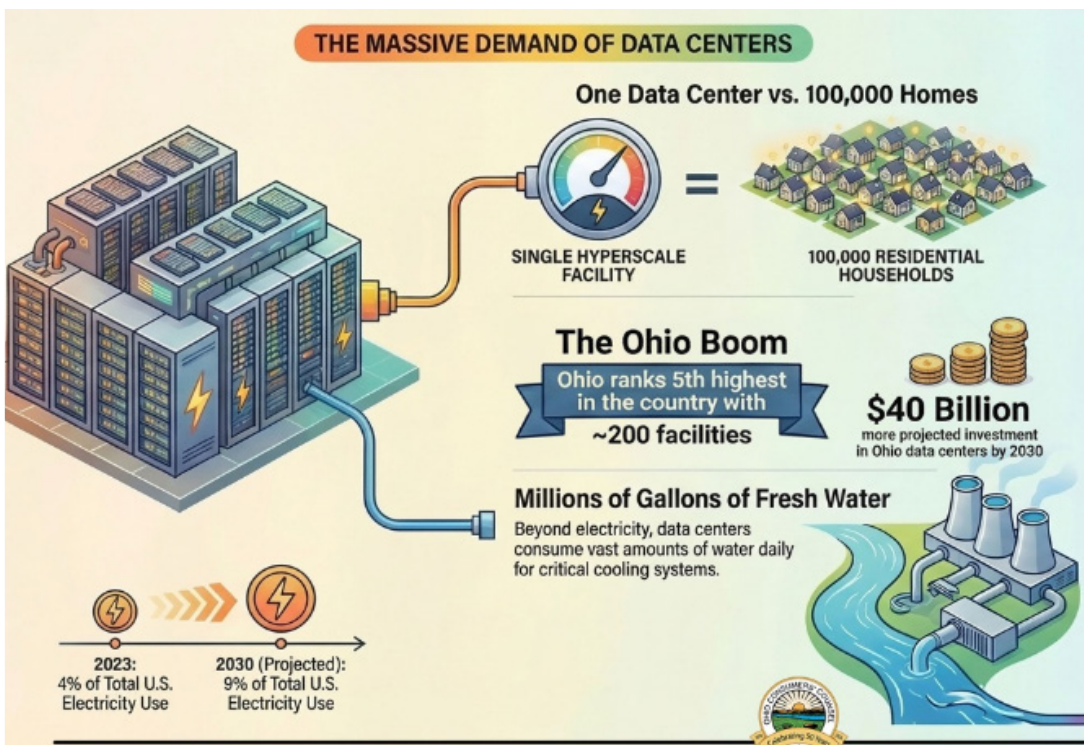
Ohio is centrally located and part of PJM – the Regional Transmission Organization serving more than 67 million customers across 13 states and D.C. PJM facilitates the transmission of power across its footprint, creating access to vast electric infrastructure.

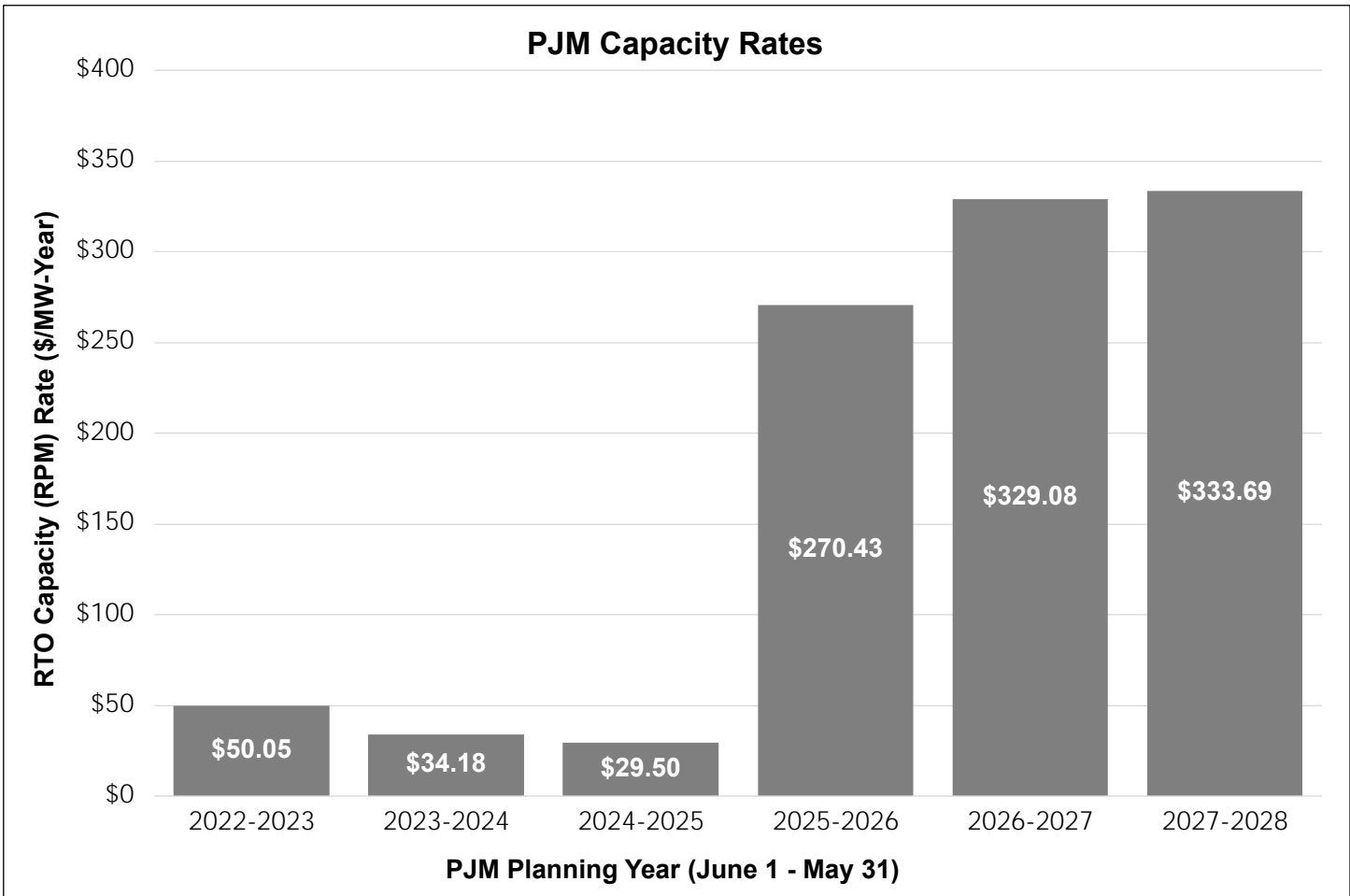
Ohio has several attractive resources that aren't available elsewhere, especially in rural areas across the state. Ohio boasts large amounts of flat, undeveloped land for a reasonable price. There are large tax incentives available to developers. Ohio has a mature deregulated electric and natural gas market, allowing data centers access to competitive pricing. Ohio also has access to large amounts of natural gas and high-pressure gas lines. Rural areas typically have closer access to high-voltage transmission lines and a higher interconnection potential for the future. These are all factors that support the needs of a potential data center.

