

# Hamilton County CEDS 2022 Update Executive Summary

Comprehensive · Economic · Development · Strategy



**Scac**  
NVILLE CULTURAL ARTS CENTER

Theatre

Film

Music Dance

# OVERVIEW

Approaching the end of 2019, Hamilton County had positive momentum entering into a new decade. Additional County government funding in the form of a newly approved sales tax, low unemployment and 10 years of steady growth following the Great Recession of 2007-08 provided reason for hope. Then, the COVID-19 pandemic spread across the globe and everything changed. At the time of this writing, the world economy, much less Hamilton County's economy is uncertain. The true long-term impact on the County, its residents and businesses will not be known for some time.



Since the recommendations in this document come from a year-long process that received much input from citizens, business leaders, local governments and other experts, we should not ignore the results of the process. While there will be new problems to solve as a result of the pandemic, many of the problems that are addressed in this document were around before the pandemic and will still be around and likely exacerbated following the retreat of the virus. When the impact of the "Great Lockdown" is better known, the County can revisit this document and update it with new ideas and new strategies. In the meantime, we look to this document to guide our efforts on the problems and opportunities that we can impact.



Kruger - Over the Rhine

The Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) is a blueprint for this new effort. While the future is uncertain, the 5 years since the last CEDS were a mixed bag of great success and troubling realities. The Banks, Over-the-Rhine (OTR) and Uptown areas have all seen major capital investments. Other suburban locations and parts of the City of Cincinnati have seen re-births and new found identities. And, while positive growth continues in parts of the County, there is still a great need to focus on those communities and areas that have not benefited from the past 10 years of recovery. Even though the County as a whole seems relatively stable, some of the older suburban communities in Hamilton County continue to see economic stagnation and even decline. Many of these communities are members of the First Suburbs Consortium. Some can be found in the central and north central parts of the County. Some communities have seen strong or modest growth, but economic success in many others has been lacking.



Certain demographic groups have also been left-behind when we talk about recovery and re-birth. African-American and other minority communities have not benefited in the same way that white-majority communities have benefited. Low-income communities have not benefited in the same way that more well-to-do communities have fared.

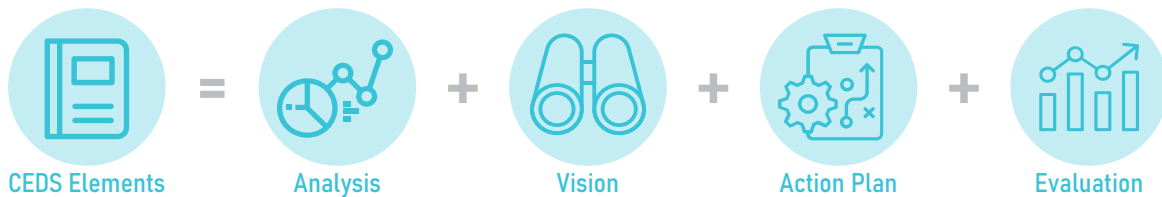


As stated in the previous CEDS, Hamilton County's current economic situation is mixed. The County has a diversified local economy with strong business clusters. Before the pandemic occurred the County's, low unemployment rate tracked with the rest of the nation and was lower than Ohio's rate. Population in the County had stabilized and has seen a 3.5% increase since 2010. The question still remains, however, whether the positive trends in certain areas like Downtown, OTR and Uptown are sustainable and whether they will spread to other areas and communities. Redevelopment is happening in the City of Cincinnati and in well-positioned suburban communities. Some communities, however, are financially constrained and are limited in how they can partner with the private sector on redevelopment projects. Finally, the County faces major infrastructure needs. With the proposed construction of a new Brent Spence Bridge and a list of other transportation projects in need of funding or support, it is critical for the County to determine its role in prioritized projects given the limited resources available.

