

**Economic Development Plan**  
**For the East Palestine – Unity Township Joint Economic Development District**

4-23-26

**Background and Impetus for Action**

Following the February 3, 2023, derailment of a Norfolk Southern (NS) train on the eastern edge of East Palestine and the controlled burn of hazardous chemicals from derailed tank cars which resulted in 30 businesses closing or relocating, including 4 four manufacturing facilities near the railroad tracks, the imperative to develop a growth corridor along State Route 14 (SR 14) in Unity Township north of East Palestine became clear. There had been numerous discussions between the Village and the Township over the prior years about forming a Joint Economic Development District (JEDD). But the time to move past talking and into action had arrived.

**Advantages of SR 14 Corridor**

The SR 14 Corridor is the primary traffic corridor in the area, connecting the Pittsburgh metro area to the Cleveland suburbs. Existing industries, such as SMS Group, as well as retail and commercial businesses have historically located along SR 14 in Unity Township. Over 9,000 vehicles a day transit the corridor. The corridor's gently rolling topography is conducive to development as opposed to the area south of the Village, which has steeper terrain and extensive past coal mining activity. The SR 14 corridor is the logical place for light industrial, commercial, retail and residential development. The greatest challenge to economic development in the area has been a lack of water and sewer service in the area, which poses a barrier for business investment.

**JEDD Part of Larger Strategy**

Manufacturing remains the largest employment sector for residents living in East Palestine, employing 17.7% of resident workers, which is far above the national average. While most East Palestine workers commute outside of East Palestine for work, East Palestine is home to approximately 10 small manufacturers. From metal fabrication, to refractory materials, to specialized components for the steel and molten metal industries, manufacturing still plays a pivotal role in the East Palestine economy. These industries require specialized skills and pay higher wages than most other sectors. Manufacturing also has one of the largest economic multipliers, meaning it supports a high number of supplier companies and jobs.

In the months following the derailment, the Village of East Palestine worked with an economic development consulting firm to assist in developing an economic development plan for the Village's recovery. The second pillar of the plan was focused on "Retaining, Expanding and Attracting Value-Adding Companies." The plan acknowledged traditional industry locations along the railroad may no longer be viable for industry growth and that there could be challenges even retaining industries at their current locations. Through the course of the economic development assessment and planning process, several manufacturers reported they have the potential to grow and like being in East Palestine where they have skilled workers and a favorable business environment. But whether East Palestine seeks to help existing employers grow or attract new employers, it will need shovel-ready locations where companies can locate and grow.

The plan recommended extending Village water and sewer utilities to the SR 14 corridor, developing a small business park for light industrial use in the corridor and creating a JEDD with

Unity Township to facilitate commercial and residential development all along the corridor. The Village worked diligently with the Unity Township Trustees to formulate a plan for the JEDD area's development.

### **The JEDD Economic Development Plan**

The JEDD Board, Village, and Township will work collaboratively to finalize and flesh out the details of an economic development plan, an outline of which follows:

1. The Village of East Palestine will secure funding to engineer the extension of a water line up Brookdale to SR 14 and then to the East in the SR 14 right of way to Howell Road where it will connect to an existing water line. The Village will extend the sanitary sewer up Howell road to the SR 14 Corridor. The timeline for construction of this infrastructure will be a function of grant and loan approvals.
2. Further extensions of utilities to other parcels will be undertaken as capacity and availability permits. The provision of utilities will allow developable land in the corridor to achieve its highest and best use, which is likely to include light industrial, commercial, retail and residential development. The development of this area will generate value for property owners, result in new construction, create new jobs, generate additional commerce, generate new tax revenue, attract new residents, and generally enhance the region.
3. East Palestine Community Improvement Corporation (EPCIC), a non-profit organization created by the Village to lead economic development efforts, and/or its development partner, will pursue the development of a small business park on an ~85-acre site, already under option by the EPCIC, along the SR 14 Corridor. Preliminary conceptual drawings call for a range of sites that could accommodate 25,000 SF to 100,000 SF buildings. Target industries will be metal working, metal fabrication, automotive suppliers, refractory related companies, energy and chemical supply chain companies, and defense manufacturing supply chain companies. The EPCIC, or its partner, will market the business park through ZoomProspector and other best practices to existing companies who may need expansion options as well as regional companies looking for new locations. Ohio's favorable tax structure could be a competitive advantage, especially with the site's close proximity to Pennsylvania.
4. The Village of East Palestine will work with the State of Ohio and Youngstown State University to develop the First Responder Training Center in the corridor on a roughly 10 acre parcel within the business park. Funding for the facility has already been secured through an agreement with Norfolk Southern Railroad and the State of Ohio.
5. Property owners of commercial or industrial property or raw developable land will be invited to voluntarily petition to have their property included in the JEDD. No property will be forced into the JEDD without the owner's willingness.
6. The Village, Township, and EPCIC will use economic development programs to support and incentivize business investments in the business park and the surrounding area. This could include the creation of a Community Reinvestment Area or Enterprise Zone for property tax exemptions, or JobsOhio incentive programs, or loan programs from Valley Partners, ODOD, SBA or OMEGA. The JEDD will utilize the Columbiana County Port Authority, Lake to River, JobsOhio, ODOD and other economic or development organizations to help incentivize deals and win projects.

7. Village Police, Fire, EMS protection will be offered to JEDD properties.
8. Unity Township and the Village of East Palestine will share income tax revenues imposed on JEDD parcels with a portion of JEDD revenues used to support the ongoing services provided to JEDD Parcels.