

# THE CORD REPORT

The Official Quarterly Newsletter of CORD



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# THE 136TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY RETURNS

**Michael Guastella**  
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## General Update

It has been a whirlwind to start the 136th General Assembly - with over 300 bills between the two chambers, two active budgets, major reform legislation in several industries, and roughly 30 new legislators ready to make their marks in Columbus.

The Senate is nearing completion of the Transportation Budget (HB 54) and the work on the Main Operating Budget (HB 96) will soon kick into gear. Although a lot of the introductory work has already been done, the House is planning to pass their version of the budget in early April - six weeks earlier than normal. We are actively monitoring two dozen moving pieces of legislation, in addition to the thousands of pages of policy moving in the operating budget for you! Here is a brief summary on the top bills that are most relevant to you!

Please contact me at [michael@gpgrhr.com](mailto:michael@gpgrhr.com) if you have any questions or would like to discuss anything further.

## Priority Legislative Updates

### **SB 57 - Requires Political Subdivisions to Accept Cryptocurrency**

Not exactly the first bill you expected to see here, right?

SB 57, as introduced, would require that political subdivisions of the state (including 6119s) establish a way to accept cryptocurrency for any fees from its customers. Practically speaking, this legislation could mean that 6119s need to come up with a way for customers to pay their bills using Bitcoin, or any of the other main "coins" in the cryptocurrency world.

Upon its introduction, GPG took immediate action on behalf of CORD to discuss this bill with the sponsors. We communicated that the bill has unintended consequences; that Districts would have to spend upwards of \$10,000 to be able to accept cryptocurrency as a means for payment of a bill. The bill sponsor was open to suggestions, and within 24 hours, we had an amendment drafted that changed the "shall" to a "may" in the bill. Meaning, if there is a District out there that wants to accept crypto - they might be able to soon! But crucially...they won't have to.

SB 57 has had one hearing in the Senate Financial Institutions, Insurance and Technology Committee. We have gotten a commitment from the bill sponsor that this amendment will go in at the next hearing if possible.

### **HB 49 - Water Improvement Districts**

This bill is a re-introduction of Rep. Claggett's HB 616 from the previous General Assembly. The legislation would create a new type of District - a "water improvement district" (WID), which looks and acts very much like a 6119 district with a couple of major differences. Namely, a WID would be able to bypass the State's competitive bidding and prevailing wage laws.



Also, the bill creates a duplicative regulatory structure, with a WID having most of the same type of authority that a 6119 has.

CORD continues to remain opposed to the bill, given the additional bureaucracy and regulatory confusion that having WIDs and 6119s at the same time would create. We are committed to working with the bill sponsor to address the issues that prompted this legislation.

HB 49 has been referred to the House Natural Resources committee, where it is awaiting its first hearing.

### **HB 92/SB 118 - Lien Certification**

These bills are a reintroduction of HB 93 from the previous General Assembly.

HB 92 and SB 118 are legislation that, if enacted, would prohibit a municipality from having the ability to place a lien on a property that is owned by someone who is not the occupant of that property due to unpaid water bills. Today, if a renter does not pay their water bill and moves away, the property owner/ landlord is liable for the unpaid water bills. If the owner fails to pay, and that property is in the service territory of a municipality, the municipality can place a tax lien on the property until the bills are paid. This bill would remove the municipality's ability to place the lien for that reason, and the municipality would be left to find other means of finding payment for the account.

An important point to make for our purposes is that 6117 districts and 6119 districts are not currently in this bill. So, while CORD members are currently not affected by these bills, we remain on the sidelines ready to oppose the bill should we become included.

HB 92 had its first hearing on February 26th in the House Local Government committee, and SB 118 has yet to receive a hearing but has been referred to the Senate Local Government committee.





## HEADS UP! UPCOMING CHANGES TO CORD LEGISLATIVE COMMUNICATIONS

In a better effort to serve you, we are refining our communications with CORD members. To highlight the priority legislative action more consistently but still have thorough communication with CORD, we are moving to a weekly communications model. See below for a full summary of the changes! We are confident these changes will be a positive change for you, and will better organize what is sent out for your review and feedback.

### Summary of Changes as of March 28, 2025

- We are discontinuing the Governmental Policy Group Monthly CORD Report and instead switching to a weekly legislative report.
- As part of this weekly report, the legislative activity for the week will be communicated in one place, instead of individual emails as individual bills are heard. This new report will include:
  - Priority legislative activity from that week
  - New Bill Introductions
  - News Articles/Other Relevant Items
  - A "running list" of bills we are tracking on behalf of CORD.
- This weekly report will not contain administrative rules, and those will continue to be sent on a case-by-case basis for review.