Data centers are already here in Ohio, and more will be built, so what does that mean for electric costs?

PJM's number one priority is to ensure there is enough power supply available to meet demand. PJM does this by compensating generating plants that provide power on its system. This cost flows down to end users, including residents and small businesses, and is referred to as capacity costs. The chart below outlines rising capacity rates as data center demand has exploded throughout the U.S.

*Continued on next page*





The chief reason for the capacity cost increase is the data center load. In response to the capacity price spike, legislators and market participants realized the need for alternatives. This included restarting nuclear generating facilities, postponing planned generating plant retirements, and expediting the timeline for additional baseload generation. Data center developers now understand that to locate in Ohio, they need to bring their own generation assets fueled by natural gas, with the hope of interconnecting to PJM in the future.

While the intricacies of what may occur and what this means for the long-term impact on energy costs can only be speculated, steps are being taken to protect consumers from being responsible for additional costs related to the data center boom.

Information and Resources:  
<https://www.occ.ohio.gov/factsheet/quick-facts-data-centers-ohio>

<https://puco.ohio.gov/utilities/electricity/resources/data-centers>



**Your business is what fuels us and we're honored to have you as a partner.**

**Thank you for 15 years of partnership with the CCAO.**

**Kirkland Mizerek  
 Executive Vice President  
 Palmer Energy Company  
 419-539-9180**

[www.palmerenergy.com](http://www.palmerenergy.com)



Ashland County community leaders pictured at the child care center groundbreaking event.

## **GUEST COLUMN** Child Care is an Economic Development Issue and Counties Have a Role to Play

by Lynanne Gutierrez, President and CEO, Groundwork Ohio

Across Ohio, county commissioners are focused on growing their local economies, supporting employers, and keeping their communities competitive.

But one issue keeps surfacing, whether you're in a rural county, a fast-growing suburb, or an urban center, and it's quietly undermining all three: child care.

When families can't find or afford care, they miss work or leave jobs altogether. Employers see it in absenteeism, turnover, and unfilled positions. And for counties, it shows up in slower economic growth and a workforce that can't fully participate. This isn't theoretical. It's happening in every part of the state.

What's encouraging is that communities aren't waiting for a single statewide solution. They're working with local employers to test practical approaches that are making a difference right now.

A new publication, [Business Innovation in Child Care: Case Studies Across Ohio](#) pulls together examples from across the state and offers a useful look at what's actually working.

There's no one-size-fits-all model. The approaches reflect local leadership, local partnerships, and a willingness to solve the problem in ways that make sense for each community.

In Ashland County, the community foundation partnered with employers and the county commissioners to build a child care center in a business park — bringing care closer to where people work. The county helped fund the project, recognizing that child care is part of the infrastructure needed to support a workforce.

In Hancock County, local leaders, including the county, came together to form a collaborative that is expanding access, supporting working families who don't qualify for public assistance, and piloting a “tri-share” model that splits the cost of care among employees, employers, and public funding.

In Muskingum County, commissioners supported the creation of a new child care center and helped advance a broader partnership with employers to reduce costs for working families.

In Stark County, a group of employers stepped up to offer



Hancock County's cutest residents participate in the groundbreaking ceremony.

monthly child care subsidies — seeing retention rates as high as 100% among participating employees.

Different approaches. Same takeaway: communities that treat child care as a workforce issue rather than just a social service are seeing results.

These partnerships also show us that when employers are part of the solution, progress comes faster. Employers know where the gaps are. Counties understand the broader community impact. When those perspectives come together, you start to see solutions that are both practical and sustainable whether that's shared-cost models, flexible workplace policies, or targeted local investments.

None of this replaces the need for broader policy changes, but it does show what is possible when communities decide to move.

For county commissioners, the role isn't to solve this alone. It's to bring the right people to the table, understand the local need, and help move a solution forward. That could mean convening employers, using county resources strategically, or supporting a partnership that's already taking shape.

It starts with a simple recognition: child care is directly tied to workforce participation, business growth, and long-term economic health. It's an issue counties can't afford to ignore.

For commissioners who want to dig deeper or connect with others doing this work, [Groundwork Ohio](#) is a strong resource. They've been working with business leaders and communities across the state to surface what's working, share data, and help communities move from conversation to action.

Communities across Ohio are already showing what's possible. The question is whether we're willing to take the next step in our own community.

# Business Innovation in Child Care: Case Studies Across Ohio

APRIL 2026



Child care remains one of the biggest challenges facing working families and employers alike. While long-term public policy solutions are critical to making care more affordable and accessible, businesses and communities cannot afford to wait.

