Belmont County / Department of Development
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2025 Annual Report

2025 Year in Review
Community Improvement Corporation of Belmont County, Ohio (CIC)

The CIC, a 501c4, was started in 1962 by local business people interested in giving back to their communities in Belmont County in a coordinated effort to improve and sustain the lives of Belmont County residents through economic development.

What is “economic development”?

“When you hear the term ‘economic development,’ it’s easy to think it’s just about money—more businesses, more jobs, more tax revenue. But that’s only a tiny part of the picture. Real economic development is about something much deeper: improving a community's overall well-being and quality of life for the long haul. It’s about creating a place where people genuinely want to live, work, and put down roots.” - The Ten District

Our Mission: To create, advance, encourage, and promote industrial, economic, commercial, research, workforce capacity, and civic development.

Historically, the CIC has been instrumental in development projects like the prison, Fox Commerce Industrial Park, the Walmart Plaza, and others. Since 2018, under the direction of Executive Director Lorimor, we have looked at the economic landscape, who was being served, what was being done and not done, as well as what factors research shows make communities strong and resilient.

To that end, we have been focused on three main pillars and that continued in 2025: Community Revitalization & Vision Planning, Cultivating an Entrepreneurial Ecosystem, and Workforce Development & Youth Engagement.

Pillar 1: Community Revitalization & Vision Planning

- The CIC Continues to work with the villages of Powhatan Point, Shadyside, and Barnesville on Vision Plans. This is an effort through the Ohio EPA and Kansas State University Targeted Brownfield Assistance. Partnering with these entities, the funding is secured to do these projects which have included community surveys, market analyses, and brownfield inventories. Once completed, all of this information is combined into a Vision Plan consisting of ideas and renderings. Each plan will supply the community with information they need and can use to apply for other grants to implement the projects they choose to pursue.
    - Through these collaborations, we brought in over $89,000 worth of services (Phase I, Phase II, Brownfield Inventories, planning services, engineering services) to our communities and businesses in 2025.
- The CIC continues to collaborate with the Land Bank on brownfields. We assisted their two brownfield remediation projects equaling $1 million.

- We are the only entity in the state of Ohio to receive the 2025 US EPA's Rural Economy for Rural Communities grant that will allow us to bring the villages of Barnesville and Powhatan Point together to plan ways for them to build on the outdoor assets in the Captina Watershed in order to help Main Street businesses. Most of this work will occur in 2026.
    - The Ohio Valley Trail Committee continues to meet monthly in our office and fall under Create Our Future. They maintain the signs on their routes, have bought and installed bike racks at businesses, are encouraging new cyclists, and trying to get businesses to see the value in being bicycle friendly.
- Because we see and hear daily that volunteers in the communities get tired, we designed a Rural Resilience Online Community & Course where we want to bring rural change-makers from all over the country together to support one another. This is a monthly subscription service. To spur this project, Create Our Future received a grant from the EQT Foundation to offer a 6-month subscription to ten people in EQT's footprint of counties across Ohio, West Virginia, and Pennsylvania. ($8,340.) The grant was awarded the end of 2025 and the program launches in 2026.

Pillar 2: Cultivating an Entrepreneurial Ecosystem

- The St. Clairsville Main Street Association, under the auspices of Create Our Future, received a $2,000 grant from the Belmont County Tourism Council promoting their downtown events to support small businesses.
- We received a grant from the USDA in Fall 2020. In 2021 we distributed our first loan under the Revolving Loan Fund. The $50,000 loan is being re-paid and is in good standing.
- The CIC continues to collaborate with the Youngstown Business Incubator (YBI) to bring more resources to the area.
    - YBI received an ARC grant called Rising Tides, geared towards manufacturing. They received the $1.75 million grant. We will receive $75,000 for November 2024– September 2026 for our work with the grant. There are additional funds available for our businesses, including site prep dollars. We have had two of the site-prep sub-grants go to a Belmont County business.
- ECDI - The CIC continues to collaborate with ECDI, the largest SBA micro-lender in the country. September 30 ended the three- year grant program we had with them, funded by the ARC.
    - We provided technical assistance to 108 individual businesses/entrepreneurs under this grant over the three-year time period.
    - We provided a $2,000 sub-grant to the Bellaire Business alliance for business promotion activities each year for a total of $6,000.
    - We provided a $2,000 sub-grant to the Ohio Valley Farmers' Market each year for promotion and assistance to individual businesses. This equaled $6,000 over the

grant period.

