



# Preliminary Report

Northeast Ohio  
Regional Town Meeting  
November 12, 2005

Hundreds of citizens from Northeast Ohio gathered at Akron University on Saturday, November 12, to plan the future of Northeast Ohio. During the Regional Town Meeting, participants discussed what they want Northeast Ohio to be known for in the future and the challenges that must be overcome to reach that goal.

The results of the Town Meeting will be used to frame the community discussions that will take place over the next year. A regional agenda for change will emerge from the process. Citizens at the Town Meeting represented the diversity of Northeast Ohio in terms of geography, age, race/ethnicity, household income and employment status.



Voices & Choices ([www.voiceschoices.org](http://www.voiceschoices.org)) is an initiative of the Fund for Our Economic Future, a collaboration of nearly 70 area philanthropic organizations.

## What We Love about Living in Northeast Ohio

- The change and beauty of seasons
- Beautiful parks and green spaces
- "Friendly, family-oriented, slower pace"
- Lower cost of living
- Appreciate history and roots of region
- Easy access to other major areas: "From big cities to cows in 20 minutes"
- Public university systems
- Community pride and neighborhood spirit
- Ability to make a difference and impact decisions
- Strong work ethic
- Access to quality healthcare and hospital systems
- Access to favorable rural, farming and Amish areas

## What do we want to be known for?

- Known as The Turn-Around Region
- "A welcome home for every culture," and "immigration center for the world"
- Our region should be a pioneer in ending regional, class and racial segregation"
- "Embrace personal responsibility for health, life, work, education"
- NEO is a business hub for entrepreneurship and small and medium sized businesses
- We have developed youth into leaders

## THE POET'S PERSPECTIVE

It's the way I see  
It's the way I see  
It's the way I see  
It's the way I see the Region

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## Who was in the Room?

Demographic Category	In the Room	Actual
<b><u>GENDER</u></b>		
Male	49%	47%
Female	51%	53%
<b><u>AGE</u></b>		
15-19	8%	9%
20-34	19%	23%
35-44	16%	20%
45-54	21%	18%
55-64	21%	12%
Over 65	14%	19%
<b><u>RACE/ETHNICITY</u></b>		
African American	26%	14%
Asian American	1%	1%
Caucasian	68%	81%
Hispanic/Latino	0%	2%
Native American	1%	0.2%
More than one race	3%	1%
Other	2%	0.1%
<b><u>EMPLOYMENT STATUS</u></b>		
Employed, working full-time	59%	64%
Employed, working Part-time.	9%	31%
Not employed, homemaker, student, retired, etc	20%	5%
Other	11%	
<b><u>COUNTY CLUSTERS</u></b>		
Ashland/Wayne	3%	4%
Ashtabula/Lake/Geauga	9%	10%
Cuyahoga	39%	23%
Lorain	7%	7%
Summit/Portage/Medina	29%	21%
Stark/Carroll	5%	10%
Trumbull/Mahoning/Columbiana	7%	15%
Outside NEO	2%	
<b><u>INCOME-HOUSEHOLD</u></b>		
<\$19K	11%	22%
\$20K-\$29K	8%	14%
\$30K-\$39K	8%	13%
\$40K-\$49K	9%	11%
\$50K-\$59K	8%	10%
\$60K-\$74K	11%	11%
>\$75	37%	20%
Don't know/Prefer not to answer	8%	
<b><u>TYPE OF COMMUNITY</u></b>		
Urban	39%	
Suburban	37%	
Rural and Small Town	24%	
Other	1%	

## REGIONAL HISTORY CULTURE & ATTITUDES

History of things which have worked for us:

- Entrepreneurial spirit and innovation
- Strong work ethic
- Immigration: global community
- Commercial transportation systems
- Strong farming communities
- Industry/manufacturing: world leaders in invention and production
- Respect for natural resources
- Financial institutions

History of things which have worked against us:

- Role of unions have not evolved
- Extreme emphasis on manufacturing
- Social divide: economically, old and new immigrants, racism, equity issues, communities
- Industrial heritage left us with brownfields
- Previous negative sentiment in population, media, popular culture
- Leaders blocking progress
- Large number of political jurisdictions results in fragmentation