*Questions? Contact your team at Governmental Policy Group!*

**Michael Guastella**  
Director of Public Affairs  
michaelegpgrhr.com





## TOP DRAWER REGIONAL DISTRICTS: DEERFIELD REGIONAL STORMWATER DISTRICT

The Deerfield Regional Storm Water District, established in 2003, plays a crucial role in managing stormwater and mitigating flooding in Deerfield Township, Warren County, Ohio. Deerfield Township is the most populous jurisdiction in Warren County and encompasses 16.36 square miles with more than 41,000 residents.

### Formation and Governance

The District was formed in response to the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency's (OEPA) Phase II stormwater regulations, along with the public's growing concerns about flooding in the rapidly developing Township. A three-member Board, appointed by the Deerfield Township Trustees, governs the District, with each member serving a staggered three-year term. The Board of Trustees meets monthly, providing a forum for public input and transparency.

### Leadership

Jeff Macomber, a seasoned professional with over 20 years of experience in the water industry, serves as the Board President. Mr. Macomber's expertise in drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater management is invaluable to the District's operations. The District also benefits from the leadership of Stormwater Manager, Jeff Thomas, who has extensive experience in stormwater management at both the state and local levels. Mr. Thomas also served on the District Board of Trustees during the early 2000s.



Jeff Macomber  
Board President  
Deerfield Regional  
Stormwater District



Jeff Thomas  
Stormwater Manager  
Deerfield Regional  
Stormwater District

### Services and Funding

The District provides stormwater services to over 16,000 households. Over the last 5 years, the District has averaged more than \$250,000 per year of capital projects, which includes several joint projects with multiple jurisdictions. It operates on an annual budget of approximately \$900,000, funded by a monthly fee of \$1.92 per Equivalent Residential Unit (ERU). The District is financially stable and has no debt.

## Challenges and Future Outlook

The rapid development experienced by Deerfield Township from the late 1980s to the early 2000s presents a significant challenge for the District. The drainage infrastructure installed in those early developments is now requiring increased maintenance and replacement. The District is focused on proactively addressing these issues and ensuring the long-term sustainability of the stormwater management system.

## Key Points

- Established: 2003
- Area: 16.36 square miles
- Population Served: Over 40,000 residents
- Governance: Three-member Board of Trustees
- Funding: Monthly fee of \$1.92 per ERU
- Annual Budget: \$900,000
- Major Challenge: Aging infrastructure due to rapid development



The Deerfield Regional Storm Water District is committed to protecting the community from flooding and ensuring the effective management of stormwater. Through proactive maintenance, strategic planning, and public engagement, the District is well-positioned to meet the challenges of the future.



## WELCOME TO NEW DISTRICT LEADERSHIP



Travis Anderson, P.E.  
General Manager  
Le-Ax Water District

### Le-Ax Water District

**Travis Anderson, P.E.**, is the new General Manager for the Le-Ax Water District. Travis became the General Manager with the retirement of longtime General Manager **John Simpson** last year. Travis is no stranger to Le-Ax as he has been the District's Engineer since 2009. Travis is a graduate of Ohio University with a degree in Mechanical Engineering. Travis received the 2020 System Specialist of the Year award from the Ohio Rural Water Association. The Le-Ax Water District serves the Village of Albany and 7,100 customers in Athens, Hocking, Meigs, and Vinton counties.



Chase Morris  
Operations Supervisor  
Pleasant Valley Regional  
Sewer District

### Pleasant Valley Regional Sewer District

**Chase Morris** is the new Operations Supervisor for the Pleasant Valley Regional Sewer District. Chase took over the reins of the District with the retirement of General Manager **Jeff Raines** last year after over 35 years of service. The District is located entirely in Ross County and provides services to the residents of Twin, Union, and Scioto Townships. Chase has been with the District since 2003 and is certified as a Class III Operator.

## MEET CORD'S NEWEST BOARD MEMBER THOMAS STALTER, P.E., DISTRICT ENGINEER NORTHWESTERN WATER AND SEWER DISTRICT



Tom Stalter, P.E.  
Engineer, Northwestern  
Water and Sewer District

CORD'S newest Board Member is Thomas Stalter , P.E. Tom has been District Engineer for the Northwestern Water and Sewer District(The District) in Wood County, which serves over 20,000 customer accounts since 2013. As Manager of the Engineering Department, he and his staff oversee design and construction of projects totaling \$25-\$30 million a year. Tom is experienced in design and construction of water and sanitary sewer facilities, hydraulics, master planning, financial and rate projections, project funding administration, private site development, and road design and construction.

