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Q&A with Alex Beres, executive director of the Clinton County Port Authority

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In this edition of *Development Incentives Quarterly*, we welcome [Alex Beres](#), executive director of the Clinton County Port Authority. We discuss how he got his start in economic development, what “success” in economic development has meant to him over his career, and why the port authority form of government in Ohio is the “ultimate economic development tool.”

How did you become interested in making a career out of economic development?

When I was in grade school, my uncle worked for the Ohio Department of Development, and I heard whispered conversations that “Uncle Joe is visiting a major industrial company nearby because he’s working to make sure they stay in Ohio.” I was astonished that there was someone with that much pressure and responsibility, but also trust, to be commissioned for such a job, especially when no one could really know he was doing it. I found it intoxicatingly honorable and full of mystery!

Later, when I was in college, I interned at the Ohio Department of Transportation District #3 in Ashland under District Deputy Director Tom O’Leary. Tom brought an economic development perspective to how he approached the job at ODOT. I thought, “Here is this super-smart, passionate, ornery, truth-talking gentleman who weaves infrastructure and economic development together into a career. Maybe I should do that.” I’ve spent the following two decades realizing I’ve been chasing after the career of an extremely one-of-a-kind and uniquely gifted individual.

How do you measure "success" in economic development and has that changed for you?

Earlier in my career, I measured it strictly in quantitative terms: How much investment? How many jobs? How many projects? But now I value the qualitative aspects as well.

We're contemplating and attempting big things again in the United States and Ohio. We have a new international race for the development of artificial intelligence, aerospace and defense, and advanced manufacturing, and we need vast amounts of reconstructed and new infrastructure to support it. But we have to work to convince our neighbors, residents, and existing businesses that we can actually execute on these tasks ahead of us. We must keep the trust from our fellow citizens, that these projects won't take forever and will benefit them. We talk about being innovative but we've at times forgotten what it means to just be competent and get things done.

I want to look back a couple of decades from now and have people say, "Yes. We accomplished those big internal improvements and we can feel the benefits of them. They make our lives better." That will be the measure of success for us in the future: winning back the belief in ourselves that we can execute and accomplish great things, and they're great because we know and feel that they benefit us all.

Is there a particular economic development tool or tactic that you have found particularly successful?

The port authority form of government in Ohio is the ultimate economic development tool. The common trope is that private business decisions get caught in the trap of waiting for slow and bureaucratic government, and things need to move at the speed of business. But I find that given the right parameters, a port authority can move as rapidly as, or more rapidly, than a private corporation.