

Blue Ribbon Commission Meeting Minutes

Date: May 6, 2025

Time: 10:00 a.m.

Location: Erie County Office Building Chambers, 247 Columbus Avenue, Sandusky

Welcoming Remarks

The meeting was called to order by Co-Chairman **Jeff Krabill**, Roll Call was taken. All present. An attendance sheet was signed by audience members present.

Approval of Minutes from April 29, 2025 – Topic of Discussion: Infrastructure (roads/street maintenance)

A motion to approve the minutes that were distributed electronically was made by Ms. Crescimano and seconded by Ms. Balconi Ghezzi. The motion carried unanimously.

Purpose of the Meeting

Mr. Jeff Krabill (Blue Ribbon Commission) welcomed attendees and reiterated the Commission's purpose: to assess public service areas throughout Erie County and identify collaborative opportunities between municipalities, townships, and agencies that could reduce redundancy and provide a cost savings. These efforts aim to alleviate the growing tax burden placed on Erie County residents.

Mr. Jeff Krabill emphasized the importance of today's focus—Economic Development—as a key area where joint initiatives could lead to meaningful financial efficiencies across the region. The discussion centered on evaluating how different public and private entities within Erie County can better coordinate economic development efforts. The goal is to encourage efficiencies and reduce the tax burden on the citizens of Erie County.

Mr. Krabill stated the speakers for today's meeting include: Eric Wobser, CEO of Greater Sandusky Partnership (GSP); Colleen Gilson, Community Development Director for City of Sandusky; Erie County Treasurer, Caleb Stidham; and Perkins Township Trustee Tim Coleman.

Ms. Colleen Gilson (Community Development Director, City of Sandusky) introduced herself and outlined the functions of the City of Sandusky's Community Development Department. Her responsibilities include oversight of planning, zoning, parks and recreation, and all economic development initiatives within the City of Sandusky.

Ms. Gilson presented a slideshow highlighting several city-led incentive programs that provide economic development assistance. She explained that the City of Sandusky works closely with the Greater Sandusky Partnership (GSP) to attract businesses and support sustainable development.

Mr. Eric Wobser (CEO, Greater Sandusky Partnership), introduced himself and the mission and functions of GSP, explaining that it is a regional economic development organization, serving Erie and Ottawa Counties. He stated that GSP's role is a unifying entity that brings together business leaders, government agencies, and civic groups to collaborate on economic development projects. He addressed the economic challenges facing Erie County—specifically the decrease in working-age population and the increase of senior residents. Mr. Wobser underscored the need to expand the housing stock availability and invest in infrastructure to attract and retain residents and businesses.

Mr. Tim Coleman (Perkins Township Trustee) described Perkins Township's proactive stance on economic development, highlighting its goal of becoming a premier destination for residents and visitors. He noted that Perkins is the second-largest political subdivision in Erie County and currently home to approximately 700 businesses. The Township, he explained, is a founding member of the Firelands Partnership Group and actively participates in the Erie County Economic Development Corporation (ECEDC). Perkins Township has completed Tax Increment Financing (TIF) projects with Kroger, Firelands Regional Medical Center and the Data Center. **Mr. Gary Boyle (Perkins Township Administrator)** added that the Township's successful data center development was the result of strong collaboration between Perkins, the Port Authority, and GSP. He is committed to continuing this cooperative model in future development efforts.

Mr. Caleb Stidham (Erie County Treasurer) reflected on the presentations and asked the questions: What role do public dollars play in economic development? And what impact do those investments have on the taxpayers who fund them? He mentioned that the community spends resources to promote economic development and in turn, those funds are invested on citizens who live and work in Erie County. However, promoting economic development also raises the tax base. With Erie County's decrease in population, it means fewer citizens are bearing a greater portion of the tax burden. He also pointed out that Erie County does not receive lodging tax revenue, which further limits reinvestment.

Ms. Sharon Johnson (City of Sandusky resident) voiced concern over the City of Sandusky's financial contribution to GSP, stating that the city provides \$300,000 annually for three years, which she believed could be better spent internally. She expressed skepticism about GSP's transparency, alleging that the organization functions as a quasi-governmental body with excessive staffing.