### ACTIONS TO CHANGE OUR ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIORS TO STRENGTHEN THE REGION

- Ask the media to be more positive; market the region globally
- Reduce political boundaries and regionalize governments for optimal use of resources
- Vote
- “More discussions like the one we are having today”
- Prepare new civic leaders for the future
- “Create more ‘voice ’among citizens for political action”
- “Stop competing within the region”
- Train people for high-tech jobs
- Comprehensive regional planning to limit sprawl and maximize resources
- Invest in our youth and promote leadership
- Create a regional transportation system
- Support entrepreneurs starting new businesses
- Get unions to support global competitiveness
- Create regional healthcare system
- “Create equitable tax base for business and homeowners”
- Take more risks in the region
- Revise the Medicaid system
- Increase funding for education
- Overcome isolation, rural-urban divide, and parochialism
- Establish a concept of “life time learning”
- Believe in ourselves first

## CHALLENGES THAT MUST BE OVERCOME TO ACHIEVE OUR FUTURE

<p><b>Employment &amp; Economic Growth</b></p> <p>Top Two Challenges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Disconnect between business and educators</li> <li>▪ Inequitable and burdensome tax structure and policies</li> </ul> <p>Others</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Lack of positive regional identity</li> <li>▪ Too few employers paying a living wage</li> <li>▪ Lack of an overall support system for entrepreneurs – “We only provide lip service to assist entrepreneurs.”</li> <li>▪ Intolerance for diversity and alternative lifestyles</li> <li>▪ Lack of consensus and cooperation between union and management</li> <li>▪ Unregulated sprawl</li> <li>▪ Too few employers paying a living wage</li> </ul>	<p><b>Education &amp; Skills</b></p> <p>Top Two Challenges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Public school funding is flawed, inequitable and unconstitutional</li> <li>▪ Need to educate for skilled 21<sup>st</sup> Century workforce and link to jobs</li> </ul> <p>Others</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Teaching to the test versus preparing students to think creatively and independently</li> <li>▪ Inequitable school districts – need regional approach or consolidation</li> <li>▪ Inadequate parental involvement at school and home</li> <li>▪ Students leave school with inadequate life skills</li> <li>▪ Need to foster and fund higher education with access for all</li> </ul>
<p><b>Fairness &amp; Equity</b></p> <p>Top Two Challenges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Lack of employment opportunities and livable wage and benefits for all sectors</li> <li>▪ Unequal educational opportunities and access...Pre-K through Postsecondary Education and training</li> </ul> <p>Others</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Lack of opportunities for at-risk youth and people outside the system.</li> <li>▪ Current criminal justice system reinforces inequalities</li> <li>▪ Lack of public transportation is a barrier to employment, schools and housing choices.</li> <li>▪ Growing gap between rich and poor.</li> <li>▪ Lack of affordable and accessible quality healthcare</li> <li>▪ Diversity is not valued and immigration is being discouraged</li> <li>▪ Inequities in the tax system.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Quality Of Life &amp; Place</b></p> <p>Top Two Challenges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Improving Education: (K-12) Funding, Leadership, Lack of Parental Involvement, Skills Educational and Isolation</li> <li>▪ Overcoming isolation and inequity regarding jobs, education, affordable housing and health care</li> </ul> <p>Others</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Making our winter climate attractive</li> <li>▪ Access to and support of Arts and Cultural Amenities</li> <li>▪ Addressing Environmental d planning concerns regionally (such as growing green space, controlling urban sprawl and improving air quality)</li> <li>▪ We don't work collaboratively</li> <li>▪ Low Political Participation</li> <li>▪ Media is negative</li> </ul>
<p><b>Cooperation &amp; Governance</b></p> <p>Top Two Challenges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Fragmentation! Too many governments, wasted resources, and inefficiency</li> <li>▪ Belief by some political leaders that change to the political structure threatens their power base</li> </ul> <p>Others</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Communities fear they will lose their identity through regional governance</li> <li>▪ Difficulty in educating public to the benefits of cooperation</li> <li>▪ Civil servants feel threatened by consolidation of services.</li> <li>▪ Fear that regional collaboration will bring performance standards down for communities that are doing well now, especially for K-12 education</li> <li>▪ Current tax structure inhibits regional cooperation</li> <li>▪ Current land use policies encourage sprawl.</li> </ul>	 <p><b>A Complete Report of the Regional Town Meeting will be made available in the coming weeks.</b></p>