



Greater Ohio Policy Center

2023-24 Public Policy Agenda



Reflect & Refocus
Furthering Resilient Communities

Reflect & Refocus: Furthering Resilient Communities

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Resilient communities are able to withstand and recover quickly from difficult conditions. Ohio has hundreds of cities, villages, counties, and townships that have weathered economic recessions, natural disasters, and, other major challenges, emerging changed, but formidable.

The Greater Ohio Policy Center's 2023-2024 public policy agenda, **Reflect & Refocus: Furthering Resilient Communities**, calls for state policy changes that will strengthen communities' resiliency through revitalization and sustainable development. This platform channels advocacy successes achieved in the past two General Assemblies, and introduces policy recommendations that are grounded in data and our deep expertise in legacy cities.

This platform looks to state-specific funding sources, as well as the American Rescue Plan (ARPA) and the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL). The federal funds, in particular, are once-in-a-generation opportunities to make the investment needed to maintain strong legacy cities and rural areas.

Through catalytic partnership, informed leadership, and leveraged funding, we can further resiliency among Ohio's communities.

Revitalizing Ohio's Brownfields

In 2021, the Ohio General Assembly made a historic investment to mitigate Ohio's brownfields. The **Brownfield Revitalization Fund** will deploy \$350 million to eradicate environmental contamination, and, thus, grow jobs and strengthen Ohio's quality of life. Greater Ohio Policy Center (GOPC) is grateful for the General Assembly's leadership, which will kick-start redevelopment in prime locations across the state.

However, the Brownfield Revitalization Fund will uncover more potential projects than there are currently funds for; a permanent funding source for brownfield remediation can help all projects return land to productive use.

To Further Resilient Communities:

- **Establish a permanent funding source for brownfield remediation.** Create a permanent grant program, complete with a dedicated source of funding, which complements existing programs, and ensures communities can assess environmentally contaminated sites *and* remediate them.

Connecting People to Places

In the past four years, Ohio has made notable progress by investing in public transportation, diversifying our transportation network, and emphasizing public safety in roadway construction and design. This work has greatly enhanced opportunities for multi-modal transportation system access in both large cities and smaller legacy cities throughout Ohio. BIL presents even greater opportunity for Ohio to invest in a transportation network that is designed to accommodate all users, is financially sustainable, and, at the same time, is sensitive to local needs.

To Further Resilient Communities:

- **Invest in Public Transportation.** Ohio must maintain or increase existing state funding levels for public transportation. These funds will build on the significant progress made over the past four years and help expand services to tackle employer and community needs, create modern, fuel-efficient transit fleets, and innovate to meet mobility demands of today. It would be shortsighted for Ohio to reduce state funding for transit in response to short-term increases in funding from the BIL. Any reductions could threaten the funds that have already been allocated to the state.
- **Promote and Fund Robust Active Transportation Policies and Projects.** The state, in partnership with local governments, must take a comprehensive approach to creating roadway and mobility infrastructure that gives Ohioans of all ages more transportation choices, including walking, cycling, or taking transit. Such infrastructure should be sensitive to context, boost safety and convenience, and offer a competitive array of transportation options.

Unleash Opportunity in Ohio

Ohio's legacy cities are the epitome of resiliency and continue to generate the majority of the state's economic contributions. Although these places have lost population and industry, they are actively retooling to remain the drivers of the state's economy. Ohio's legacy cities offer desirable amenities and incredible opportunities for Ohioans, their families, and their businesses.

To Further Resilient Communities:

- **Protect the Fiscal Health of Ohio's Cities.** Ohio's

cities depend on a range of income sources to provide the services and tools needed to grow the state's economy, and offer opportunity to residents. To effectively and fully contribute to the state's growth, Ohio's cities need long-term income predictability and assured access to stable sources of income.

- **Invest in Existing Places, Rectify Historic Inequities, Build Capacity.** Ohio has hundreds of cities and villages with historic architecture, solid homes, and walkable neighborhoods. Many of these places are older and need to repair or modernize their utilities and life-sustaining infrastructure. ARPA and BIL offer the opportunity to invest in residents and neighborhoods that have been marginalized or under-invested, in both rural and urban communities. State leaders should deploy funding, technical assistance and capacity-building support to Ohio's left behind communities to keep the state vibrant for existing residents and potential new residents.
- **Create the Ohio Community Transformation Fund.** This program would provide grants to **Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs)** for lending and technical assistance to businesses and real estate projects that cannot access traditional bank loans. Many central business districts and commercial corridors are under-utilized in Ohio because developers and entrepreneurs are unable to secure risk-tolerant, low-cost capital that is comfortable with weak real estate markets. This Fund, utilizing funds from ARPA, would provide grants to trusted, experienced, financial intermediaries, who know how to coach borrowers and leverage other dollars to make real estate and businesses succeed.



Reduce Barriers to Development & Homeownership

Ohio's communities do not have a sufficient inventory of structurally sound homes that offer modern amenities, which puts pressure on the entire housing market. While many housing markets outside of central Ohio have modestly priced homes that could offer accessible and sustainable homeownership, in some neighborhoods, homes are valued so low that responsible home improvement financing is hard to access, and increasing numbers of single-family homes are being purchased by large, multi-state real estate investment firms. Growing Ohio's housing stock through redevelopment, in-fill development, and strategic new development in places that can sustainably handle the long-term infrastructure costs associated with residential development, will require an "all of the above" approach.

To Further Resilient Communities:

- **Pilot a program to help local communities modernizing their zoning codes.** Many communities in Ohio are operating under zoning codes that have not evolved with changing market preferences. A pilot program, run through the Department of Development or Ohio Housing Finance Authority, would help select communities produced modern zoning codes that reduce the time and paperwork needed to build buildings the market wants, such as 2-4-unit homes in single family neighborhoods, mixed-use buildings in neighborhood commercial districts, and form-based code that can help unify the feel of a neighborhood or district.
- **Establish a loan loss reserve fund for small-dollar mortgages and home improvement loans.** The Department of Development or Ohio Housing Finance Agency should create a loan loss reserve fund that intermediaries and local housing agencies can apply to, to underwrite small-dollar mortgages and home improvement loans that exceed loan-to-value ratios that traditional finance institutions must adhere to.

Public Engagement

GOPC will continue to advocate for policies and initiatives with the Ohio General Assembly and the next Administration related to capital investment, budget and taxation, housing, brownfields, transportation, and other areas. GOPC will champion solutions that fulfill our mission to improve Ohio communities through smart growth strategies and research and achieve our vision of a revitalized Ohio.

Our Values

Non-partisan Voice, Bipartisan Work

Our policy platforms are based on objective data, not politics, and we work with both sides of the aisle to achieve our goals.

Connecting Ohio

Collaboration and cooperation are fundamental to how we plan our work.

Pride in Place

The vitality of Ohio, and its cities and towns, matter to us and motivate our actions.

Recognize Potential

We build upon what exists, see what could be, and create solutions to enable sustainable growth.

Informed Leadership

Our research and analysis are designed to impact strategic decisions and investments.



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