Tom joined The District after a 27-year career as a Principal with Poggemeyer Design Group where he managed the Environmental Department responsible for design and construction services for water and wastewater treatment, collection, and distribution. He

also worked for Jones and Henry Engineers after he graduated from the University of Toledo with a BS in Civil Engineering in 1984.

Tom is a native of Bowling Green and a graduate of Bowling Green High School. Tom's wife Sue is a retired preschool teacher, and they are the proud parents of two daughters. Emily, also a BGSU Falcon, is a homemaker with three children ages 1-5. Bethany attended Hillsdale College, George Mason University and is a University of Toledo Law School graduate. She is a practicing attorney in Missouri and specializes in estate planning.. She has a 1-year-old daughter and a son on the way.

Tom finds the greatest satisfaction in his position to "successfully completing difficult and costly projects with grant and loan funding to reduce the costs to our customers." Tom replaces long time CORD Board Member Jerry Greiner as he prepares for retirement in 2026 as President of The District. Tom also looks forward to retirement in coming years—but we do not want to lose him too soon!



NORTHWESTERN  
**THE DISTRICT**  
WATER & SEWER



**Some other fun things you may want to know about Tom:**

**Biggest Challenge in your job:** Permitting and funding for large projects is the most complex (and least fun) part of the job. We typically manage \$25M to \$30M of projects each year while navigating the funding maze and dealing with engineering consultants, contractors, permitting agencies and the public to successfully complete the project. We have a staff of 15 skilled employees that handle this as well as any staff I have experienced.

**Biggest pet peeve:** Bureaucracy and career politicians.

**Something about me you'd be surprised to know:** I know way more about the Royal Family than I care to know.

**If you could have dinner with one person (living or dead) who would it be?** George Washington.

**If you were elected Governor, what new law would you pass?** Tax reduction.

**Your favorite movie:** It's a Wonderful Life.

**Your favorite vocalist, music group, or type of music:** Southern Rock, Lynyrd Skynyrd, Allman Brothers, etc.

**Your favorite football teams:** College: Ohio State Professional: Cleveland Browns (sadly).

**Your favorite book:** Leonardo da Vinci by Walter Isaacson.

**The last book you read:** Travels with George by Nathaniel Philbrick.

**Your favorite vacation spot:** Hatteras, North Carolina.

**Hobbies:** Wood working, fishing, cooking.

**What do you enjoy doing when you are not working?** In my workshop fixing and making things. Spending time with grandchildren.



Pictured above is the construction site for a new 2-million-gallon elevated tank, which will serve a new data center being built next to The District's property in Wood County..



# INFRASTRUCTURE BOND ISSUE ON MAY 6TH BALLOT AS ISSUE 2

Last year, on the final day of the 135th General Assembly, the Legislature completed work to renew what is popularly referred to as the “Issue 2 Public Works Program” or the “State Capital Improvement Program” (SCIP) for local infrastructure improvements. Originally approved by Ohio’s voters in 1987, the program has been renewed three previous times—in 1995, 2005 and 2014. HJR 8, the vehicle to place the issue before the voters on May 6th, provides for an additional 10-year program with the issuance of \$2.5 billion in new general obligation bonds over the next ten years, or an increase of \$50 million annually over the current program. The plan, now in the hands of the voters, would increase bonds by \$625 million over the prior authorization between 2027 and 2036.

Ballot Issue	Article VIII	Date	Amount	Passage Rate
Original (Issue 2)	2k	11/3/87	\$1.2B (\$120M@10 years)	70.8%
1 <sup>st</sup> Renewal (Issue 2)*	2m	11/7/95	\$1.2B (\$120M@10 years)	61.9%
2 <sup>nd</sup> Renewal (Issue 1)**	2p	11/8/05	\$1.35B (\$120M@5 years / \$150M@5 years)	54.1%
3 <sup>rd</sup> Renewal (Issue 1)	2s	5/6/14	\$1.875B (\$175M@5 years / \$200M@5 years)	65.1%

\*with ODOT’s increase in bonding capacity from \$500 million to \$1.2 billion.

\*\*with \$500 million for Third Frontier and \$150 million for Job-Ready Sites.

The Ohio Ballot Board approved the language to go before the voters early this year. The language states that capital improvements be funded if the ballot issue is approved by the voters which would include roads and bridges, wastewater treatment systems, water supply systems, solid waste disposal facilities and storm water and sanitary collection, storage, and treatment facilities.