Across Ohio, employers are stepping forward with creative approaches to support their workforce and strengthen the communities where they operate. From partnerships with local providers to new benefit models and community investments, these efforts demonstrate how the public and private sectors can be part of the solution.

This series highlights **case studies from across Ohio** where businesses are helping address the child care challenge for their employees and their communities—and what we can learn from their leadership.



# GUEST COLUMN Ohio is Winning. The Work is Getting Harder.



## David Zak

President & CEO at the Ohio Economic Development Association

Thanks to the collaborative work of thousands of local, regional, and state economic development professionals and partners, [Ohio continues to position itself for long-term success](#), surging ahead with a steady stream of national rankings we can be proud of. [#1 in the country for infrastructure investment](#), [#2 in the country for cost of doing business](#), [#3 in the country for the number of economic development projects](#) (with several metros ranking in the Top 10; the most of any state for number of high-ranking rural counties), [#4 in site availability](#). Overall [#5 state for doing business](#). Within the last week, [Ohio rose in Chief Executive's rankings](#) of Best & Worst States for Business, rising from #12 in 2025 to #7 in 2026, now ahead of our Midwestern peers. Between megaprojects, FDI, workforce training programs, and STEP completions — the Top 10 list goes on.

### THE NEW OPPOSITION TO DEVELOPMENT

At the same time, things are getting harder. In the last few years, especially with the data center surge, opposition to development has become the default. Patrick Fitzgerald Fox, in his book *Mastering Land Use Politics: Dealing with NIMBYs, YIMBYs, and Covert Operatives* (2025), cites 2025 research that 73% of Americans “believe their communities are either overbuilt or fine as they are.” 57% of Americans “graded their communities poorly when it comes to deciding what gets built” and 32% “believe the process is simply unfair.” And more than 1 in 4 have actively opposed a development project in their community, while only 22% have ever actively supported one. This statement from Fox sums up his view: “The default answer to virtually every project is NO. You start with that and work to overcome it.”

I've been in economic development for more than 30 years, and I'm honored to represent the profession as the leader of the [Ohio Economic Development Association](#) (OEDA) – a non-profit, non-partisan professional association for economic developers established in 2005 (with roots going back to 1980!). We are the 2nd largest such association in the country, with over 1,000 practitioners and partners across the state as OEDA members.

In our most recent annual member survey (October 2025), almost two-thirds of respondents rated (negative) community sentiment as one of the biggest challenges they face — a factor that didn't even register in the 2024 survey. The reality of this is reflected in the increasing personal attacks in social media, letters to the editor, and public meetings we're seeing.

I spoke with an economic developer I've known for years who now needs security to attend public meetings because of death threats tied to a controversial project. And this past week, I came across the story of Ron Gibson, an Indianapolis City-Councilor whose house was shot at by someone who left a sign that said, “No Data Centers” (Gibson had publicly backed rezoning for a \$500M data center).

### WHO ARE THE PEOPLE & WORK BEING IMPACTED BY THIS?

I am proud of the work I've done over my career in both public government and non-profit roles, helping to grow the economy of this state. I'm even prouder of the work being done every day by the more than 6,300 economic practitioners across Ohio. And I'm grateful for the elected officials at every level and many partners who work alongside us to build prosperity in their communities.

The people doing this work don't directly benefit financially from a company expansion, location, or start-up project. They don't see a portion of the profits, get a cut of the action, or receive fees from businesses. They do it because they believe in the cause, in making a lasting positive impact on a place, in serving as ambassadors for and servants of their communities, and because it's their job.

Boiled down, the goal of economic development is to increase private-sector jobs, payroll, taxes, and investment and thereby improve the quality of life of the communities, regions, and states we serve. It means working directly with the private sector on projects, but also doing community development, workforce development, and any activities that remove obstacles to growth or create an attractive environment for progress. We close the gap between the resources a community has and what it could have. To promote and catalyze results that the market alone cannot. And thereby to ensure a community has a solid, strong, prosperous present and future.

Throughout my career, I've worked on projects that drew opposition: wind and energy, affordable housing, correctional facilities, landfills, industrial expansions, and more. People opposed the incentives, the location, the size, the look (or smell!), the environmental impact, or sometimes, just because they don't want any change at all. Opposition is nothing new. What's different now is how widespread the sentiment is, how often it surfaces, and how much it's affecting projects. When I attended the [International Economic Development](#)

[Council](#) Annual Conference last fall, the site selectors panel cited community support for the first time as one of the most important criteria — in addition to workforce, utilities and infrastructure, and incentives.

## **BUILDING COMMUNITY TRUST**

The question then, from my perspective, is how do we navigate this current situation? How do we continue the growth and progress, while addressing the concerns many people have and allowing them to meaningfully engage? On this topic, another book has been a focus for me: *Trust Builders: The Key to Thriving Communities* by [Amy Holloway](#). Holloway's work is built on the idea that the long-term prosperity of a community depends less on any single project than on the level of trust that exists between the residents, the businesses, and the public and civic institutions that serve them. Trust isn't a byproduct of good projects; it's the precondition for them. I agree with her, and have some thoughts to contribute to the conversation.

### **1. Engage early and often**

First, I think that the standard practice of engaging the public only after the fact (e.g. through press releases or city council meetings announcing project wins) is no longer sufficient. Economic development organizations and communities must engage much earlier in new and creative ways. While we can't violate confidentiality, we should find ways to have community conversations about what kinds of growth a place wants, tradeoffs, and expectations of how projects come together. To this end, there are some innovative things happening across the state, both in terms of formal planning (e.g., [Licking County's Framework](#)) and informal gatherings (Union County's town halls). Shout out to [Union County-Marysville Economic Development](#) and its many partners, as well as to [GROW Licking County Community Improvement Corporation](#), [planning NEXT](#), and the many partners involved in the Framework.

