

Blueprint for Impact

WESTSIDE ECONOMIC ALLIANCE | SUMMER 2024

ABOUT US

We are a nonprofit, member-based organization that advocates for a healthy economy on the Westside of the Portland, Oregon metropolitan region. Westside Economic Alliance provides our members with a unified voice on local, regional, and state issues. At WEA we believe that smart investments require a balancing of three elements: creating a taxing and incentive environment where businesses can thrive, bolstering a well-trained and well-paid workforce, and investing in the creation of a healthy community.

Issues of concern include land use regulations, housing, urban growth boundary expansion, transportation funding, workforce development, and other Westside infrastructure issues vital to economic development. Westside Economic Alliance members work strategically through our committees on local, county, and state policy-making, to advocate for our members.

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Dear Members, Partners and Colleagues,

Over the past few years, Westside Economic Alliance has been working to build reputation and partnerships while developing a clear vision of our role in the region. Now is the time to draft a blueprint that outlines our policy direction and how we can leverage our resources, including member expertise, to impact our region.

Here are some of various aspects of the situation that convince us the time is right for this blueprint:

- The 2025 legislative session is already on everyone's mind.
- Metro has just issued their 2024 Urban Growth Report with thoughts on how to update Vision 2040
- Conversations about a Transportation funding package are well under way with a look to the 2025 legislative session.
- The federal government is investing in infrastructure and semiconductors at historic levels, yet many legislators oppose economic development incentives as tools to grow our economy.
- As a result of the federal government's commitment to re-shore semiconductor manufacturing, Intel is investing \$36 billion in our region; while other federal CHIPs investments are brought into the state.
- Each of our communities has identified an ongoing need to recruit, train and retain a middle-class workforce; which is tied to meeting affordable and workforce housing needs.

We will weave elements of the bullet points above into a WEA policy agenda for 2024-2025. This agenda will focus the organization's work and build connections between our policy committees to maximize our impact.

To be clear, we could not do this work without our members. And so, a special thanks to Kaiser Permanente for their sponsorship of WEA's Policy Conference in March. Conversations from members at that event contributed to our work and in the development of this document. We thank Kaiser Permanente for the many years of WEA membership and look forward to continued collaboration.

Together we have the chance to make changes that will positively impact our region for generations to come. Let's not miss this opportunity.

Sincerely,
Elizabeth Mazzara, Executive Director
Westside Economic Alliance

Background

There is a long history of advocacy for a vibrant economy, a strong and growing workforce and healthy communities on the Westside of the Portland Metro region. For decades, various associations worked to ensure the Westside had a voice as policy makers made decisions about transportation, infrastructure, and economic development investments. In 1998, Westside Economic Alliance formed from a merger between two of these entities, the Tualatin Economic Development Corporation and the Sunset Corridor Association. The merger's goal was to form an alliance that brought together the public, private and non-profit sectors in a collaborative approach to problem solving and policy making.

Today, the economic importance of the Westside cannot be overstated. Our region has never been more important to Oregon's economic future as it has become a key driver of the state's diversity and population growth. We intend to use this fact to ground the development and implementation of a targeted policy agenda. The goal of this work is to ensure elected officials understand that Westside growth and success are a central and positive economic force for our state.

Our Goals

On the heels of March 2024 Policy Conference, we heard a strong desire from our membership to shape policy and funding packages for the benefit of the Westside.

Three goals should guide our work:

1. Protect and expand economic development tools and incentives.
2. Achieve a more balanced approach to land use, land readiness and employment lands.
3. Support the adoption of a well-rounded transportation funding package that includes a transformative, equitable and uniquely Oregon approach to revenue generation.

These goals are responsive to the needs of our members and true to our vision of supporting vibrant, prosperous, and diverse communities on the Westside of the Portland metro region.

Additionally, these goals look both internally and externally at what it will take to be successful for our membership.

Our Blueprint



Goal 1: Protect and expand economic development tools and incentives

One of the challenges of working in and for the Westside is a perception among some policy makers that economic development tools are one-sided in favor of business. We need to tell the story of how economic development tools can be crafted to ensure they reflect the values of our state, with a focus on building a well-trained and well-paid workforce.

We need to link economic development tools to middle class job creation, which means focusing on manufacturing, the construction trades, healthcare jobs and similarly situated employment opportunities with above median wages. We also need to support employers who struggle to find and retain the workforce they need to thrive.

WEA should take two actions to achieve the goal of protecting and advancing economic development tools and incentives:

1. Economic Development 101: Educate policy makers and their staff on the opportunities to craft economic development tools that build the economy for all residents.
2. Build Policy Capacity: Westside Economic Alliances needs more policy expertise, either internally or through a partnership, to help us successfully galvanize public and private members to stack economic development tools to supercharge growth.

Goal 2: Achieve a new approach to land use, land readiness, housing and employment lands

In both Senate Bill 4 (the Oregon Chips Act, 2023) and SB 1537 (Governor Kotek's Housing Production legislation, 2024) the most contentious element was language that adjusted Oregon's land use laws to allow the region and the state to be nimbler and act more quickly. If we have to work around the system to allow for needed expansion – both for employers and for housing – then the system is broken.

We can both support long-standing Oregon values on open, green space and promote changes to land policies to grow the economy. It is not a binary choice.

WEA can hold these seemingly contradictory beliefs and help policy makers move forward by focusing on a simple question: what do our employers need on the Westside and what areas should we target for growth?

WEA should take two actions to achieve a new approach to land use, land readiness, housing, and employment lands:

1. Craft a proposal, through our membership, that catalyzes a focused and specific conversation on where and how the Westside should ready land for these purposes.
2. Use all of our relationships with government and business leaders - federal, state, regional and local – to break the deadlock and chart a new path for talking about land use in Oregon.

Goal 3: Support a well-rounded transportation funding package that includes a transformative, equitable and uniquely Oregon approach to revenue generation

We can no longer rely on old models of public engagement and outreach to come up with new ideas. In order to design and implement funding mechanisms that move us up and through the transition to cleaner fuels, we need to engage in thoughtful and concentrated work with experts, business leaders and our community.

Actions:

1. Convene a 6-month Workshop on Transportation Revenue to explore best practices across the country and propose an approach that works for Oregon.
2. Bring forward policy recommendations drawn from the workshop to regional and state policy makers to advance alternative transportation revenue models.

Implementation Plan and Timeline

- May - August
 - Discuss Blueprint with the Board and Committee Chairs, Make Edits, Finalize
- September - October
 - Present Finalized Blueprint to Committees
 - Assign Each Committee Parts of the Blueprint, Clarify Work Plans
 - Brief Partners and Elected Officials on Goals
- October - onward
 - Implement Committee Work Plans
 - Organize Events to Support Policy Agenda
 - Educate and Activate Membership during 2025 Legislative Session
- Quarterly 2025 - onward
 - Staff and Committees Report to Board on progress
 - Reassess Blueprint, adjust or adopt new goals based on organizational progress



Our Vision

Where do we want to be in the future?

To realize vibrant, prosperous, and diverse communities on the Westside of the Portland Metro region.

Our Mission

What do we do? What makes us different?

Promote and encourage a vibrant business environment on the westside of the Metro region by supporting the creation and growth of economic opportunities, investments in a well-trained and well-paid workforce, and strategies for healthy and sustainable communities.

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Want to learn more?

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