The language voters will see also declares that the constitutional amendment would “determine that such capital improvements are necessary to preserve and expand the public infrastructure, ensure the public health, safety, and welfare, create and preserve jobs, enhance employment opportunities and improve the economic welfare of the people of Ohio.”

According to Logan County Engineer Scott Coleman, the leader of a broad-based coalition supporting the issue, “A ‘Yes’ vote on Issue 2 is a vote to strengthen the future of our state and its communities. The State Capital Improvement Program has a long and proven track record of success - funding vital roadway improvements and critical water safety projects across all 88 counties. Issue 2’s broad support from local elected officials, business leaders, and labor groups mirrors the nearly unanimous bipartisan support the General Assembly gave in agreeing to place the renewal issue before voters on the May 6 ballot.”

The program is administered by the Ohio Public Works Commission (OPWC), working through 19 local Public Works Integrating Committees (see map below), who help to establish priorities for the funding at the local level. Linda Bailiff, OPWC Director, stressed the magnitude of the responsibility that local governments have for infrastructure: "I think it's over 212,000 lane miles that counties, townships, and municipalities are responsible for. There are 29,000 bridges, 4,400 public water systems, and 1,000 wastewater systems. And so, all of those need attention," she explained. "Our funds pay for repair, replacement, reconstruction, rehabilitation as well as new (builds) and expansion."



Since the program was first funded in 1987, it has provided funding for more than 19,000 projects across all of Ohio's 88 counties. It is estimated that passage of the new issue in May would help create about 35,000 construction jobs. In 2005, 54% of voters marked their ballots in support of the program. When the program was renewed in 2014 it passed with 65% of the vote.

## OPWC Districts

*The Ohio Public Works Commission is made up of 19 Districts Committees statewide that encompass all Ohio's 88 counties. Each District develops their own scoring methodologies based on parameters set forth in the Ohio Revised Code, sets deadlines to apply for funding, and scores the project applications for recommendation to the Commission.*



# NEW LAW ON REMOTE MEETINGS: HALF A LOAF

**Larry Long**  
**Director of Membership Development**  
**CORD**



During the waning days of the last General Assembly, legislation was passed that addressed the issue of remote or virtual meetings by public bodies including Regional Water and Sewer Districts. HB 257 was then signed by Governor DeWine on January 9, 2025, and the Act will become effective on April 9, 2025. During the COVID crisis, you will recall that most public bodies were allowed to conduct public meetings over the internet thanks to the enactment of a temporary law change to Ohio's Open Meeting or "Sunshine Law." In the spring of 2020, the 133rd General Assembly enacted HB 197 which allowed virtual public meetings until December 1, 2021, which was later extended to July 1, 2021, when HB 404 was enacted.

Many Regional Water and Sewer Districts, along with other political subdivisions, thought virtual meetings made it easier to conduct business, while at the same time allowing for greater access to meetings by the public. CORD was hopeful the Legislature would look at the history of the "experiment" and allow virtual meetings permanently.

But, in the end, the legislation is, at best "half a loaf"—if not just a few slices from the loaf. In the case of Regional Districts, the law only applies to those districts where the members of the Board of Trustees do not receive compensation. It's OK to receive reimbursement for expenses, but any form of compensation to the Board makes the law not applicable to these Districts. So, if your Board receives compensation, there is no need to read further. But don't feel bad, this prohibition also applies to all elected officials, so it is of no use to Township Trustees, County Commissioners, and City and Village Councils.

Now, if your Board does not receive compensation, but only reimbursed expenses, virtual meetings are permitted for your district, but several strings are attached. At this point, you may want to stop reading and ask your legal counsel to come to a meeting and explain all provisions of the new law.

One of the first things that is required under the new law is that a district wanting to use the provisions of the law must adopt a policy. This policy must conform with various provisions contained in the Act as specified in the new ORC Section 121.221, some of which will be summarized in this article.



For example, if you are eligible to conduct virtual meetings, however, the following actions cannot be taken at a virtual meeting:

- Actions approving "major nonroutine expenditures." This term must be defined in the policy.
- Actions approving a "significant hiring decision." This term also must be defined in the policy.
- Actions proposing, approving, or voting on a "tax issue or increase."

