

*Teamwork Toledo*  
*Economic Development Remarks*  
*August 16, 2009*

*(Kevin)*

Good afternoon. Thanks for joining us.

The mantra of the campaign for any Toledo city council candidate should be simple—it's about the jobs, stupid.

With our metro unemployment rate topping 15 percent...and it appears it will still climb...our region's leaders need to refocus, redouble, and redirect their efforts to grow the local economy, create an environment for investment and expansion, and foster the long-term opportunities that won't just allow Toledo and Northwest Ohio to survive, but thrive.

What you're about to hear is a 5-point economic development plan...that is as much a **philosophy** about how to grow our economy and create jobs...as much as it is a **blueprint**.

While everyone who runs for office says they're all about creating jobs—they're being disingenuous.

**GOVERNMENT DOES NOT CREATE JOBS. BUT IT CAN—AND SHOULD—MAKE A MORE BUSINESS-FRIENDLY ENVIRONMENT THAT ALLOWS THAT TO HAPPEN.**

Number one—take the politics out of the process.

For too long, Toledo's political leaders have thought they're the masters of job creation. I say, get real. None of us is an economic development expert. That's why an alphabet soup of agencies exists—LCIC, the port authority, RGP, and others.

As legislators and elected leaders...our job should be simply this: give them direction, hold them accountable, then get the hell out of their way.

Directors, presidents, and CEOs of those agencies can—and should—have measurable goals built into their contract. Tie part of their paycheck to meeting those annual goals. **BUT LET THEM DO THEIR JOBS WITHOUT FURTHER INTERFERENCE.**

*(Tricia)*

Number 2—cooperate and coordinate.

Each of our economic development agencies has a role to play and a niche that fits a bigger picture.

Representatives of the various agencies all meet on a regular basis to discuss projects, pitches, and plans. Let's take that a step further.

LCIC—the Lucas County Improvement Corporation...for a long time was the county's real estate holding agency.

The port authority's specialty is financing, incentives, and grant funding.

The RGP...with Rocket Ventures and other investment portfolios provides startup capital and other assistance.

The Toledo Regional Chamber of Commerce, the University of Toledo, and the county workforce development department also play vital roles.

But let's define those boundaries and have each agency focus on what it does best so that each one is a player at the table for a regional approach to economic development...not at loggerheads.

LCIC banks available land and offers brownfields, prime real estate, and shovel-ready sites with infrastructure in place.

The port authority sends a representative with an array of incentives and financing options.

Workforce development officials offer the trained human capital options—in other words, the skilled, hard-working folks needed.

*(Tricia, cont'd.)*

Number three—reduce the rules, regulations, and red tape.

Too many times in Toledo, city government and its elected officials see what they think is a problem and try to “fix” it with unnecessary bureaucracy, another program, or regulations that overburden or overtax business owners or an entire industry.

Let’s be blunt—there’s a ring of investment going on around and outside the city limits—roughly outside the I-475/U-S 23 beltway.

Why—because Toledo is **NOT** presently a business-friendly community. That’s the reality on the street...not in the ivory tower on the upper floors of One Government Center.

A couple of examples. The city’s point-of-sale inspection legislation needs to go. Why add more government bureaucracy and regulation to an already-depressed real estate market. Homes and buildings are not moving...because buyers and sellers are overburdened with another needless layer of bureaucracy.

The state already certifies home inspectors...and for 200 years, any real estate transaction already has been **BUYER BEWARE.**

Have you ever tried to get a permit approved for anything here in the city? It’s like how changing a college class used to be for students. A visit to who-knows-how-many agencies.

Let’s take it to the 21st century...and employ a technology-based request and approval process...so busy people can obtain a building inspection, a construction permit, or contractor’s license over the Internet...from their desk.

*(John)*

Number four—be a good neighbor.

Toledo has become a dirty word to our suburban neighbors and bordering counties—because our elected city officials have given them no reason to trust us.

Don't just mouth the words "regional cooperation" when it's convenient. Deeds, not words, win back that trust. We must show Wood County and its communities, and our other suburban neighbors that Toledo is worthy of their renewed partnership.

One example involves water.

Yes, Toledo controls Northwest Ohio's largest source of fresh water. **BUT DON'T USE WATER AS A WEAPON TO HOLD OUR NEIGHBORS HOSTAGE.**

Use it instead as a regional resource to create jobs. Our neighbors know they should—and must—pay a markup on the price of water. But don't gouge them so badly that it prevents regional cooperation or development.

Approached in a fair, common-sense manner, reasonable deals can be done that are a win-win for both communities. Tax sharing is a laudable goal—but be realistic...and we can earn back some lost trust and set the stage for future cooperation.

*(Kevin)*

Number five is a new concept—explore the idea of so-called “economic gardening”.

We must balance our economic portfolio beyond the auto industry. Everyone now recognizes that.

Yes, alternative energy and intermodal can—and should—play vital roles in Toledo’s future. However, they alone are not the saviors of our suffering economy.

Our elected officials have conducted what is known as “cluster analysis” of growth **industries**—and identified those two as the main players.

Economic gardening goes beyond that and identifies the **“growth companies”**—the entrepreneurs, the innovators, and the owners of “second-stage” companies that are ready and ripe for expansion.

They aren’t the Fortune 500 giants...but the home-grown hopefuls, one to 99 employees...ready to go from the owner making all the decisions to a more formal, larger structure.

We are in a fast-paced and largely unpredictable marketplace. We need a change in the mindset of our community...similar to what Littleton, Colorado went through when it lost a major employer—and thousands of jobs.

Instead of competing against hundreds of other communities looking for that one grand-slam...economic gardening focuses on the intellectual capital within a community...helps those entrepreneurs and innovators ready to take a risk...and allows them to create jobs of the future.

These kinds of growth companies have CEOs and senior executives who network extensively...cooperate and collaborate with each other in creative ways...and create local/regional supply-buy chains. The companies that are created are agile and able...always looking to refocus, instead of read-and-react to the ever-changing marketplace and business climate.

By identifying those “can-do people and firms, the movers and shakers, and thinkers and decision-makers”...economic gardening can provide the water, nutrients, and fertile soil to help those “home-grown hopefuls” become success stories.

It’s not a sexy approach—we’re talking a couple dozen, 100, or a handful of new jobs at a time—not thousands.

But it’s working out west. And there are dynamic communities doing it every day—and winning. Seattle, Washington and Fairfax, Virginia are just a couple of examples.