- We started interviewing local business owners to create educational videos. The grant paid for the video editing.

Pillar 3: Workforce Development & Youth Engagement.

We continue to think outside of the box for building the future of Belmont County. To that end, we have been working with schools and parents to reach more youth.

- Through Create Our Future, we once again had a county-wide youth essay contest about the future of Belmont County. Through donations, we were able to provide monetary awards.
- Through Create Our Future, we successfully received a $16,000 grant on behalf of Bellaire Local School District for a 54" Roland Cutter, assisting them in their education and workforce goals.
- We assisted Ohio Hills Health Center and Bellaire Local School District in their planning and implementation grants for a school-based health center that is also open to the community. In the fall of 2025, they hosted the ribbon-cutting and open house for this exciting expansion to improve the lives of residents along the Ohio River. Research shows healthier children are able to attend school without as many disruptions, thereby improving their educational outcomes. Improved educational outcomes support a stronger workforce.
- The end of 2025 brought an exciting step forward on a greenhouse project in downtown Bellaire for the school district. More details will be forthcoming in 2026, but this is an exciting collaboration between industry, economic development, and a school district.

In support of these efforts, our director serves on committees, panels, and gives presentations.

- Director Lorimor served on a scholarship committee for the EQT Foundation again, reviewing over 80 applications in 2025.
- Serves on the Washington Council of Economic Development Loan Committee.
- Our director continues to serve on the Workforce Area 16 Development Committee.
- Speaking engagements & panels included: Barnesville Kiwanis, Barnesville Rotary, Barnesville Area News MC for Election, Buckeye Hills Annual Development Summit Panel.
- Started in the last quarter of 2025 but really launching in 2026, the director will be serving on the Barnesville Main Street Board and assist in branding efforts by the Barnesville Historical Review Committee.
- She has been invited to present at two conferences in 2026 based upon the CIC's novel approach to brownfields and Vision Planning work.

How does our work fit into the county's economic development plan?

The CIC has been and continues to be active in many of the strategies outlined in the county's most recently published "Economic Development Strategy May 2011." The following table demonstrates how the CIC's daily operations directly fulfill the core goals of the County Plan:

How the CIC's daily work fulfills the County Plan's goals

Strategic Goal	Daily Activities & Alignment	The "So What?" (Strategic Impact)
Goal 6: Targeted Areas for Economic Growth	Brownfield site assessments, environmental mitigation, and CBD revitalization.	Risk Mitigation: Eliminating environmental liabilities makes vacant properties "market-ready," significantly reducing the barrier to entry for private capital.
Goal 7: Marketing Belmont County	Vision Planning workshops and branding initiatives for small towns.	Experiential Branding: As noted in the Strategy (7-2), branding "attracts outside investors while motivating residents".
Goal 2: Business Retention & Reinvestment	Enhancing community spirit, cultural amenities, and entertainment through Vision Planning.	Retention Strategy: Businesses reinvest where their labor force wants to stay. Improving quality of life is a direct defense against talent migration.
Goal 5: Building an Entrepreneurial Culture	Partnerships with YBI and ECDI providing technical assistance and capital to small ventures.	Economic Vitality: Rural regions with high entrepreneurship levels achieve greater economic resilience than those relying solely on large-scale manufacturing (Strategy 5-2).
Goal 9: Workforce & Educational Advancement	Serving on the Workforce Area 16 Board; equipment grants for vocational training.	Talent Pipeline: Ensures the labor force possesses both "universal basic skills" (Strategy 9-1) and technical proficiency in high-intensity sectors like healthcare and manufacturing.
Goal 10: Superior Quality of Life	Engaging "Generation Y" through student downtown walks and youth essay contests.	Brain Drain Prevention: Young people are "offended if they are not asked" to contribute (Strategy 10-1). Engagement is a deliberate strategy to secure long-term resident retention.