In addition, Hamilton County faces similar issues of other urban, Midwestern communities when attempting to assemble marketable, available land for development. Hamilton County has worked over the past several years to pursue strategies to deal with brownfield and greyfield properties that require significant investment. The properties can also require the added step of working with multiple property owners to assemble large sites for development. In order to continue competing with the greenfield space available in surrounding counties, Hamilton County must continue these efforts. Hamilton County also has functionally obsolete structures in their retail and office stock and a shortage of contemporary industrial properties. These needs will also need to be addressed in order to retain existing businesses and attract new ones. Strategic, targeted economic development efforts, such as The Port of Greater Cincinnati Development Authority's (The Port) Industrial Revitalization Strategy, are critical to continuing Hamilton County's economic rebound. This detailed CEDS outlines the County's five-year plan for improving the environment for job creation and economic growth, highlighting specific initiatives worthy of the County's investment as well as the partnerships and resources that can assist the County moving forward. Through feedback from local communities, County residents, local businesses and other stakeholders, this CEDS will guide the economic development efforts in Hamilton County over the next five years.

## PROCESS

Each CEDS is unique, reflecting the specific challenges and opportunities of a certain location and time. This Plan contains four main elements: Analysis, Vision, Action Plan, and Evaluation. Stakeholders have provided input via interviews and four stakeholders meetings. In addition, a 30-day public comment period will allow the general public an additional chance to weigh in on the plan. A draft copy will be accessible via the internet on the County and Hamilton County Economic Development Office (HCEDO) websites and will be introduced at a public meeting of the Board of County Commissioners.



## GOALS

The following goals were established by the participants in the CEDS Process:

- Develop, train, and retain workforce with attention to STEAM employment
- Modernize obsolete real estate across the region (targeted to the central, north central and first suburban communities of Hamilton County)
- Enhance networked transportation investments
- Align education and training system to market needs
- Increase true collaboration among economic development agencies
- Retain and expand existing businesses
- Attract “new to market” businesses in emerging sectors
- Support quality of life investments to enhance regional and national profile as a great place to live and do business
- Address water and sewer capacity and flood control issues

# ACTION PLAN

The Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy provides a resource for Hamilton County and local officials when contemplating economic development policy and initiatives. Hamilton County currently funds several entities to promote and carry out specific economic development programs for the County. Each entity has well defined roles and responsibilities which are coordinated and supervised by the County Administration on behalf of the Board of County Commissioners.

## Included Organizations

- HCEDO
- The Port of Greater Cincinnati Development Authority
- REDI Cincinnati
- Cincinnati USA Convention & Visitors Bureau
- Ohio-Kentucky-Indiana Regional Council of Governments (OKI)

Each of these entities plays a critical role in promoting economic development in Hamilton County. The following recommendations provide a blueprint for Hamilton County and these entities when delivering economic development services. They are also a resource for local municipalities and townships and other organizations who promote economic development. Political jurisdictions across the County have expressed a desire to work more closely with these agencies on pre-development and support for their economic development needs. Many of the smaller jurisdictions in the County do not have their own economic development professionals and rely heavily on these regional resources.

## Human Development

A

**WORKFORCE** - Hamilton County and local workforce professionals need to continue to work together to address the shortfall of workers available to fill job vacancies. In addition to traditional workforce programs, this should include supporting efforts that bring alternative solutions to finding workers and better access to jobs via improved transportation (e.g. Issue 7), childcare (e.g. Preschool Promise) and healthcare.

B

**INCLUSION** - Efforts like the Hamilton County Office of Economic Inclusion and other similar efforts in the private sector are starting to take hold. Government and the private sector are making concerted efforts to go the extra mile to access traditionally underrepresented women and minority groups when hiring. While some companies state that they do not discriminate, efforts are needed to not only not discriminate, but to make pro-active efforts to broaden the pool of applicants for jobs where they are often underrepresented. The County should support Initiatives like the City of Cincinnati Mayor's Task Force on Immigration that welcomes immigrants as workers and entrepreneurs in the local economy.

