



NOBLE COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

ROOM 210 - COURT HOUSE

CALDWELL, OHIO 43724-1294

PHONE (740) 732-2969

HOUSE ECONOMIC AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

PROPONENT TESTIMONY – HOUSE BILL 98

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Brad A. Peoples

Noble County Commissioner

Good morning Chair Zeltwanger, Vice Chair Powell, Ranking Member Sobecki, and members of the House Economic and Workforce Development Committee. Thank you for allowing me to speak in support of House Bill 98, and the efforts made to revive the Rural Industrial Park Loan program:

Noble County Ohio on November 6th elected a 33 year old Independent Party candidate to the office of County Commissioner. Both Democrats and Republicans alike voted outside party lines to elect an Independent candidate for the first time. There is a logical explanation for this and it had nothing to do with the quality of the candidate. A struggling economy, missed opportunities, a lack of readiness, and a gross lack of progressive thinking adequately explains why after nearly 6,000 votes were cast, I was the last man standing.

Noble County residents time and time again explained to me how important it was to them, to have an elected official who would advocate for better job opportunity in our local economy. Voters would tell me that their children and grandchildren had left the area to find gainful employment. Sometimes this meant moving 30 minutes away, sometimes 2 hours away, and sometimes even two states away. In Noble County Ohio we have exported our best and brightest young adults to other communities, simply due to depleted job opportunities. And now after years of this unfortunate outflow, we are left not only with depleted job opportunities but a depleted workforce.

With that being said, Economic Development was obviously the #1 problem on the mind of Noble County Voters last election, and I believe their problems should determine our policy. So when considering whether or not to revive the RIPL program I'd like you to consider the economic development landscape in my County:

We have hundreds of acres of property available for development in prime location. This ground is near the intersection of State route 78, and interstate 77 that just happens to split Noble county down the middle. Much of this ground is out of the flood plain. Much of it is flat and would provide an ideal setting for A Rural Industrial Park. These tracts of land are owned by local business owner/investors who have the same vision of a bright economic future that I have. These property owners are community minded people who are willing to cooperate with Economic Development efforts, and people who I personally know value the future of their community more than they value a dollar.

However these raw land assets in a competitive market stand very little chance. A lack of readiness at these sites, has made Noble County a 3 legged dog in a 4 legged dog race.

Since taking office January 1st I've aggressively educated myself on the realities of Economic Development. I now know that unless you have a shovel ready site with Infrastructure present and measured, you don't have much. I now know that until you have a shovel ready site with some sort of spec building you likely won't compete with those who do.

However the cost of changing raw land assets to ready assets is nearly unjustifiable unless we can guarantee return on the investment. We do not have enough financial resources on our own to take risk of that magnitude. Without some financial assistance designed to help us develop our assets, our raw land assets will remain exactly that: raw.

As leaders in the County we are giving 100% effort toward making wise use of what we already have. Myself and Commissioner Ty Moore have connected Noble County with the Director of the Port Authority in Belmont County. This relationship looks to be an ideal fit to connect our county with opportunities associated with the energy development in Belmont County. Our local leaders, including all 3 Commissioners, all members of the Board of Public affairs, our mayor, our village council and our water superintendent are meeting Monday night to discuss the expansion of our water capacity so that we can be ready for tomorrow's opportunities. Our commissioners met with the CEO of Washington electric in an effort to support Broadband internet expansion into Noble County, and to proactively invite growth. Even with few assets we are doing our best to be prepared, and to make sure anyone willing to invest in our county knows they have made a wise investment.

I am incredibly hopeful and energized by the possibility of reviving the RIPL program. Here's why:

For whatever reason the Good Lord decided that the foothills of the Appalachians would be home of the cheapest source of energy in the world. Like a Golf ball sitting atop a tee of pure Gold Noble County rests on top of the fuel of the future. We are currently very hopeful that PTT Global will locate a cracker plant in Belmont County. If this project comes to be, we are being told that any prime acreage within one hour of this new cracker plant will be subject to significant economic growth. A vast amount of Developable land along a state highway mirroring an interstate throughout our County, creates a blank canvas that is ripe for new industry. With help, Noble county could create an industrial environment that could offer prime locations. Large tracts of land with interstate frontage, close to schools, restaurants, several gas stations, and hotels, means Noble County could offer industrial sites to businesses that may otherwise locate 25 minutes south of Noble County in West Virginia.

If you believe the RIPL program is the 4th leg we need to become competitive and attract people to rural Ohio then by all means make it happen.

My community desperately needs to take advantage of this. Our county budget desperately needs the positive financial impact associated with this. Our current graduates, and graduates of the years to come deserve to find lucrative employment in their home community. Our local filling stations deserve the increased foot traffic of a growing population. Our local restaurants deserve the increased sales, our local builders deserve new building contracts, our local grocery stores deserve to sell more food.

Many rural Ohio counties are behind the curve, because we have never had the tax base revenue to meet basic needs, PLUS the needs attached to proactive economic development in our community. Our tax base simply cannot sustain both.

The RIPL program just may be what our County needs to attract people and attract new transactions. We have operated on so little for so long that I can promise you every dime invested in Noble County will be appreciated, and reinvested wisely. Thank you for allowing me to testify today. I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.