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Revitalizing Our Downtowns

Ohio has a rich legacy. When Ohio became the first state in the Northwest Territory, our cities and frontier towns became the new gateway to the West. Through the 1800s, the economic opportunity and untapped potential of our state led settlers to plan cities, build roads, design parks, and construct factories and homes for the booming population. But forward-looking Ohioans did not rest on their laurels. Into the 20th century, Ohio's great colleges and universities helped elevate a quality of life that attracted workers and industrialists to every corner of our state. Along the way, each big city and every small town developed its own cultural and economic identity. Populations boomed. Communities flourished.

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Today our cities and small towns face a new set of challenges. Many of our biggest cities have experienced significant population decline over the past 60 years. After years of trade and tax policies that shipped manufacturing jobs out of our state and overseas, Ohio communities have been forced to deal with vacant homes, crumbling infrastructure, and acres of abandoned properties. Public transportation and services have not kept pace with the needs of our population. Students attend our world-class colleges and universities, but too many leave our state after graduation. We will confront these challenges with the same spirit of optimism and sweat-equity of our forebears.

This week the Senate Banking Committee, on which I serve, passed the [Livable Communities Act of 2010](#). This legislation would provide communities with resources to help reshape themselves for the 21st century. It is not a one-size-fits all approach. By empowering local and regional planning, the Act would help communities promote sustainable economic development and better coordinate local, state, and federal housing, transportation, and housing programs, while saving taxpayer dollars.

From big city mayors to economic development directors in Appalachia, communities of all sizes would have the flexibility to develop and implement plans that best fit the needs of their communities. Small towns that have plans for historic renovation of buildings or water and sewer improvements could apply for competitive grants to make these plans a reality. County

officials worried about unsafe roads or dangerous intersections could obtain technical assistance to help them design safer roadways. City planners and chambers of commerce could partner together to receive resources to spur economic development on our state's lake and river fronts.



The Act would build on the work we're already seeing across Ohio. It could help communities like Xenia and Wilmington revitalize their Main Streets. It would promote regional planning strategies like those in Youngstown and Columbus that have become national models for sustainable city planning.



The redevelopment of Cleveland's University Circle and Euclid Corridor is creating jobs and connecting residents with new restaurants and small businesses. This legislation would help other cities and towns pursue their own redevelopment goals. Whether it's brownfield redevelopment or investments in public transportation that spur transit-oriented economic development – like Cincinnati's streetcars – the tools provided in this legislation would create exciting revitalization and growth opportunities for cities and towns throughout Ohio.

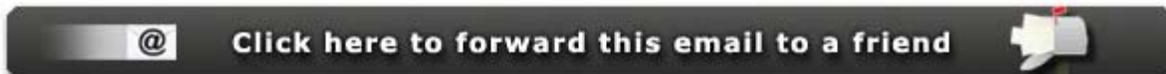
This Act would also be critical in promoting efforts to prevent "brain drain" in Ohio. From Akron to Athens to Columbus to Toledo, our young people look to cities and towns with a high quality of life and meaningful, good-paying jobs. The community redevelopment programs in this legislation can help Ohio's cities attract and retain the people and jobs necessary to compete with cities across the nation.

This bill is an important compliment to the exciting work already being done across Ohio and can play an important role in strengthening our communities. Our state is home to a diverse array of big cities, Appalachian hamlets, farming communities, and suburbs that stand to benefit from the Livable Communities Act. Together, we can ensure that Ohio not only overcomes the challenges we face, but thrives in the 21st century economy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Sherrod Brown".

Sherrod Brown



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