



# Report to Athens County Commissioners

## November 30, 2021

The **Athens County Economic Development Council's** mission is to be a catalyst for quality jobs and progress in Athens County and throughout the region by creating a seamless network of economic development resources through partnerships with government, business and nonprofit organizations.

# 2021 Overview

## **Throughout 2021, the ACEDC has:**

1. Assisted local businesses grow and expand operations
2. Secured investments for economic development projects
3. Supported entrepreneurship through educational opportunities
4. Focused on site development efforts
5. Engaged in industry diversification efforts
6. Coordinated the Athens County Remote Work White Paper thru the Voinovich School
7. Advocated for critical community infrastructure improvements
8. Supported talent retention/workforce challenges in partnership with WFD board
9. Managed TIF, DRD, EZA and City/County Revolving Loan Fund programs
10. Connected area businesses with additional state COVID-19 stimulus money
11. Marketed Athens County/City of Athens as a place to do business

**The ACEDC helped Athens County secure over \$2.8mm from state and federal sources throughout 2021.**

This funding went directly to companies for technical assistance, planning, revitalization, site development, and COVID-19 related losses.

<b>Program</b>	<b>Funding Secured</b>
EDA CARES Proposal (Industry Diversification)	\$30,000
JobsOhio Sites Initiative Program Funds (reallocation)	\$1,750,000
Opportunity Zone Technical Assistance (POWER)	\$50,000
Ohio Bars & Restaurant Assistance	\$740,000
OhioSE Prepared Communities Grant (Chauncey)	\$20,000
OhioSE Site Readiness Grants	\$23,000
JobsOhio Inclusion Grants	\$100,000
JobsOhio Revitalization Grant	\$125,000
Enterprise Zone Tax Abatements	\$20,116
Program Sponsorships	\$1,500
Entrepreneurial Development Group L&Ls	\$0
Young Athens Professionals	\$1,500
Ohio Restaurant/Lodging/Venues Asst	Value TBD
<b>Total ED investment in Athens County, 2021</b>	<b>\$2,859,616</b>

# Business Retention & Expansion Spotlight

In 2021, Rocky Brands was awarded a \$125,000 JobsOhio Revitalization Grant for the expansion of its warehousing facility. This was a joint effort with Hocking County, as the facility is in Hocking, but the company HQ is in Athens.

## Company Investment

- 60 new full time, permanent jobs
- 281 retained full time, permanent jobs
- Minimum project investment: \$1,000,000.
- Annual payroll: \$1,900,000
- Direct Sales/Output Impact : \$7,036,674
- Direct Compensation Impact: \$3,322,124



# Areas of Opportunity

There are many opportunities for economic development beyond the City of Athens, including organic growth stemming from the Baileys Trail System, revitalization of downtown Glouster and flat, developable land in Albany.

## CHAUNCEY

The Baileys Trail is a catalyst for economic development in the Village of Chauncey. In addition to organic growth that will stem from increased tourism, the EDC is working closely with Village council and a property owner to develop land across the street from the trailhead for mixed use and business/industry purposes.

### Estimated economic output:

Jobs: 60+

Compensation: \$3,310,000

Sales Output: \$60,000,000

## GLOUSTER

The Glouster Revitalization Organization has dedicated time and resources to bringing life back to the Village. The EDC has supported these efforts by connecting GRO and Glouster businesses with funding for architectural and design plans for historic building renovations/preservation.

### Estimated economic output:

Jobs: 10+

Compensation: \$565,297

Sales Output: \$3,526,967

## ALBANY

Leadership in the Village of Albany is committed to economic development along Carpenter Road and at Hebbardsville Farm (OU). Both provide relatively flat land prime for development. The EDC is currently helping the Village advocate for critical sewer infrastructure and planning funding.