What is the bottom line? Using virtual meetings routinely as the regular and usual way to conduct public meetings has a lot to be desired. However, the new law may be of some use for various standard actions or in cases where weather or other emergencies may make it hard to have in-person meetings. In addition, the law has some other requirements that must be met and included in the district policy, including the following:

- A 72-hour notice of the virtual meeting must be provided.
- Notification on the district website or other public forum stating how the virtual meeting can be accessed publicly.
- Access must be provided to assure that the public can at all times observe and hear discussions of the Board members and staff.
- Voting must be by Roll Call.
- Each member of the Board of Trustees planning to attend virtually must notify the Chair 48 hours in advance of the meeting.

There are also a couple of other "fun" things in the law. Any two Board members, or 10% of the Board, whichever is greater, can insist that any specific issue or agenda item not be voted on during a virtual meeting. The Board members must make this declaration at least 48 hours before the meeting. Also, if the meeting is legally a public hearing, like in the case of a special assessment hearing, any person affected by the hearing can insist that the hearing not be held virtually.

Districts should consult legal counsel if it is eligible and desirous of utilizing the limited provisions of HB 257. To read the full text of the bill as signed by Governor DeWine, [follow this link](#). As well, [follow this link](#) to view a summary of the law prepared by the Legislative Service Commission.

## SOCIAL SECURITY WEP AND GPO CHANGES: MORE PAYMENTS FOR RETIRED PUBLIC EMPLOYEES POCKETS

Many are aware that the Social Security Fairness Act is now law after many years of proposals for change by state and local government retirees and employees. The law repealed both the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP), and the Government Pension Offset (GPO). Initially, the Social Security Administration believed that it could take a year or more to implement the new system, adjust monthly payments, and make the retroactive payments required by the new law. Many recipients are entitled to a retroactive payment because the WEP and GPO offset no longer apply as of January 2024.

Most people will receive their one-time retroactive payment by the end of March, which will be deposited into their bank account on record with Social Security. Many recipients will also receive higher monthly benefits, which will first be reflected in the benefit payment they receive in April. In some cases, the payments will be delayed for complex cases that cannot be processed through automated systems. Complex cases must be processed manually, on an individual case-by-case basis. Those complex cases will take additional time to update the recipient record and pay the correct benefits.

Generally, eligible social security recipients need to take no further action unless individuals have not previously applied for benefits due to the WEP or GPO offset. In those situations, they may need to submit a new application, which can be completed online or by phone.

Social Security urges recipients to wait until April to ask about the status of their retroactive payment, since these payments will be processed incrementally throughout March. Since the new monthly payment amount will begin with the April payment, beneficiaries should wait until they receive their April payment before contacting the Social Security office with questions about their monthly benefit amount.

Visit the agency's [Social Security Fairness Act webpage](#) to learn more and stay up to date on its progress. Visitors can subscribe to be alerted when the webpage is updated.

So, let's go back to 1977 and 1983 for a minute to understand how we got here. Congress enacted legislation reducing Social Security benefits for employees covered by other pension systems like the Ohio Public Employees Retirement System (OPERS). The Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP) applies to retirees' own social security benefit. The Governmental Pension Offset (GPO) applies to those eligible for Social Security spouse or widow(er) benefits. So, the bottom line—if you worked at a social security job and qualified for benefits, and also work for a state or local government and qualified for retirement under a state retirement system, you or your spouse's social security payments were reduced.

For nearly 40 years state and local government retirees and employees have complained about this "inequity" and the reduced social security payments. At the time, the argument was that WEP would prevent workers who receive state and local pensions from receiving higher social security benefits as if they were long-time, low-wage earners. Given the way the complex social security formula works, those low wage earners receive relatively more benefits than those of higher wage earners. In the case of the GPO, the rationale is more complicated and relates to equity on how spousal or widow(er) benefits of retirees who have only worked under social security works.

But now all of that has been repealed, thanks to the enactment of HR 82, The Social Security Fairness Act, which was signed by President Biden just before leaving office on January 5, 2025. The legislation was sponsored by Congressman Garret Graves, a Republican from Louisiana, who introduced the proposal in early January 2023. When it finally passed the House in the middle of November 2024 many believed it would die in the Senate. You see, the estimated cost of the Social Security Fairness Act was estimated to be around \$200 billion over the next decade and was also thought to cause the Social Security Trust Fund to become insolvent six months sooner than now projected which could later impact all Social Security recipients.



President Biden signs the Social Security Fairness Act as Senator Susan Collins (far left) looks on with other supporters.



Former Senator Sherrod Brown holds a field hearing in Ohio on the WEP and GPO Provisions

But in the Senate under the leadership of Senator Susan Collins (R-Maine) and former Ohio Senator Sherrod from Ohio, the legislation made it through the Senate on December 21 by a vote of 76-20. A nice Christmas gift! But it was not easy as there was competing legislation. HR 5342, the Equal Treatment of Public Servants Act would have watered down the repeal of the WEP by changing the benefits formula, while not addressing the GPO at all. This effort was fought back in the Senate, and HR 82 passed in tack and sent to President Biden. Security benefits received and the size of their pension.