Mr. Wobser addressed the concerns directly, clarifying that the city's contribution to GSP is not just allocated to salaries; that half of the City's contribution goes directly for event expenses. He reported that GSP operates with 14 full-time equivalent staff, only two more than before GSP was formed. Staff costs account for less than 60% of the operating budget.

He also noted that GSP's budget has more than doubled—from \$1.2 million to \$3 million—largely due to increased private sector contributions and earned revenue.

Review

- What entities are currently expending public dollars to pursue economic and community development? Cities, villages, townships, county, regional planning, Shores & Islands, GSP, etc.?
 - Cities, villages, townships contribute through ECEDC
 - GSP – Total budget
 - Approx. 1/3 private investment/memberships,
 - 1/3 revenue through programs/fees,
 - 1/3 through public sources
 - City of Sandusky - \$300,000 annually
 - Land Bank – DTAC at \$250,000
 - Port Authority - \$300,000
 - Shores & Islands Ohio for Erie/Ottawa - \$3-3.5M through marketing, grants, events
 - Various local incentives through abatement
 - Economic Development Administration (EDA)
- What income streams are solely devoted to pursuing development? Lodging tax for cities, township, and Shores & Islands, Community Improvement Corporation, Port Authority, Land Bank, etc.?
 - See responses above
- What tools are being used by public entities to pursue development (i.e. tax incentives, grants, etc.)? Do communities calculate Return On Investment (ROI) on these investments and can they be used to lessen the tax burden on residents? Also, how can they be used to invest in public infrastructure that offers benefits to the community as a whole?
 - Tools: TIFs, Grants, Loans
 - ROI tracked on lodging tax sales through GSP studies and calculated payback period to ensure strong ROI
 - Review future direct and indirect spending through market studies
 - Critical tool for local governments to determine ripple effect of investment based on studies
- What coordination is occurring among entities pursuing economic and community development? Are there opportunities for more partnership and cooperation?
 - Great deal of coordination going on with all entities
 - Further coordination with Infrastructure – sewer and water
- How are demographic and population changes going to affect the tax base moving forward? Does population stagnation and a declining school-age population lead to a greater cost burden on current residents?

- Mr. Wobser shared demographics of Erie County population by decade by age group. Demographics show a decrease in working age adults and an increase in retirees living in Erie County.
 - Need to work on the housing stock to attract working age adults to this area
 - Find ways to accommodate older adults
- Dive deeper on future impacts to tax base based on population changes
- Coordination with water and sewer projects to fill the gaps in infrastructure
- Activities planned or in progress to improve efficiency
 - Lowering the overall tax burden on residents impacts housing locally, and goal of Blue Ribbon Commission is to address government spending

Mr. Matt Old (Erie County Commissioner) Mr. Old emphasized staying true to the Blue Ribbon Commission's mission: reducing the tax burden and making Erie County more affordable for its residents. He called for collective action from all entities to manage the size and cost of local government.

Mr. Krabill announced that the May 20th meeting will be on a new discussion topic:

Ms. Karen Balconi Ghezzi (Blue Ribbon Commission) Ms. Ghezzi shared that the May 20th meeting will focus on fraud in social security, Medicaid, food stamps, and daycare that should be investigated thoroughly to return funds to the state and reduce tax burdens at both local and state levels.

Adjournment

Work Session Meeting: Scheduled for 9:00 a.m., Tuesday, May 13, 2025 at Services Center Chambers, 2900 Columbus Avenue, 3rd Floor Chambers

Next Regular Blue Ribbon Meeting: Scheduled for 10:00am, Tuesday, May 20, 2025 at Office Building Chambers, 247 Columbus Avenue, 3rd Floor Chambers

Discussion Topic: Public Health Resources.

Facilitator: Ms. Karen Balconi Ghezzi

A motion to adjourn was made by Mr. Moon and seconded by Mr. Tucker. The motion carried unanimously.