### Estimated economic output:

Jobs: 100

Compensation: \$5,698,877

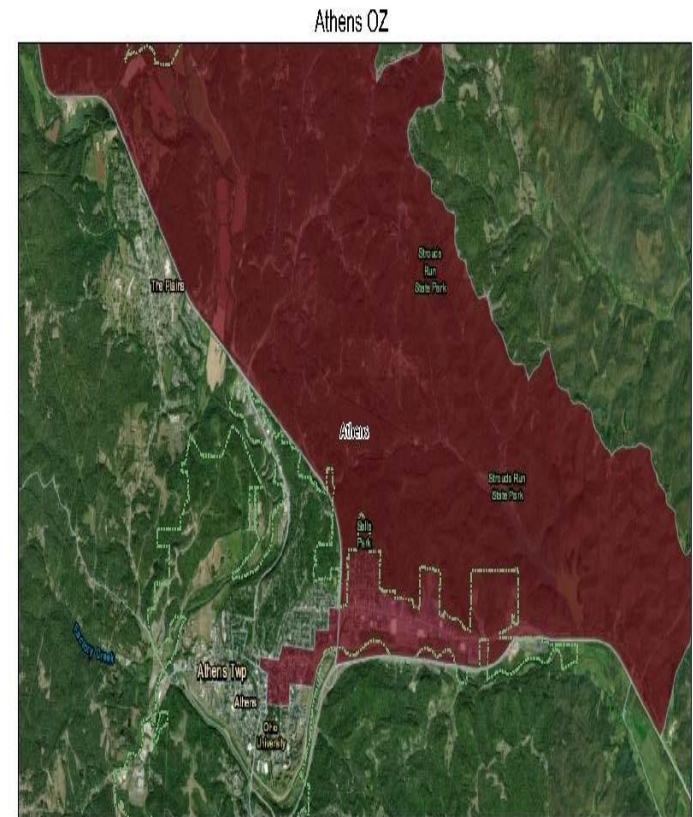
Sales Output: \$26,381,545



# Opportunity Zones

The Ohio opportunity zone investment credit is a non-refundable credit that allows a taxpayer to invest capital gains in a qualified opportunity fund. The intent of the program is to incentivize private investment in low-income urban and rural communities.

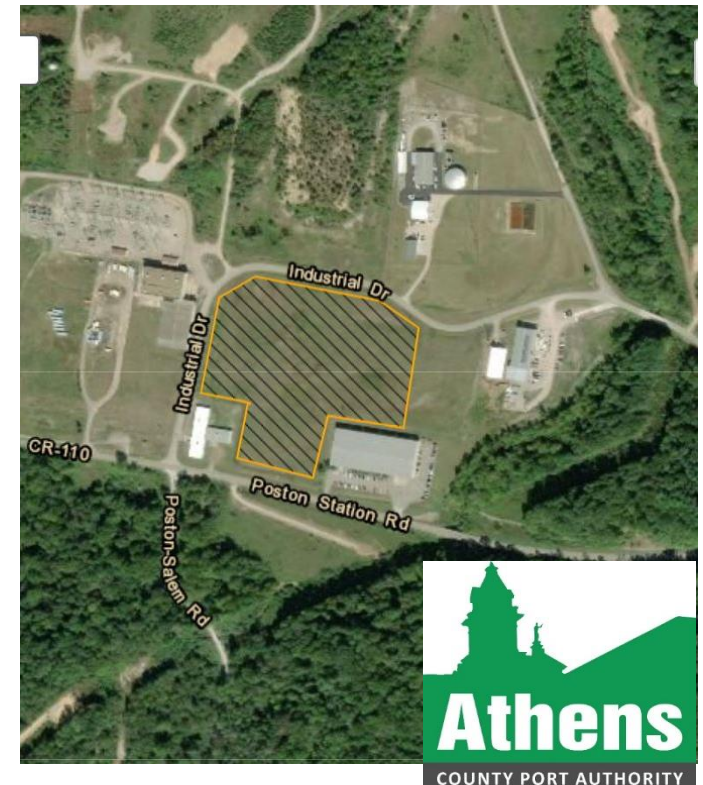
- Athens County has three designated Opportunity Zones spanning from the Village of Chauncey to the City of Athens to the Village of Albany.
- Buckeye Hills hired Steadfast City to assist its 8-county region with OZF technical assistance.
- To date, we've held meetings with village leadership and business owners in Albany and Chauncey to explore the creation of OZFs.
- The Stimson Ave corridor is still low-hanging fruit for an OZF in the City of Athens.
- The ORCA POWER grant includes \$50,000 for OZ assistance