Collins explained that the changes were decades in the making and that she held the first hearing on the issue in 2003 and later collaborated with former Senators Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Mikulski on the issue. Sherrod Brown reflected on the fact that he had first worked on this issue when he was a member of the House—17 years earlier and when it passed, he said: “We have spent decades working to pass this legislation and tonight is a victory for all the public servants who will finally get the Social Security they have earned. Tonight, Congress ensured that police officers, firefighters, teachers, and public servants across Ohio will be able to retire with the Social Security they spent their lives paying into.”

According to the Social Security Administration the elimination of the WEP and the GPO will impact over 3.2 million people. The Congressional Budget Office estimates that qualifying beneficiaries may see monthly increases ranging from \$360 to over \$1,190. This depends on several factors, such as the type of Social Security benefits received and the size of their pension.

As it relates to Ohio, the Congressional Research Service estimates that for the WEP over 167,000 Ohioans are affected -- 162,005 retirees, 1,409 workers who are disabled, and 4,201 spouses and children. For the GPO, an estimated 103,492 Ohioans are affected -- 56,063 spouses and 47,429 widows and widowers.

## CHANGE - AN OPPORTUNITY FOR THE FUTURE

**Matt Whitehead, Executive Vice President  
Governmental Policy Group, Inc.**

One of my favorite Presidents is John F. Kennedy. I have read many books about him and by him. Not to brag, but I could probably handle a **Jeopardy!** show category about him and run the board. He once stated that "Change is the law of life. And those who look only to the past and present are certain to miss the future." That is pretty heavy stuff, but quite insightful from someone who didn't get the chance to realize the full capacity of his own future!



*Matt Whitehead*

For those who may be used to an article in this space from your lobbying lead at Governmental Policy Group, Michael Guastella, he is getting a writing respite and I am filling in to introduce/re-introduce myself to CORD members and highlight a few changes in our lobbying firm about which we are excited! The changes that I will discuss, with a nod to President Kennedy, celebrate the past and present of your lobbying firm and secure the foundation for the future.



*Brooke Chaney*

Governmental Policy Group, Inc. (GPG) was founded by Brooke Chaney 37 years ago on February 1, 1988. Brooke was a Shelby, Ohio native that worked as a lobbyist for the Tobacco Institute in Washington, D.C. and was one of the innovators of the "independent lobbying" movement in the 1980s. Until that point many groups had in-house lobbyists or dedicated legal staff to advocate on behalf of their issues. Companies and associations found that they could hire out these services to professional lobbyists and cut their overhead by reducing travel, hotel, and other costs by not having lobbyists on payroll. Thus, independent lobbying was born.

Brooke grew his practice from a one-man operation into one that has 8 full-time employees today. Brooke was at the beginning of his retirement when he passed away suddenly last October at the age of 69. He was celebrated by many friends, colleagues, competitors and elected officials

during the various ceremonies honoring his life. His passing has marked a change in the methods of lobbying. He told stories of pay phones, drinks and dinners with members of both political parties after a day of political wrangling, mailing and faxing clients information, and hosting meetings in person. While the methods have changed to include Zooms, cell phones, text messages, 24-hour news cycles, what has not changed is the foundational roots with which he founded the firm.



Brooke believed in treating everyone with dignity and did not treat people of different political parties or ideological stances with anything less than respect. He was a true gentleman and approached lobbying with an ethical approach for honest brokering of information on behalf of his clients. These are practices that our team still practices to this day to build on the success that he built using those strategies. In 2020, Brooke's protégé and business partner, Victor Hipsley, accepted the mantle of leadership fully from Brooke and became the President and CEO of GPG.



*Victor Hipsley*

Victor has been with the company for 30 years as of 2025 and has positioned the company for growth and stability into the next generation. Victor has modernized many of our business practices and has sought an inclusive work culture reflecting the various generations of team talent we possess and utilizing the strengths and skill sets each generation brings to the organization. However, at the core of the operations is the fact that the "GPG Way" of lobbying and providing client services has not changed under his leadership.