C

**DEGREE ATTAINMENT** - Leverage the State of Ohio programs mentioned in the annual Ohio Attainment report to increase degree attainment in post-secondary education.

D

**LIVABLE WAGE** - Promote Livable Wage Jobs with companies via information sharing on how other companies are solving their hiring problems by paying more. Also, include support for companies that provide livable wage jobs when considering tax incentives and tax credits for private companies. See Osceola County, FL's Living Wage Certification Program. We need to also challenge all our current businesses to raise their wages to make sure all their employees are making a living wage.

E

**COLLEGE STUDENT RETENTION** - Support programs that retain the younger workforce that matriculates to our Universities, but often leave after obtaining their degrees. One such program, the Orr Fellowship in Indianapolis, seeks out talented college seniors and places them with major employers in Indianapolis for a two-year paid entry level job. The University of Cincinnati also has one of the best Co-op programs in the country and is another example of connecting students to jobs with employers in the local community.

F

**TECHCRED** - The County and others should refer organizations to this state-run program that allows employers to send employees and prospective employees to receive technology-focused credentials. Employers are reimbursed up to \$2000 for successful completion of the program.

G

**DIGITAL DIVIDE** - Before the pandemic, students were falling behind due to a lack of having the tools to stay connected in today's tech-based learning environment. During the pandemic it became even more obvious that students from low-income neighborhoods were suffering from a lack of access to the internet and the devices that are critical to a good education. Through recent federal funding, Hamilton County has been able to fund several public wi-fi projects that have helped provide access in low-income neighborhoods. Training programs like Code for Kids, Robotics Summer Camp and The Gaskins Foundation are three local STEM focused programs that can also help children from low-income backgrounds learn more about technology.

H

**WORK FROM HOME & OFFICE HYBRID** - Employers are being faced with a new normal when determining where their employees work and how flexible they will need to be when providing options to work from home. Flexibility may be an important consideration when retaining employees during the "Great Resignation." In a market where there was already low unemployment, an article in the Harvard Business Review points out that there has been a 20% increase in the resignation rate among 30-45 year-old employees. Employers need to be aware of this when trying to retain or hire employees. Communities also need to be aware that some employees who used to work in their community may work from home more resulting in less income tax revenue and the impact that will have on budgets and services provided.

## Physical Development

A

**PROPERTY CONTROL OF UNDERPERFORMING PROPERTIES** – Partner with the Landbank to get control of properties in communities that are blighted or no longer in productive use. If a community does not control strategic properties, they are at the mercy of property owners and developers who are not as concerned about the highest and best use of a property from the community's perspective.

B

**BLIGHT REMOVAL (INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL, OBSOLETE INSTITUTIONAL, etc.)** – Hamilton County needs to continue to partner with local communities to fund the removal of blight and the clearing of properties for future development. Utilize the experience and expertise of the Landbank to understand how to best identify and enforce code compliance issues as a first step toward blight removal.

C

**INFRASTRUCTURE AND TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENTS** – Hamilton County's road, bridges and general infrastructure (e.g., MSD) need repairs and maintenance. Since Issue 7 was passed, this local effort to fund infrastructure and transportation improvements could be a complement to the State of Ohio's gas tax increase to improve and maintain Ohio's roads and bridges. Hamilton County should also leverage local dollars to access other State and Federal programs including the \$1.1 trillion federal infrastructure bill.

D

**REVITALIZATION PLANS** – Hamilton County's communities (especially those that are economically disadvantaged) need to form revitalization plans on how to redevelop their community with a particular focus on underperforming properties. HCEDO and the County should work together to inform communities of the different funding sources available to help with their plans including CEDAP, the Community Revitalization Grant, CDBG, ARPA funds from the federal government and any other programs that can help them activate these plans. Consideration should also be given to fund the Greater Cincinnati Community Improvement Corporation, local CICs and other organizations that can help local communities with capacity issues when it comes to implementing their plans.