# Port Authority Building Project

**Throughout 2021, the Port Authority had to re-evaluate the speculative building project and continued to build out its capital stack.**

- Global Cooling no longer will occupy the new building but is interested in attracting its suppliers;
- The project scope changed (60,000 SF shell building);
- Updated committed/secured sources include
  - EDA Public Works/Economic Adjustment Assistance Grant
  - Appalachian Growth Capital Loan
  - Property Assessed Clean Energy Loan
  - Rural Industrial Park Loan program
  - JobsOhio Sites Initiative Grant
- All wetlands mitigation has been completed and final designs will be completed by end of year
- The Port Authority expects to break ground on the manufacturing building in the spring of 2022.



# Exploring remote work as an economic driver

Remote working necessitated by the COVID pandemic has accelerated pre-existing trends. As we began to see other communities investing in remote worker attraction efforts, the EDC, City of Athens and other partners engaged the Voivovich School to help identify a strategy around remote work that works for Athens and that would generate the greatest economic impact.

- The key finding of the report found that high-profile city and state programs that have driven many remote working discussions are primarily focused on incentive-based attraction strategies.
- The study recognized that a successful strategy should yield ROIs that best addressed Athens' priorities, such as
  - **Increasing Athens incomes and local spending to be recirculated locally**
  - Reduce retail leakage from physical out-commuting
  - Cost savings that benefit employed resident's wallets AND the environment (less travel)
  - Retention of graduates and early career residents
  - Increased labor force participation
  - **Enhance upward socioeconomic mobility opportunities for existing residents**
  - Diversify employment/employer portfolios
  - Increase Athens human/social capital



# Remote Work Continued

- Attracting high wage earners from coastal cities that likely don't need financial incentives to relocate is not the best strategy for our community. This neglects the dominant role in generating economic impacts played by middle income groups:

Economic Impacts of Adding 100 Athens Remote Workers					
Annual Household Income Level	Direct Impacts		Induced Impacts		
	Employment	Income	Employment	Labor Income	Output
<\$30k	15	\$616,000	4	\$138,105	\$496,293
\$30-49k	24	\$976,000	6	\$273,519	\$786,334
\$50-74k	28	\$1,974,000	10	\$397,138	\$1,444,789
\$75-100k	18	\$1,611,000	8	\$326,262	\$1,150,137
\$100-150k	10	\$1,339,000	6	\$258,591	\$907,939
\$150k+	4	\$570,000	3	\$110,080	\$386,501
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>\$7,086,000</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>\$1,503,694</b>	<b>\$5,171,992</b>

*\*\*Remote workers earning between \$50,000 and \$100,000 generate 50% of estimated impacts.*