Because Victor also wanted to celebrate the future and ensure that the legacy of client service and success continues, he has asked me to join him as the next generation of leadership for GPG. Late last year, I became his business partner, elevated to Executive Vice President and placed on a pathway to succeed him in years to come. I have been with the firm for 19 years this week and I have worked in and around state government for nearly 30 years. I have worked on CORD issues during my tenure and helped pass some of the competitive bidding changes that were made over a decade ago. It has been my pleasure to represent 6119 water districts before the General Assembly and your members' stories are so important to the future economic growth of this state that it is hard not to get excited about the work and customer service you provide every day.

While Michael may be your day-to-day lead on your issues, the GPG team takes a one-for-all, all-for-one approach using the "GPG way" to lobbying to pull from our individual strengths, abilities and relationships. You have our entire team looking out for your interests. In my new leadership role in the firm, it is my responsibility to continue to support our team in their service to you and ensure that your needs are met and that the level of service you have come to expect is maintained. The law of life may bring change of the faces that are working on your behalf, but the formula that has worked for 37 years to achieve the goals and your success will not...I promise.



## BUILT TO LAST: UNCOVERING THE SECRETS OF TIMELESS INFRASTRUCTURE

**Theodore A. Bennett, PE, Vice President, Director of Infrastructure  
Jones & Henry Engineers**

Do you feel like we're missing something in our modern structures? Do you wonder if we should be building things that should be lasting longer?

I've seen too many infrastructure projects fail long before they should. Whether it's pump stations, roads, or water systems, I've watched structures designed for long-term service fall apart due to short-sighted decisions that focused on the current problems but failed to look at the longer view. Furthermore, we only have so many resources available to us on earth and putting valuable resources into a landfill is a major waste of the energy used to mine and produce those materials.



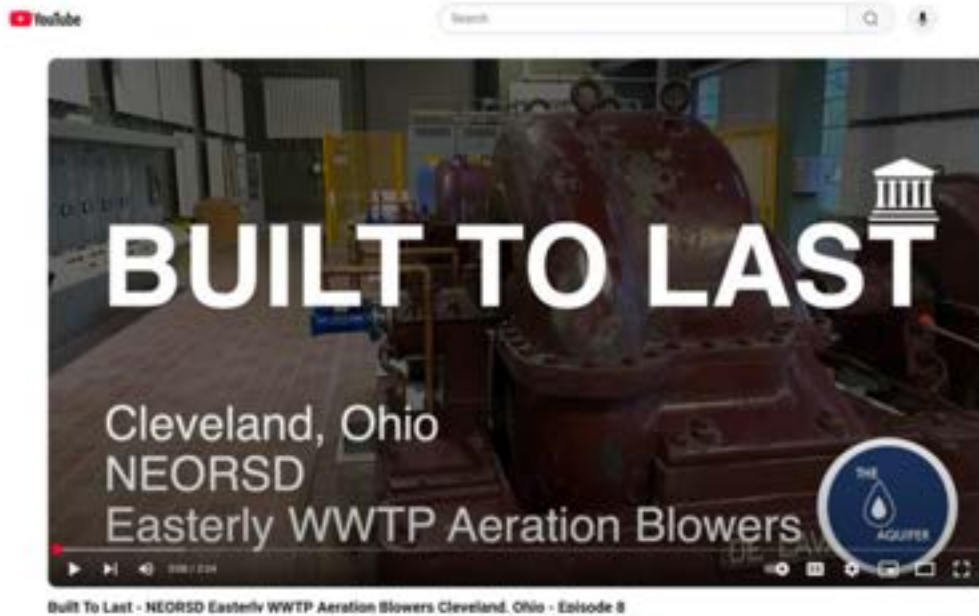
That was my frustration with modern infrastructure, especially so when history shows us that infrastructure can last for generations if those structures are built a different way. Something needed to change to figure out what I started investigating. My studies led me to start the YouTube Built to Last series. To explore what makes some structures endure at the century level while others crumble after only decades, and to bring those lessons forward into today's engineering and construction industry.

### What I've Discovered

One of the biggest takeaways from Built to Last is that longevity isn't an accident—it's a result of deliberate choices made at the project's inception. Structures that have stood for a century or more share common traits:

- **Over-Engineering for Resilience** - Long lasting infrastructure wasn't designed to just barely meet the minimum requirements or solve today's issues. Those facilities were built with an understanding that redundancy, future capacity, and durability matter.
- **Materials and Craftsmanship** - Many long-lasting structures were made from materials chosen for their durability, not just their cost-effectiveness. Oftentimes these materials are local materials best suited for service in the local environment. Skilled labor and attention to detail also play a huge role as local workers take an extra level of pride in their work. Taking the time to make thoughtful choices about the materials and labor instead of using the lowest priced options is important.
- **Community Pride & Stewardship** - Even the best-built infrastructure won't last without care. The structures that endure are often the ones that people take pride in maintaining.

