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SUMMER 2022



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Wood County
Economic Development

Lindsey Piersol, a native of the Mid-Ohio Valley, has been serving as the Executive Director of the Wood County Economic Development Office since March of 2016. Her responsibilities include county-wide marketing and attraction; business retention and expansion efforts; recommending tax incentives or abatements for companies; and maintaining the county property database. Prior to her current role, Piersol served as the Public Affairs Liaison for former State of Ohio Treasurer Josh Mandel, where she was responsible for 23 counties in Central and Southeast Ohio.

Economic Development Opportunities Courtesy of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act

By definition, economic development is the creation of wealth from which community benefits are realized. Economic Development Directors, like myself, work to expand their local tax base by attracting new businesses or assisting their current businesses with growth and expansions. We are frequently asked why Community A is able to land a large project while Community B cannot. The answer may be one of the following:

1. Community B does not have shovel-ready sites.
2. Community B does not have the necessary infrastructure in place to land a large project.
3. Community B does not have access to an attractive education system or workforce.



4. Community B is not located near or along an interstate or U.S. highway.

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act of 2021 and the significant influx of dollars that accompanied its passage can address many of the obstacles listed above. West Virginia is slated to receive \$6 billion in investment. According to Congressman McKinley's office, West Virginia will receive \$3.013 billion for roads and bridges, \$350 million for water and sewer systems, and \$100 million for broadband deployment, amongst other things.

“The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act funding is a step towards ensuring we have available utilities to attract businesses to West Virginia.”





How will this funding assist economic development efforts across West Virginia and in Wood County? Let's start by addressing what Community B was missing above.

What is a Shovel-Ready Site?

A shovel-ready site is one that has had the necessary due diligence completed, including, but not limited to: planning, zoning, Phase I environmental study, a Phase II (if required), an ALTA survey, a geotechnical survey, title work, a wetlands delineation, utilities/infrastructure mapping, soil analysis, etc. As of 2019, 31 states in the U.S. – and every contiguous state to West Virginia – had a Certified Sites program in place. A certified site designation means that a property meets or exceeds specific criteria for industrial development. To be competitive amongst site selectors, realtors, and companies, West Virginia needs to implement an official certified sites program.

What is Necessary Infrastructure?

At a recent meeting of the West Virginia Economic Development Council, InSite Consulting did a presentation about site readiness. One of the slides presented was titled, "Make or Break Your Site" from a site consultant's perspective.

The slide went on to say that the site specifications you must know and confirm about your site include:

1. Electric to site boundaries with available, excess capacity.
2. Water to site boundaries with available, excess capacity.
3. Sewer to site boundaries with available, excess capacity.
4. Natural gas to site boundaries with available, excess capacity.
5. Fiber to site boundaries.

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act funding is a step towards ensuring we have available utilities to attract businesses to West Virginia.

What Does an Attractive Education System and Workforce Mean?

I have an 18-month-old son. One of the most important things to his dad and me, aside from his happiness, is that he gets a quality education. When deciding where to locate, businesses and site consultants often examine the area's education system, including the attainment rate of high school diplomas, bachelor's degrees, and graduate degrees. Likewise, they often request information on the labor shed and unemployment rate of the area they are considering locating.

The Infrastructure and Jobs Investment Act is set to create workplace development grant programs and industry-specific advisory boards. According to [SHRM.org](https://www.shrm.org), "*The legislation would create or expand workforce development programs at the Department of Transportation (DOT), Department of Energy (DOE) and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) related to the surface transportation, energy efficiency, and wastewater and water utility industries.*" Further, the bill would "*direct federal agencies to create four new advisory boards related to workforce composition and industry needs,*" including a Women of Trucking Advisory Board, an Intelligent Transportation Technologies Industry, a 21st Century Energy Workforce Advisory Board, and the creation, through the EPA, of a "*federal interagency working group on the water and wastewater utility workforce that would produce a report on the recruitment, training and retention challenges faced by the industry.*"

How Important are Roads and Bridges for Economic Development?

Every Request for Information (RFI) that our office has ever received has a transportation section or tab. An RFI our office recently worked on had its own section for transportation, with a portion titled "Proximity to Highway." The RFI went on to ask the distance to the nearest interstate highway/four-lane major primary road, as well as information on existing industrial grade access roads to the property. The \$3.013 billion West Virginia will receive for roads and bridges will only help to support the network of production transportation that is critical to our nation's economy. West Virginia is in a prime location to reach half of the U.S. population and a third of the Canadian market in one day's drive.

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At the end of 2021, Wood County announced the attraction of a FedEx Distribution Center that will result in 250 jobs and a \$47 million investment. We were able to land this project because the property owner invested in site readiness studies, plans, and infrastructure. This project is a prime example of being proactive rather than reactive.

I'm pleased to see West Virginia's – and Wood County's – leaders investing in infrastructure as we look towards future economic growth. The infrastructure bill's one-time infusion of dollars into our economy is an opportunity to make generational change in our great state. **W**