### **2. Increase transparency and education**

Second, I think we need to be not only a lot more transparent, but also a lot more educational on how land use, incentives, and economic development are done — as well as specific projects. Incentives are one of the most misunderstood tools in our toolkit, and we need to provide our communities with plain-language explanations of what an incentive is and what it's not, how it's tracked, and what happens if a company doesn't deliver. We need to communicate more about what the community gains and what it gives up. A great recent example of this is the [Van Wert Area Economic Development Corporation's](#) recent website on the [\\$10 billion Thor Equities project](#) as well as [Regional Growth Partnership's two-pager on data center work](#).

### **3. Make community engagement a core competency**

Third, community engagement needs to become a core competency of economic development. Two decades ago, workforce development became a common part of economic development. Within the last decade, community development work has become a critical part of economic development work (housing, energy systems, downtown revitalization, planning and zoning, etc.). Now, community engagement

needs to be added to the list. Listening, facilitating, navigating conflict are now critical skills. We need to be willing to go into places where we might not have support for our work. Economic development organizations like [Paulding County Economic Development](#) are sending out weekly newsletters to hundreds of community members, not just the board, to share what is happening, and build trust as a result.

### **4. Tell our own story**

Last, we need to be clearer about who we are and why we do this work. I said earlier that people in our profession don't personally profit from the projects they help make happen. Many people outside of economic development don't know that to be true. Some assume that someone somewhere is getting rich, and it's at the community's expense. We need to tell our own story — the mission, the public-service ethic, the long hours behind the scenes that most people we never see — because if we don't, someone else will tell that story, and they will get it wrong. I feel that OEDA has a real responsibility here, alongside our partners at IEDC and across the country, and it's work I intend to focus on in the weeks and months to come. I recommend exploring IEDC's work through the [ED Research Partners Program](#) and their "[What is Economic Development?](#)" primer.

## **THE WORK AHEAD**

Ohio's results over the last few years are no accident, and to continue we will have to face this challenge head on. Thousands of people all over this state have made our success a reality, choosing to do the difficult work for the communities they believe in and live in. That work is worth defending, and it's worth evolving. If Holloway is right that trust is the foundation of thriving communities, then our task is not simply winning projects, but earning and continuing to earn the trust that makes those projects possible in the first place.

Over the last 100 years, our profession has navigated hard moments, and I have no doubt we'll navigate this one — not by being quieter or by doing less; but by being present, resisting the urge to react defensively, and bringing more people along with us. OEDA, along with our partners at IEDC and across the country, has a real role to play here. I hope in the coming weeks and months to hear from practitioners, elected officials, and community members about what's working well in effectively engaging the public.

I believe strongly that our work is more important than ever. As Nobel Laureate Joseph Stiglitz said, "Development is about transforming the lives of people, not just transforming economies." The task before us is to bring more people into that work. The transformation brought about by economic development is no longer something we do to or just for people — it's something we earn the right to do with them.

# FEATURE America 250 County Pin Project Connects Ohioans Across All 88 Counties



## Steve Caraway

Managing Director of Enterprise and Retirement Services

As America approaches its 250th anniversary on July 4, 2026, Ohio counties have continued finding meaningful ways to celebrate the nation's history while highlighting the local pride that defines the Buckeye State. One effort that has resonated in communities across Ohio is the America 250 Ohio County Lapel Pin project.

What began earlier last year as a commemorative initiative has grown into a statewide success story. Thousands of limited-edition county pins have now been sold in every corner of Ohio, with residents, county officials, history enthusiasts, and collectors proudly wearing and sharing the symbols of their home counties.

Each pin features the outline of one of Ohio's 88 counties paired with the official America 250–Ohio logo, creating a distinctive keepsake that celebrates both local identity and the nation's upcoming semiquincentennial. The pins have served as more than collectibles — they have become conversation pieces connecting Ohioans to their communities and to the broader story of America.

The project has also highlighted the strong partnership between Ohio's counties and the America 250–Ohio Commission as preparations continue for the historic anniversary celebration. County leaders across the state have played an important role in supporting America 250 initiatives, helping ensure that Ohio's commemoration reflects the people, traditions, and stories that make each community unique.

“Ohio's counties appreciate the leadership and dedication of the America 250–Ohio Commission, which continues to lead the way in commemorating America's semiquincentennial across the state,” said Hamilton County Commissioner and CCAO President Denise Driehaus. “The Commission's work has been instrumental in uniting communities and highlighting Ohio's important role in our nation's story.”

Todd Kleismit, Executive Director of the America 250–Ohio Commission, said the county pin project has become a meaningful example of statewide collaboration and local engagement.

“The America 250 Ohio County Lapel Pins are a meaningful way for Ohioans to celebrate this historic milestone while honoring the local communities that help tell America's story,” Kleismit said. “We are grateful for the partnership with Ohio's counties and communities across the state as we continue working together to make this commemoration impactful, inclusive, and representative of all Ohioans.”

Proceeds from the project also support the CCAO Research and Educational Foundation, helping advance education and research efforts that benefit Ohio counties and residents. Although the project is beginning to wind down, interest in the pins remains strong as Ohioans continue preparing for America 250 celebrations throughout the state. Limited quantities remain available for purchase through the Ohio Statehouse Museum Shop in Columbus and online at [OhioCountyStore.com](http://OhioCountyStore.com) while supplies last.



*Pictured are the America 250 county pins on sale at the Ohio Statehouse Museum Shop*

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# COUNSELOR CORNER What to do When a County Employee's Social Media Post Causes a Public Demand for their Termination?

by Jeff Stankunas, Partner, Isaac Wiles

An increasing phenomenon is employers receiving complaints from members of the public about employees' social media posts. County employers must first ask whether the First Amendment protects the employee's social media "speech." Consider the recent case of Hook v. Rave, involving a tenured professor at the University of South Dakota. Following last year's assassination of political activist Charlie Kirk, Professor Hook posted to his private Facebook account:

"Okay. I don't give a flying f\*\*\* about this Kirk person. Apparently, he was a hate spreading Nazi. I wasn't paying close enough attention to the idiotic right fringe to even know who he was. I'm sorry for his family that he was a hate spreading Nazi and got killed. I'm sure they deserved better. Maybe good people could now enter their lives. But geez, where was all this concern when the politicians in Minnesota were shot? And the school shootings? And Capitol Police? I have no thoughts or prayers for this hate spreading Nazi. A shrug, maybe."