I've explored these principles in places like the Louisville Water Company's historic pumping station, the birthplace of the Model T, and Michigan Stadium—each offering its own insights into what it means to be Built To Last. I encourage you to take some time to check out the currently 18 episodes that are available on YouTube at: <https://bit.ly/Built2Last-25>.



### Where Built to Last Is Headed

This journey is far from over. Moving forward, I plan to continue highlighting historic infrastructure, but also explore more modern projects—ones that are getting it right and others that are falling short. My goal is to challenge today's engineers, planners, and decision-makers to think beyond short-term costs and consider the long-term impact of their designs.

If we want infrastructure that lasts, we need to rediscover what worked in the past and apply it to the future. That's what Built to Last is all about.

Join me on The Aquifer YouTube channel as I keep uncovering the secrets of infrastructure that stands the test of time. Let's build something that lasts.



Jones & Henry  
Engineers

## **FRAUD TRAINING REMINDER!!**

OHIO AUDITOR OF STATE  
**KEITH FABER**



Happy that you completed your mandated fraud training last year? Great—you are off the hook for a few more years as it only has to be repeated every four years. But, don't forget that new employees and new Board members are required by law to complete the training within 30 days of hiring or appointment to the Board.



The training continues to consist of watching an 8-minute webinar on ways to prevent and/or report waste, fraud, or abuse, and then acquiring a Certificate of Completion with the individual's name. To complete the training visit <https://ohioauditor.gov/trainings/fraud.html>.

## **Fraud Reporting & Training Required**

This free training is an 8-minute video that employees can watch on-demand. Upon successful completion, a certificate will be provided. All certificates should be collected from employees and retained for audit.

To receive a certificate, register first, then watch the video.

## CORD PLATINUM MEMBER



Jones & Henry  
Engineers



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# 2025 CORD MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL INFORMATION



JOIN OR  
**RENEW**  
TODAY

**WELCOME TO 2025—A NEW MEMBERSHIP YEAR!**  
**CORD OFFERS TWO TYPES OF MEMBERSHIPS, ACTIVE AND ASSOCIATE**

**Active Membership** is limited to Regional Water and Sewer Districts organized under Ohio Revised Code Chapter 6119. Active members are invoiced in early summer. The membership includes a dues contribution based on the number of combined water and sewer taps and a legislative contribution to help defer the costs of legislative representation.

**Associate Membership** is open to other political subdivisions or departments of counties, townships, and municipalities and other special purpose districts such as port authorities. It is also open to firms and individuals who work with or provide services and supplies to Regional Water & Sewer Districts. All memberships are on a calendar year basis. Associate members have four options to support CORD, by joining as a regular Associate Member or by upgrading to a Silver, Gold, or Platinum Associate Membership. The costs and benefits of these categories are detailed below:

CORD 2025 Sponsorship Levels	Platinum \$2000/Year	Gold \$1000/Year	Silver \$500/year	Associate \$250/Year
Recognition as a Vendor and Sponsor of CORD	X	X	X	X
Opportunity to present at CORD yearly membership/annual meeting, regional meetings, webinars, and training opportunities	X			
Opportunity to sponsor and attend CORD yearly membership/annual meeting, regional meetings, webinars, and training opportunities	X	X	X	X
Participate and advertise (subject to Board approval) with the CORD booth at trade shows i.e. OTA Winter Conference	X	X	X	
CORD will assist in setting up a yearly event to spotlight the Vendor by co-hosting. Vendor will be responsible for all expenses incurred by CORD.	X			
Featured sponsor on website and in newsletters	X	X		
Advertise on the website at no additional cost	X			
Linked on the CORD website	X	X	X	X
Invited to present an overview of the Sponsor Business to the CORD Board during a Board meeting	X			
Invited to contribute articles to the CORD newsletter	X	X	X	
Opportunity to meet semi-annually with CORD Director and explore ways to enhance or improve Platinum sponsorship.	X			
CORD will assist in attempting to schedule and attend meetings between Platinum Sponsors and individual CORD member Districts	X			
Invited to participate in CORD Endorsed discount programs i.e.: Energy Aggregation	X			

**For Further Information Contact: Larry Long at [larrylong@CORDohio.org](mailto:larrylong@CORDohio.org) or  
Catina Taylor at [catina.taylor@alberslaw.com](mailto:catina.taylor@alberslaw.com)  
Membership Forms are also located on the CORD website: <https://cordohio.org/>**