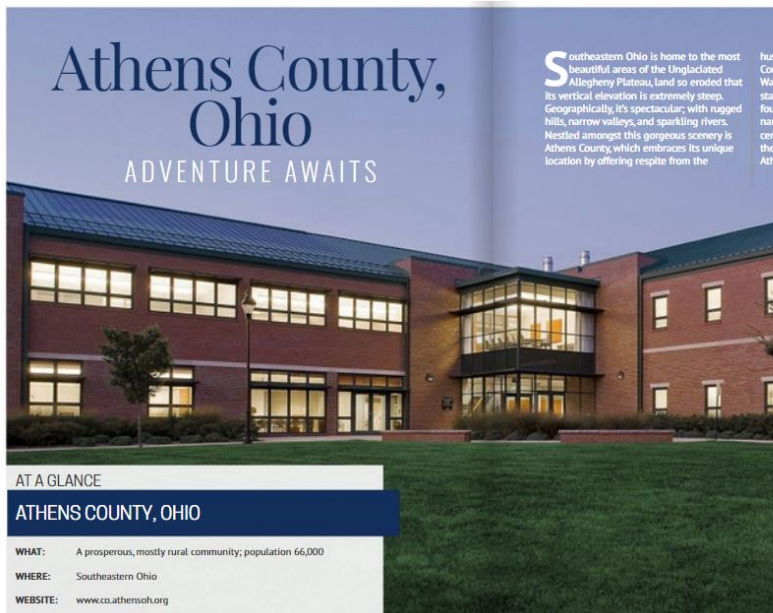
# Infrastructure Projects

The EDC continues to advocate for critical infrastructure improvement projects that are key to economic development such as broadband and sewer and water extensions in areas of the county with high growth potential. These include:

- **Albany Sewer Extension:** Needs funding for a lift station and sewer lines that run down Carpenter Road to provide sanitary service for future development along the corridor. Advocating village and township ARPA dollars be allocated to the extension.
- **Chauncey Sewer Extension:** Requires replacement of existing lines and extension down Rt 13 to 38 developable acres. Wrote letter of support for county ARPA request.
- **Athens County Broadband Expansion:** The EDC continues to work closely with the Athens County Broadband Coordinator and serves on the Broadband Advisory Committee because accessible and affordable Internet is a basic utility that supports the economic health of a community.

# Business View Magazine Feature

The EDC pitched Athens County as a featured story in Business View Magazine's *Build Back Stronger* edition. Athens was selected and the spread focused on the city and county's approach to COVID-19 recovery, highlighting key efforts including the Baileys buildout, site development and broadband expansion.



**Athens County, Ohio**  
ADVENTURE AWAITS

**WHAT:** A prosperous, mostly rural community; population 66,000  
**WHERE:** Southeastern Ohio  
**WEBSITE:** [www.co.athensohio.org](http://www.co.athensohio.org)

**S**outheastern Ohio is home to the most beautiful areas of the Unge-lated Allegheny Plateau, land so eroded that its vertical elevation is extremely steep. Geographically, it's spectacular; with rugged hills, narrow valleys, and sparkling rivers. Nestled amongst this gorgeous scenery is Athens County, which embraces its unique location by offering respite from the

hustle and bustle of everyday life. Athens County was officially formed in 1805 from Washington County. In honor of the original state university, now Ohio University, founded in 1804, the town and county were named after Athens, Greece – the ancient center of learning. Today, the university is the area's largest employer with the City of Athens serving as the county seat. Whether



"Quick Loadz Container System / QuickLoadz Intermodal Robotics, a rapidly growing manufacturer of patented truck beds and trailers that automatically load and unload shipping containers expanded into the Bill Theisen Industrial Park in 2019. In collaboration with JobsOhio, and the Athens Economic Development Council and OhioSE, QuickLoadz renovated a 47,000 square foot facility to support the advanced manufacturing of their innovative automated system. "QuickLoadz is a great example of how innovative companies can establish a business in southeast Ohio and continue to thrive and grow," said Dana Saucier, JobsOhio Vice President and Head of Economic Development. "This investment demonstrates the confidence QuickLoadz has in Athens County's talent and brings new opportunity to a vacant facility there."

"We are very pleased we could support a smaller growing company that is doing world class business from right here in southeastern Ohio,"

commented APEG President Mike Jacoby. "QuickLoadz is a leading example of a local company combining innovation with manufacturing expertise to grow, create jobs positively impact our economy."

The county is also investing in infrastructure, such as the large sewer expansion that will connect to the Athens Water/Sewer Department. Investments are even being made for supportive infrastructure along the Baileys Trail System. Powers reports, "Through a variety of partners, we have secured over \$8 million in mainly public grants. Some of this funding will be used for infrastructure items such as the extension of a sewer line to a restroom, expansion of Hockhocking Adena Bikeway, creation of a new trailhead, and sidewalks. Those enhancements will be appropriate for the trail system we're developing here – the largest contiguous mountain bike optimized trail system east of the Mississippi River. It's also going to connect people to resources they don't

## ATHENS COUNTY, OHIO

typically have access to because of geographic barriers preventing access to employment and educational opportunities."