Hook subsequently removed the post and extended an apology.

However, the South Dakota Speaker of the House shared screenshots and publicly admonished Hook on Facebook:

"Yesterday, I was made aware of these hateful and vile comments made by a University of South Dakota professor regarding the death of Charlie Kirk and Charlie's family. I am disgusted by his remarks, and think they are unbecoming of someone who works for and represents our University."

Moreover, the university received "hundreds of calls and messages" commenting negatively about the comment and/or calling for the removal of Hook.

Shortly thereafter, Hook was sent an "intent to terminate" letter by the university.

Before the university could fire him, Hook filed a federal lawsuit, claiming that his Facebook post was protected speech under the First Amendment. The court agreed, issuing an order prohibiting his termination.

Why did the court do this?

First, it concluded that Hook spoke as a private citizen (not as a government

employee) and his speech was on a matter of public concern, making it protected. Hook's comments were also posted on his private account while at home. Even though Hook listed his occupation as professor at the University of South Dakota, the court concluded it did not show that his speech arose from his duties as a professor. Kirk was a public figure, and Hook's post "relat[ed] to a matter of political, social, or other concern to the community."

Second, the court determined that the university's efforts to terminate Hook were in retaliation for his protected speech. Indeed, the university sent him the "intent to terminate" letter because of his singular social media post and the demands for his removal.

The most important takeaway from this case is that courts generally will not allow public complaints to outweigh a public employee's right to free speech.

However, county employees still cannot say whatever they want on social media. Each case is different, and the law is complex.

Counties should always consult legal counsel before taking action against employees for their social media posts.

## Economic Development Is A Team Sport

**JobsOhio is your partner in showcasing the advantages of doing business in Ohio – the heart of it all.**

At JobsOhio, we're all about helping businesses and communities grow and thrive. As Ohio's private economic development partner, we help Ohio's businesses grow, and we work to bring new business investments and job opportunities to the state. We partner with local and state leaders and a network of seven regional partners who share our commitment to helping Ohio's communities succeed. Together, we provide businesses and communities of all sizes with world-class service and ensure they get the personalized support they need to stay competitive and grow.



Let's work together as Team Ohio to drive Ohio's competitive advantage. [jobsOhio.com/gov](http://jobsOhio.com/gov)



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# VOICE OF COUNTY LEADER

Heidi Maxwell, Morgan County Commissioner and CCAO Board Member

## How long have you been a county commissioner?

I have been a commissioner since January 2, 2025.

## Can you tell us about yourself?

I am married with three grown children and one 6 year old granddaughter and a grandson on the way! My husband and I just celebrated our 20th year in business at our Hunting & Fishing store in McConnelsville. Along with a hunting store we own two drive throughs and a pizza shop in Morgan County. I enjoy doing crossfit, traveling, playing cards and throwing darts, planting flowers and mostly spending time with my family.

## Why did you want to be a commissioner?

This is my first elected position and I ran because my children are grown now and I felt that this was a good time in my life to take this step. I have always enjoyed helping and working in the community and business so I felt this would be a good fit.

## What are you most proud of for having achieved in your time as commissioner?

I haven't been in the role very long but since my time we have completed a major water project that was a long time coming. We have secured funding for a jail expansion. We just recently had our first Habitat for Humanity house closing and were able to provide a beautiful home for a beautiful family.

## What has been the biggest challenge you've faced as a county commissioner?

One of the biggest challenges I've faced is learning to embrace the pace of progress. Many of our initiatives require patience, whether it's waiting on approvals, funding, or collaboration.

## What was the biggest surprise or adjustment after taking office?

I'd say the biggest surprise was how much time is spent communicating and building consensus behind the scenes. I had to adjust to the fact that progress isn't just about decisions in public meeting, but also about the ongoing relationships and conversations that keep things moving forward.

## One of the primary responsibilities of a commissioner is to develop a balanced budget and provide adequate resources to deliver county services. What has been one of the biggest challenges in that area?

One of the biggest challenges in balancing the needs of essential services with the reality of limited funds. Even in one year of budgeting, finding that balance between funding priorities like public safety, infrastructure, or social programs.

## Could you discuss your involvement with CCAO as well as the benefits of being an active member?

Though I'm fairly new to the CCAO, I've already attended a few meetings and found the biggest benefit is connecting with other commissioners. Whether I have questions or need guidance, being part of this network means I have a direct line to experienced peers who can offer support and insight.



CCAO President and Hamilton County Commissioner Denise Driehaus welcomes Maxwell to the CCAO Board of Directors at the January 2026 meeting.



## Healthier communities lead to healthier people

We believe that people are only as healthy as the communities they live in. Anthem values and nurtures our local ties — it's why we have been working with CEBCO since 2004. Together, we can improve overall health, advance equity, and strengthen communities.



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# CORSA NEWS

## Managing Costs, Protecting Members: CORSA's Path Forward



### Ali Redmond

CORSA Membership Services Manager

#### CORSA'S STRATEGIC MOVE TOWARD A CAPTIVE FOR EXCESS LIABILITY

Public entity risk pools across the country are increasingly turning to captive insurance structures to address rising costs and market volatility.

CORSA's formation of the Ohio Risk and County Alliance (ORCA) reflects this growing trend and positions the organization for greater financial stability and long-term success.



#### BUILDING THE FOUNDATION

ORCA was formally established on January 2, 2026, as a Vermont-domiciled captive, capitalized by CORSA to support a more strategic approach to risk financing, particularly for excess liability coverage.