- Goal 6: Targeted Areas for Economic Growth.
    - Brownfield site assessment and redevelopment falls under this goal, as shown by these assertions in the strategy:
        - "Any site benefits from completion of a phase one environmental site assessment, so that potential occupants have some assurance that there are no outstanding environmental issues." (Page 6-3)

        - "It is likely that some targeted properties in Belmont County's riverfront communities may be Brownfields…" (Page 6-5).
        - "There are a number of vacant properties adjacent to or near the Ohio River in communities such as Bellaire and Martins Ferry…. Any environmental issue needs to be mitigated and cleaned up before the property is marketed and sold to a new user." (Page 6-6).
    - Entrepreneur technical assistance, Existing business education & training, and Community engagement & vision planning also fall under this goal, illustrated by this statement:
        - "The County's larger central business districts (including Barnesville, St. Clairsville, Martins Ferry, Bellaire, and Shadyside) still provide ample opportunity for the creation of new businesses, including restaurants and offices, but also mixed uses that could include small manufacturing or assembly, and service businesses. These central business districts present opportunities for the creation and "incubation" of new businesses in existing storefront properties that may be able to provide relatively affordable rent." (Page 6-6 – 6-7).
- Goal 7: Marketing Belmont County
    - The Vision Planning and workshop the CIC has developed for the communities assists with this process, as illustrated by this explanation in the strategy:
        - "… big cities have brands; why not small towns?... Communities should consider visitors' first impressions. Any formal or informal branding should help people see the community's strengths and capabilities; show off what you do best, and make sure you can deliver on promises…. Branding should reflect what is, while also developing what you want to be. It should attract outside investors and visitors, while also motivating residents… if an area's brand is rooted in its history, for example, that history must be brought alive in an experiential way." (Page 7-2)
    - The strategic plan lists several site selection factors, including the following that we have been working on extensively (Page 7-3 – 7-4):
        - "Environmental condition of land."
        - "Availability and cost of financial capital." (primarily small businesses and start-ups)
        - "Labor force quality…"
        - "Quality of life"
- Goal 2: Business Retention and Reinvestment
    - Again, are work with communities and the projects that stem from the Vision Planning with them assist with the retention and expansion of existing businesses. Existing businesses say they need workers. In order to get more workers, we must build communities where they want to stay or move to.

        - "Quality of life factors can enter into a retention and expansion issue. Two broad areas that are valued by virtually all residents are entertainment (restaurants and cultural amenities) and community spirit and image." (Page 2-3)

- Goal 5: Building Belmont County's Entrepreneurial Culture.
    - We have focused extensively on this goal the last few years. In 2025, we have helped over 35 entrepreneurs and small businesses. We partner with other organizations to bring resources to our entrepreneurs, including technical assistance, capital, and professional services.
        - "…the county does not depend on large manufacturers for many of its jobs; the current local economy is conducive to the start and growth of small, entrepreneurial ventures." (Page 5-1)
        - "… rural regions with higher levels of entrepreneurship achieve higher levels of economic vitality." (Page 5-2).
- Goal 9: Workforce, Training, and Educational Advancement
    - We work with school districts and existing businesses to develop programs to build the needed sills. We partner to win grants to bring needed resources to the schools, like books, a CNC plasma machine, and entrepreneurial tools.
        - "In addition to job-specific skills, there is also a universal need to emphasize the basic skills needed to be a productive worker." (Page 9-1)
- Goal 10: Superior Quality of Life
    - We think in innovative ways and partner with organizations not usually brought to the table to build the future, including asking young people their opinions.
        - "Help create economic opportunities; offer entrepreneurship training…" (Page 10-1).
        - "Help young people figure out "What am I going to do in this town?" Invite young people to be a part of community projects that include social opportunities." (Page 10-1)
        - "Rethink how you "engage" Generation Y in your community. Young people believe they have something valuable to contribute, and are sometimes offended if they are not asked to do so. Younger people want to feel valuable." (Page 10-1)