



Ohio Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee

Testimony

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Lake County Ohio Port and Economic Development Authority**

Chairman Balderson, Vice Chairman Jordan, Ranking Member O'Brien and members of the Senate Energy & Natural Resources Committee, my name is Peter Zahirsky and I would like to thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Senate Bill 51 on behalf of the Lake County Ohio Port and Economic Development Authority, where I work as the Director of Coastal Development.

- In 2005, following several years' worth of stakeholder meetings, public input sessions, and community fundraising, the Lake County Planning Commission released the Coastal Development Plan, which focused on documenting the conditions of the county's shoreline, as well as its major public access points, and what could be done to protect and enhance those opportunities. In 2006, the Landside Communities Plan was released, which built on the previous plan by exploring the opportunities for private investment based around the public access sites examined in the first plan. The opportunities were amenities such as lakefront restaurants, bed and breakfasts, and residential and commercial space. When the Port Authority was created in 2007, one of its tasks was implementation of the coastal development plans.
- As mentioned before, one original goal of the Coastal Development Plan was shoreline protection. While new recreational opportunities like beach parks and restaurants are exciting, none of them are possible where the shoreline is in danger of eroding. Anything that can be done to protect the lakeshore's natural integrity in an ecologically sound manner will go a long way in ensuring that these priceless public resources will be available to future generations.
- While the Port Authority must direct its resources toward publicly owned and publicly accessible lands, we all know that Lake Erie does not concern itself with parcel boundary lines. This year we have seen record high water levels on Lake Erie, and concomitantly high amounts of erosion across Ohio's Lake Erie shoreline. In order for this erosion to be effectively addressed, neighboring property owners, both public and private, must work together to undertake comprehensive protection measures. In Lake County, we have 31 miles of shoreline, but only 6 of those miles are publicly owned. It is important to note

that public areas benefit when private property is properly protected because it prevents a chain reaction of weakened conditions.

- Private property owners acting individually to counter erosion encounter great difficulty, both in project cost and navigating regulatory hurdles. The individual investment in erosion control on the lakefront can be prohibitively high, and the options for financing these improvements are generally very limited. Many owners have to take out additional mortgages on their property to cover the cost of protecting it. Further, the approval process can be a long and complex one, and many owners do not have the time or resources to manage it alone. By joining together in a special improvement district and committing to a special assessment for the life of the district, these owners can access long-term financing which will help to ensure that projects undertaken are of lasting quality as opposed to a series of lower cost, relatively short term projects. Comprehensive erosion control projects that are undertaken by adjacent landowners in concert with each other will be much more effective and cost efficient than an individual, piecemeal approach. Finally, by partnering with their local government agencies, these properties owners can receive help in working through the approval processes of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Ohio Department of Natural Resources.

In closing, I would just like to repeat that anything we can do to assist in the protection of private property along the Lake Erie shoreline will also help to protect the public lands and public investments as well. Thank you again for giving me the opportunity to speak today on this important piece of legislation.