Strong governance is central to this effort. ORCA's officers are:

**Former Fayette County Commissioner Daniel Dean, President**  
**Allen County Commissioner Cory Noonan, Vice President**  
**Ottawa County Commissioner Mark Stahl, Secretary**  
**Thomas Strup, Treasurer**

This leadership team provides the oversight and expertise necessary to guide ORCA as it begins to play a key role in CORSA's evolving program.

#### ADDRESSING A CHALLENGING MARKET

The move toward a captive is driven by significant increases in excess liability costs, fueled by hardening reinsurance markets, increasing claim severity, and reduced carrier capacity. These pressures have made traditional insurance purchasing less predictable and more expensive for risk pools.

#### WHY A CAPTIVE MAKES SENSE

Establishing ORCA allows CORSA to take a more proactive approach by:

- **Controlling Costs:** Retaining risk internally reduces reliance on volatile commercial markets.
- **Increasing Flexibility:** CORSA can adjust strategy and access reinsurance on its own terms.
- **Building Strength:** Premium dollars remain within the program, growing surplus over time.
- **Following Industry Trends:** Captives are becoming a best-practice solution among leading pools.

#### A POSITIVE STEP FORWARD

By creating ORCA, CORSA is shifting from reacting to market conditions to actively managing them. This approach enhances stability, strengthens financial resilience, and helps ensure long-term affordability for members.

As pooling continues to evolve, CORSA's investment in a captive structure demonstrates leadership and commitment to innovative, sustainable risk management.



Working with you  
to create the future  
you imagine.



Ohio County Employees Retirement Plan (OCERP)



### Mike Kindell

Interim Managing Director, Health and Wellness

#### CEBCO ANNUAL MEETING

The 22nd CEBCO Annual Membership Meeting was held on April 10 in Westerville/Polaris. During the meeting, Commissioners Jeff Benton (Delaware County), Steve Hess (Champaign County), Cory Noonan (Allen County), and David Painter (Clermont County) were elected to three-year terms for the CEBCO Board of Directors. Highlights of the program included a membership vote to approve changes to the CEBCO Code of Regulations, a review of the 2025 benefit year, and a presentation by our actuarial consultant, Aon, on the current healthcare landscape and the 2026 renewal calculation and process. In addition, special guest, Commissioner Lenny Eliason (Athens County), was recognized for his 20+ years of service on the CEBCO Board of Directors as its longest serving member and past president.

#### SURVEY RESULTS AND EARLIER RENEWAL MEETING DATE

CEBCO county commissioners and primary county contacts were surveyed a few months ago to get their feedback on the recent 2026 Renewal and Open Enrollment process. The results showed that counties wanted to have more time to make their renewal decision, additional health plan options to consider at renewal time, and more education about how their rate renewals are calculated. Consequently, the CEBCO Board voted to back up the renewal meeting date to July 31, 2026, giving counties an extra month to make their renewal option decisions. CEBCO is working with our actuary, Aon, to provide counties with more education and plan choices for their employees in the next renewal cycle.

#### WELLNESS PROGRAM

The vendor we retained to help review and improve our wellness program, emailed surveys to CEBCO county employees this spring. Over 2,000 survey responses were received and members provided feedback on current wellness program offerings and initiatives they felt would have a positive impact on their health and daily lives. Once survey results are analyzed, the vendor's recommendations for changes to the wellness program will be discussed at the Board Retreat this May. Meetings with county stakeholders will also be scheduled to gather more in-depth information. The goal is to implement enhancements to the program later in 2026.



Athens County Commissioner Lenny Eliason was recognized for his 20+ years of service to CEBCO ahead of his retirement at the end of 2026. Pictured: CCAO Managing Director of IT/Operations, Eliason, CCAO Executive Director Cheryl Subler, and CEBCO Interim Managing Director Mike Kindell.

#### NEW CEBCO BENEFIT SPECIALIST

We are pleased that Rachel Bishop joined the CEBCO staff in March as our new benefit specialist. Rachel is a graduate of Ohio University and is licensed in Accident, Health, Life & Annuities and in Property & Casualty insurance. She has experience in benefits coordination and spent the last few years of her career working for the Ohio Dental Association.

#### WELLNESS TOPICS

Wellness topics that are being emphasized this spring include: Help Understanding Your Mental Health, Women's Health, and Men's Health. Please use the following links to learn simple steps to help improve your and your family's overall health.

[Mental Health Resources](#)

[Let's Talk Women's Health](#)

[Men's Health](#)

# SERVICE CORPORATION NEWS

## The Rising Cost of Emergency Medical Transport: a Growing Concern for Ohio Counties and Their Workforce



COUNTY COMMISSIONERS  
ASSOCIATION OF OHIO  
SERVICE CORPORATION



Across Ohio and the nation, county leaders are facing a convergence of challenges that extend beyond

traditional budgeting and into the daily well-being of their workforce. Among the most pressing — and often overlooked — is the rising cost of emergency medical transportation. Whether by ground or air ambulance, these services are becoming more expensive, less predictable, and increasingly tied to structural changes in the healthcare system itself.

For Ohio County Commissioners, this trend is not abstract. It directly affects employee financial security, workforce health, and ultimately, the attractiveness of public sector employment.

### COSTS AND COMPLEXITY ON THE RISE

Emergency medical transportation costs have increased significantly over the past decade, driven by a mix of inflation, hospital closures, more complex care, longer transports, equipment costs, and uneven insurance reimbursement structures.<sup>1,2</sup> Even without increase in utilization, the costs for ambulance rides have increased 32%, affecting both employee financial exposure and budget predictability.<sup>3</sup>

A key issue is the frequency of out-of-network billing for ground ambulance services. Even with Ohio's strong surprise-billing protections, coverage depends heavily on how a county's health plan is structured.<sup>4</sup> Fully insured plans are more clearly protected under state law, while self-funded plans may fall under federal rules that notably exclude ground ambulance services from comprehensive protection.

The result is a patchwork of financial exposure where two employees in neighboring counties — or even within the same county — may face dramatically different out-of-pocket costs for the same emergency medical transport.