OVERVIEW

PROCESS

GOALS

ACTION PLAN

E

**RETAIL DEVELOPMENT** – Specific attention should be focused on underperforming retail properties due to the shift in consumer spending. While many retail shifts were happening before the pandemic, these trends were accelerated during the pandemic and many retail properties will see permanent decline and obsolescence. Many malls and other retail sites are and should be considered for newer more contemporary mixed-use developments that bring office, retail and residential to the same location. There are many examples of where this has been successful. Other creative ways to promote retail should also be pursued County-wide. Some examples include the use of outdoor dining, parklets and street calming in downtown, Over-the-Rhine and other communities. These strategies provide additional seating and allow for more spacing when social distancing is required.

F

**REDEVELOPMENT OF UNDERPERFORMING SITES** – The County needs to partner with local communities and developers in a public-private partnership to redevelop these underperforming sites. We should also be encouraging local jurisdictions to consider innovative mixed-use projects when they are developing new projects. The Port, with their Industrial Revitalization Strategy, can serve as a critical partner in these efforts.

G

**HOUSING** – Hamilton County has a need for more housing options, in particular, affordable housing. There is a shortage both locally and nationally of all types of housing. The County should promote the construction and renovation of housing where we have underperforming properties in locations that are walkable and close to transportation.



## Business Development

A

**REVISE INCENTIVES** – Hamilton County should continue to offer greater incentives in distressed communities and especially the First Suburbs. These incentives should reward companies that provide good livable wage jobs, promote inclusion in hiring and contracting, actively pursue programs that establish alternative workforce solutions and that implement LEED/green construction.

B

**SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT** – The County should continue to support the local economy by supporting start-up companies that create good jobs and especially jobs of the future (e.g., Cincinnati Innovation District, HCEDO's business incubator, and other business support and start-up programs like the Urban League's SBDC/WBEC, CincyTech, Cintrifuse, Hillman Accelerator, Mortar, etc.).

C

**SECOND STAGE BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT** – Support programs such as HCEDO's Office of Innovation and Creativity that provide support to second stage businesses in the form of technical assistance, strategic information and connections that help businesses grow and succeed.

D

**INCLUSION** – Hamilton County should continue to promote programs that assist/coach minority, women, LGBTQ and small businesses – programs like the Cincinnati Minority Business Collaborative, Cincinnati Chamber Minority Business Accelerator, Hillman Accelerator, Economic Community Development Institute/Women's Business Center, Mortar, Black Career Women's Network, Latina Entrepreneur Academy, etc.

E

**BUSINESS DISTRICT ASSISTANCE** – Assist businesses in local business districts with business coaching and financing (e.g., HCEDO Small Business Assistance Program, SBA loans, the Port's Public Finance Programs, Hamilton County Community Revitalization Program, and programs like Akron's Great Streets and Rubber City Match programs). Many small businesses (e.g. bars, restaurants, salons, etc.) were impacted by the pandemic and were helped by small business grants that were provided by the County via federal funding. Once these grants run out, these same small businesses will continue to need assistance.

## F

**INDUSTRY 4.0** – Industry 4.0 or the fourth industrial revolution includes the trend towards automation and data exchange in manufacturing technologies and processes which include cyber-physical systems (CPS), the internet of things (IoT), industrial internet of things (IIOT), cloud computing, cognitive computing and artificial intelligence. Technology and Innovation have always been a part of the economy and the advancement of society, but the last decade has seen hyper advancement of the impact that technology plays in the economy. This impact is seen not only in our manufacturing sector, but also in the distribution, retail and office sectors of society. In order to have an economy of the future, Hamilton County must continue to promote innovation among businesses with programs like the Uptown Innovation District, the HCEDO Office of Innovation, Techsolve and other programs that help advance technology in business.

## G

**BUSINESS RETENTION & EXPANSION** – As an urban county with limited available land for retention and expansion of local companies, the County should continue to focus on the retention and expansion of existing businesses. Hamilton County's Business Retention Council should continue to coordinate the efforts of local communities, the County and other economic development entities like REDI Cincinnati.