Environmentalism is another important focus. The City of Athens Environment and Sustainability Commission implements many green initiatives and sustainability goals. Rural Action, a membership-based non-profit organization has been working on The True Pigments project in the county's Millfield area along with some other partners. "They're taking the acid mine discharge (AMD) from the Sunday Creek watershed, extracting it, and making paint with it," says Powers. "They're actually removing the old coal mine runoff from the water and utilizing it in a different form. That's a really neat sustainability project."

Looking ahead three to five years, Perani would like to see continued growth in the county's broadband infrastructure. She acknowledges,

"The county currently has many partners in the Athens community that are working hard to expand broadband infrastructure. The Athens County Broadband Advisory Committee was formed specially to help tackle this problem. As we know, broadband access plays into health, education, and economics. For the county to keep moving forward, we need to expand broadband."

Perani also looks forward to having companies in The Ohio University Innovation Center expand, maybe into one of the new speculative buildings. Powers would like to continue growing the county into a vibrant thriving area, and notes, "Having the Baileys Trail System completely built out and in full use will certainly help. I think we have an opportunity to lead the region in doing this correctly by being holistic and collaborative. That way, we can deliver more opportunities to Appalachian Ohio."



Screenshots from BVM *Build Back Stronger* Edition

# Management of Local Economic Development Tools & Programs

- **Tax Incentive Review Council:** TIFs are tools that lock in the taxable worth of real property at a specific value. Payments from increased assessed value of any improvement to real property are directed to a fund for infrastructure improvement. The EDC manages annual review of the East State Street TIF, in addition to all active Enterprise Zone agreements (3) and Downtown Redevelopment Districts (3).
- **Revolving Loan Funds:** The City and County RLFs were created through Community Block Development Grants funds. They provide gap financing on a portion of economic development projects ranging from fixed assets and buildings/land to infrastructure and site preparation to working capital. Both loans are administered by the EDC.
- **Revenue Bonds/Sales Tax Exemption:** The Port Authority issued revenue bonds for the WODA Cooper housing project, which will provide 107 affordable multi-family general occupancy units.

# Organizational Relationships

## Administration

- Ohio InSite
- Business Retention & Expansion
- Tax Incentive Review Council Admin
- JobsOhio Regional Representation
- Revolving Loan Funds (City & County)
- Site Development
- Small Business Relief Fund

## Operation

- Athens County Economic Development Council
- Athens County Port Authority
- Young Athens Professionals
  - Talent Retention/BRE
  - Networking

## Partnerships

- Ohio Southeast
- JobsOhio
- Buckeye Hills
- USDA Rural Development
- US EPA
- Ohio University
- Utility Providers
- Entrepreneurial Development Group
- Office of Workforce Development
- ACCVB
- Athens Area Chamber of Commerce



# Looking Forward: 2022 and beyond

## **Initiatives the EDC will continue to explore and deploy:**

- Funding for the Athens County Port Authority speculative building project (submitted an EDA grant request for \$2mm for construction in November 2021)
- Vibrant Communities grant in partnership with the City of Athens for rehab of the Armory/co-working space
- Industry diversification efforts, Buckeye Hills/EDA
- Build out the Athens Remote Work Policy
- Support efforts around the creation of a technology institute/training center that would address workforce challenges for area manufactures
- Creation of Opportunity Zone Funds

# Questions?

## **Athens County Economic Development Council**

340 West State Street, Unit 26

Athens, OH 45701

740-597-1420

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

### **Mollie Fitzgerald - Executive Director**

[mollie@athenscountyohedc.com](mailto:mollie@athenscountyohedc.com)

### **Kate Perani- Project Specialist**

[kate@athenscountyohedc.com](mailto:kate@athenscountyohedc.com)

### **Ricarda Sammaneh – Administrative Assistant**

[admin@athenscountyohedc.com](mailto:admin@athenscountyohedc.com)