### THE IMPACT OF FACILITY CLOSURES

Compounding the issue is a structural shift in healthcare access: the closure of hospitals and emergency departments, particularly in rural and underserved areas. These closures are not just reducing access; they're increasing the distance and time required for emergency transport.<sup>2</sup>

Operational data from Ohio shows that EMS incidents in lower-density counties already involve significantly longer total response times than those in urban areas.<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately, those longer transports directly translate into higher costs, as ambulance billing is often mileage-based.

For counties, this creates a dual burden: higher system-wide EMS costs and increased financial exposure for employees who rely on these services in emergencies.

### FINANCIAL ANXIETY AND DELAYED CARE

Beyond the financial and operational metrics, there's a more subtle but equally important consequence: the psychological impact on employees. 1 in 4 Americans didn't call an ambulance during a medical emergency for fear of costs according to a YouGov survey<sup>6</sup>

When workers are uncertain about the cost of calling an ambulance, hesitation can set in. Employees may delay seeking care, opt for less appropriate transportation, or experience significant stress during and after an emergency event. Even when protections exist, the complexity of billing rules and the fear of unexpected charges can undermine confidence, meaning delayed care, worse outcomes, and higher long term costs.<sup>6</sup>

In counties where high-deductible health plans are common, even in-network cost-sharing can represent a substantial financial burden. This creates a scenario where employees are technically covered but still feel exposed.

For employers, this anxiety can manifest in reduced morale, increased financial stress among staff, and challenges in recruitment and retention.<sup>6</sup> Public sector workers expect stability; uncertainty around emergency care costs runs counter to that expectation.

### WHAT COUNTY LEADERS CAN DO

While legislative frameworks provide an important foundation, they do not fully eliminate risk — particularly for ground ambulance services. This leaves county leaders with a critical role in bridging the gap.

Forward-thinking counties are exploring strategies such as:

- Structuring health plans to treat all emergency medical transport as in-network
- Reducing or eliminating deductibles for emergency services
- Partnering directly with local EMS providers to stabilize cost
- Offering supplemental protections that remove out-of-pocket exposure

These approaches are not just financial decisions — they are workforce investments.

*Continued on page 31*

# CCAO RESEARCH AND EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION NEWS

## County Classic Golf Outing Continues to Support Future Public Service Leaders



### Tim Hoverman

Managing Director of IT/Operations



COUNTY COMMISSIONERS  
ASSOCIATION OF OHIO  
RESEARCH & EDUCATIONAL  
FOUNDATION

CCAO is preparing to tee off for another exciting County Classic Golf Outing on Thursday, July 10, at Glenross Golf Club in Delaware County. More than just a day on the course, the annual event continues to make a meaningful impact by supporting the CCAO Scholarship Program and investing in Ohio's future public service leaders.

Over the past three years, proceeds from the County Classic have helped fund \$30,000 in scholarships awarded to 15 students representing 14 Ohio counties. Each recipient has demonstrated a commitment to public service and plans to pursue careers dedicated to serving their communities and the people of Ohio.

The scholarship program reflects CCAO's ongoing commitment to encouraging the next generation of county and community leaders. Through the support of counties, sponsors, and participants, the County Classic has become an important part of that mission.

This year's outing will once again bring together county officials, partners, and supporters from across Ohio for a day of networking, camaraderie, and friendly competition.

#### County Classic Golf Outing Details

- Date: Thursday, July 10, 2026
- Time: 12:00 p.m. Registration and lunch, 1:30 p.m. Shotgun start
- Where: Glenross Golf Club, 231 Club House Drive, Delaware, OH 43015

Participants will enjoy: 18 holes with cart, lunch and drinks, contests and prizes!

CCAO encourages counties, partners, and supporters to join this year's event and help continue investing in students who aspire to careers in public service. To register, visit [HTTPS://BIRDEASE.COM/COUNTYCLASSIC](https://birdease.com/countyclassic)

Contact CCAO's Tim Hoverman at [thoverman@ccao.org](mailto:thoverman@ccao.org) to learn more.



Team CORSA featuring Ottawa County Commissioner Mark Stahl, CORSA Managing Director John Brownlee, Adam Balls, former Fayette County Commissioner Dan Dean



Clermont County Commissioner David Painter, Williams County Commissioner Scott Lirot and wife Teresa Lirot, Greene County Commissioner Dick Gould, CCAO Consultant John Leutz

by Empower

When it comes to building wealth for retirement, one principle stands out: compound earnings. Starting early — even with modest contributions — gives your savings more time to grow.

Compound earnings means you can earn returns not only on your original contributions but also on the growth that accumulates over time. The cycle can build momentum the longer you stay invested.

Consider a simple example using a hypothetical 6% annual return for illustrative purposes (your actual returns will differ and are not guaranteed):

- Saver A invests \$100 per month for 40 years and could have an ending balance with roughly \$199,149.
- Saver B invests \$200 per month for 20 years and could have an ending balance with roughly \$92,408.

Even with the same total contributions of \$48,000, Saver A may retire with a higher ending balance because those early dollars had more time to grow with the potential of compounding. Starting early is powerful.

You don't need to be wealthy to build wealth. Here are a few ways to consider putting compounding to work:

- Start now with whatever you can afford.
- Increase contributions when you receive raises or pay off debt.
- Stay invested through ups and downs so compounding isn't interrupted.

Small, steady contributions can grow into a meaningful retirement nest egg. Your future self will thank you. Log in at [ocerp457.com](https://ocerp457.com) to review your current contribution rate and consider setting an automatic increase each year.