## H

**BUSINESS ATTRACTION EFFORTS** – REDI Cincinnati has been tasked by the County Administration to make a concerted effort to attract companies to sites in Hamilton County that have been prepared for future development. REDI should work with Hamilton County communities and HCEDO to target specific sites and should work to attract new domestic and foreign based companies to Hamilton County. Business attraction efforts can include not only larger companies but smaller companies, as well. Hamilton County is a quality destination not only for work, but offers a high quality of life, making it an attractive location for entrepreneurs. The Port's available and site ready industrial properties further serve as tools to attract high-wage manufacturing businesses.

## I

**CINCINNATI INNOVATION DISTRICT** – The University of Cincinnati has partnered with the State of Ohio and regional innovation partners to launch the Cincinnati Innovation District. The partners include: State of Ohio, JobsOhio, City of Cincinnati, Uptown Consortium and Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center. The University of Cincinnati has implemented a highly accelerated approach to address regional economic needs. The Cincinnati Innovation District will require various types of spaces for partners and stakeholders to occupy and meet their goals. These types of spaces are not readily available therefore the initiative will require acquisition and renovation of various locations. EDA funding will be pursued in order to develop the district appropriately.

## J

**AMATEUR SPORTS TOURISM** – Amateur Sports Tourism is an important component of the economic development industry. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, an entity called the Cincinnati USA Sports Commission served the role of organizing and operating some amateur sports events in the region. During the pandemic, this organization ceased operations. Commission events annually generated 100,000 visitors, \$10 million in economic activity, and over 25,000 total room nights in the region. If the County wishes to support an entity to promote amateur sports, it may want to revisit the Sports Commission or a similar entity to take on this task.

## Regional Development

A

**COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS TOWARDS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT** - The County should continue to promote collaboration among local governments, local economic development entities and align economic development strategies at all levels of government.

B

**BENCHMARKING SERVICE MODEL AGAINST OTHER COMMUNITIES** - Local communities need to perform benchmarking activities to ensure that their local service model is efficient and the best use of taxpayer dollars. Inefficient government can strain the ability of local communities to invest in their own redevelopment. This is addressed in an article on the International City Managers Association's website titled Crisis Intervention: First Suburb City Managers Are Our First Responders in a Declining Growth Environment authored by former Silverton Village Manager, Tom Carroll and University of Cincinnati professor, Dr. Brandi Blessett.

C

**SHARED SERVICES** - Hamilton County has been promoting the concept of Shared Services for many years. Most recently in November 2019, the County hosted a shared services summit to encourage local communities to seek out services that can be provided more cost-effectively by another unit of government or by partnering with other local units of government. Local communities should consider investigating how they can reduce expenses by implementing their own shared services program.

D

**REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION & INFRASTRUCTURE** - Transportation issues and infrastructure decisions are major drivers for business location, community development, and residential location decisions and thus need to be an important part of any economic development strategy. The Brent Spence Bridge, Western Hills Viaduct, and the Greater Cincinnati/NKY Airport development are all projects which possess the potential for major development enhancement of Hamilton County. The expansion of transit and infrastructure spending via Issue 7 could have a major impact on economic development. Complemented by the State of Ohio new funding from the gas tax and the federal government's new Infrastructure bill, the County will see major investments in the region's transportation assets. In addition, the County has a Transportation Policy Plan that was approved by the Commissioners that reaffirms the importance of the development of a healthy and efficient transportation and transit system to promote economic prosperity in the County and region.

OVERVIEW

PROCESS

GOALS

ACTION PLAN

## EVENTS

GALLERY  
NATE FLANAGAN  
A FLEETING MOMENT  
JUL 3 - 31  
VIRTUAL SHOWS  
PRE-K FAIRY TALES  
JUN 27  
CAFE MURDER JUN 27  
TIX ON SALE NOW

VIRTUAL SHOWS BEGIN JUNE 27  
TICKETS AVAILABLE NOW

11165