*FOR ILLUSTRATIVE PURPOSES ONLY. This hypothetical example is provided for educational purposes and does not reflect a particular investment or account. It assumes a 6% annual rate of return and monthly contributions made consistently over time. Actual returns will vary and are not guaranteed, and investment values can fluctuate, including loss of principal. This example does not reflect the impact of taxes, inflation, fees, or expenses (such as investment management fees or fund expenses), which would reduce results and could change the outcomes shown.*



**CPV Retail is proud to be a CCAO Corporate Partner.**

As a supplier for the CCAOSC electricity program, we're focused on delivering energy to help government offices run seamlessly, powering strong communities and helping Ohio continue to thrive.

[www.cpvretail.com](https://www.cpvretail.com)

Continued from page 29

### CLOSING THE GAP

Emergency medical transport is no longer a peripheral concern. It sits at the intersection of healthcare access, financial risk, and employee well-being. As costs rise and system pressures mount, counties that proactively address this issue will be better positioned to protect their workforce and maintain operational resilience.

MASA® (Medical Access & Service Advantage) specializes in providing protection from out-of-pocket costs for emergency medical transportation — both ground and air — regardless of network status. For Ohio counties navigating these challenges, understanding the full scope of risk is the first step toward meaningful protection.

To better understand your county's potential exposure—and how to close these gaps—connect with Earle Toole, Regional Sales Executive, MASA Public Sector, at [etoole@masamts.com](mailto:etoole@masamts.com) for a brief consultation and customized assessment.

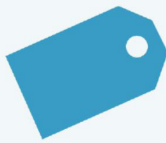
- 1: MASA, Emergency medical transportation: The true costs — and how they're rising, 2024
- 2: MASA, An unseen crisis: hospital closures throughout the U.S. limit access to care, 2024
- 3: Health Care Cost Institute, Commercial Prices for Ground Ambulance are Double Medicare Rates, 2024
- 4: Ohio Rev. Code Ann. § 3902.50–3902.54
- 5: Ohio Emergency Medical Services, Ohio Trauma Registry Annual Reports
- 6: MASA, The hidden cost of hesitation: Why fear of calling 911 should worry employees, 2025



# Save more for your future

## Use credit wisely

Credit cards may cost you a lot more than you realize.<sup>1</sup>



**\$2,000**

Purchase price



**\$3,200**

Actual price

## Help increase your monthly income in retirement

Saving just \$25 more a month can become \$180 a month in retirement.<sup>2</sup>



## Looking for ways to save?

There may be some “hidden” costs to save money on your monthly bills and increase your retirement contributions.

### Energy-efficient tax breaks

Americans cashed in on \$8.4 billion<sup>3</sup> in tax breaks by making their homes more energy efficient last year. Qualifying improvements for tax credits include adding insulation, energy-efficient windows, and electric heat pumps. The average American spends \$2,000 a year on energy, so these steps can help lower long-term utility bills.



### Stocking up

In the last year, to save money, 53% of Americans switched to a generic brand, 34% downloaded a store’s app for rewards/coupons, and 21% purchased a store membership to get benefits like free shipping.<sup>4</sup>



### Checking subscription services

Did you sign up for a free trial and forget to cancel? More than half of us forget to hit *Cancel*, and for nearly 1 in 5 consumers, that happens more than twice a year.<sup>5</sup>



FOR ILLUSTRATIVE PURPOSES ONLY.



➤ Visit [learningfromempower.com](http://learningfromempower.com) to access helpful information, videos, calculators, and more. Scan this code with your camera to go there.

Ohio County Employees Retirement Plan (OCERP)





## CCAO LEADERSHIP

### EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

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<b>1st Vice President</b>	Casey Kozlowski, Ashtabula County Commissioner
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<b>Member</b>	Shannon Jones, Warren County Commissioner
<b>Member</b>	Glenn Miller, Henry County Commissioner
<b>Immediate Past President</b>	David Painter, Clermont County Commissioner

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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<b>Wade Westfall</b>	Miami County Commissioner
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## CORSA LEADERSHIP

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<b>Director</b>	Gary Scherer, Pickaway County Commissioner
<b>Director</b>	Dave Wilson, Guernsey County Commissioner

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## CEBCO LEADERSHIP

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

<b>President</b>	Cory Noonan, Allen County Commissioner
<b>Vice President</b>	Harry Brady, Huron County Commissioner
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<b>Member</b>	David Painter, Clermont County Commissioner
<b>Member</b>	Steve Robinson, Union County Commissioner
<b>Member</b>	Mike Welch, Ashland County Commissioner
<b>Member</b>	Bartley Westfall, Williams County Commissioner

# CCAO COMMITTEES

## **Agriculture and Rural Affairs**

Chair: Jonathan Hofstetter, Wayne County Commissioner  
Vice Chair: Tony Anderson, Fayette County Commissioner

## **General Government and Operations**

Chair: John O'Grady, Franklin County Commissioner  
Vice Chair: Bill Pursel, Knox County Commissioner

## **Human Services**

Chair: Kathryn Whittington, Ashtabula County Commissioner  
Vice Chair: Carolyn Rice, Montgomery County Commissioner

## **Jobs, Economic Development and Infrastructure**

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Vice Chair: Judy Dodge, Montgomery County Commissioner

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Vice Chair: Terry Britton, Highland County Commissioner

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Vice Chair: Kevin Boyce, Franklin County Commissioner

## **Small County Affairs**

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Vice Chair: Tony Montgomery, Pike County Commissioner

## **Taxation and Finance**

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Vice Chair: Steve Davis, Fairfield County Commissioner

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Co-Vice Chair: Aaron Flatter, Darke County Commissioner  
Co-Vice Chair: Glenn Miller, Henry County Commissioner

## **Water Quality Task Force**

Co-Chair: Pete Gerken, Lucas County Commissioner  
Co-Chair: Beth Seibert, Allen County Commissioner

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County Leader, CCAO's quarterly e-magazine, provides an in-depth look at the news, programs and policies affecting Ohio's 88 counties. The e-magazine also showcases our members, offers best county practices as well as ways to enhance the state-county partnership practices and shares the offerings of the association. If you have questions or story submissions, contact us at [comms@ccao.org](mailto:comms@ccao.org) or 614-221-5627.