

## THE END OF THE ROAD....THE START OF THE JOURNEY

### *Introduction*

We have spent the last three months traveling across Ohio to talk with Green Energy Ohio (GEO) members and supporters of clean energy. The Meet, Learn, and Share events turned out to be everything we had hoped for, and more. We met in eight locations and spoke with over 125 people. Our hosts were local craft breweries, an industry on the cutting edge of sustainability and energy awareness. Many topics were addressed – some surfaced in all the meetings, while others were unique to their regions. The range of issues and the breadth and depth of knowledge reinforced our belief that Ohioans care about their energy future and know what needs to be done to secure it. Participants gave us constructive feedback on past GEO activities and excellent guidance on future initiatives. We were inspired by their confidence in GEO's ability to play an important and unique role in Ohio's energy landscape. Therefore, as we end our road trip, we embark on the next stage of the GEO journey with a sense of gratitude for past support, responsibility for the trust you place in us, and anticipation for great things to come.

### *Technological diversity, with solar taking the lead*

We heard more about solar energy than any other single technology: Residential solar, community solar, solar installations on business facilities and public buildings, and the rise of utility-scale solar. GEO has always had a strong connection to the solar industry, and many of our long-time corporate members are a part of the solar supply and installation business sector. Many individual members saw their first solar panels on an early GEO Solar Tour, when our volunteers opened their homes to allow neighbors to view their systems, and their enthusiasm encouraged others to pursue renewable alternatives.

We also heard from advocates for a range of other technologies – wind, geothermal, anaerobic digestion, and hydroelectric. Northwest Ohio is home to several large wind farms that not only produce clean energy, but also provide significant community financial benefit. Icebreaker Wind, located eight miles north of the Cleveland coastline, will be the first offshore wind facility in the Great Lakes and the first freshwater wind farm in North America. Newly installed hydroelectric generating stations along the Ohio River supply energy to multiple communities in the American Municipal Power (AMP) system. Aerobic digestion manages organic material which would have otherwise been sent to landfills or incinerators by converting these waste streams into renewable energy and a valuable fertilizer product. Significant sources of geothermal energy are also found throughout Ohio, with applications in homes, businesses, and public structures.

Energy efficiency can best be described as a suite of technological improvements that reduce energy use, saving money and lessening the need for additional carbon-producing generation. GEO member companies across the state offer energy audits, upgrades and retrofits, and new building designs.

## *Opportunities for Growth*

At each stop on our tour, we found ourselves discussing growth – building on successes of the past, taking the old and making it new again. Developing programs that meet the needs and reflect the interests of our members is critical to our future. Doing so is inextricably tied to financial stability and relevance.

### ➤ Updating the Green Energy Tour

GEO's signature event – the Green Energy Tour – is a prime example of an opportunity to grow with the changes that have taken place in the fifteen years since the first event. Shifts in attendance patterns, expansion of technologies on display, and increased availability of information all point in the direction of reassessing the design of the Tour. Fortunately, we have experienced GEO Tour volunteers whose knowledge we can draw upon, and many of them shared initial ideas during our recent conversations.

### ➤ Expanding the availability of clean and affordable energy

Expanding access to renewable resources – in particular, solar energy – to lower income homes and neighborhoods was put forward as an aspirational goal and one that GEO could help advance. Several organizations in Ohio are active in this arena, including Ohio Interfaith Power and Light and Glass City Community Solar, which presents valuable partnership opportunities for us.

### ➤ Educating the today's policymakers and tomorrow's leaders

GEO's mission statement has always emphasized education – for residents, business leaders, and policymakers – on issues related to the development and deployment of sustainable energy. Expanded involvement in formal and extracurricular educational experiences was frequently proposed. Potential roles included working with college and university partners on internships, service projects, and independent studies, as well as assisting student sustainability teams and organizations from K-12 and beyond. In addition, education of elected officials and candidates for public office was understandably a focus in this election year. While GEO is not a lobbying organization, we have a responsibility to ensure that Ohio office holders are well informed on clean energy issues and to correct misinformation designed to undermine the progress that has been made. This can be accomplished most effectively by working in coalitions with other advocacy organizations.

### ➤ Increased collaboration with other organizations

Ohio is fortunate to have a significant number of organizations representing environmental and energy issues. The theme of programmatic collaboration was repeated in every community. Whether with the Sierra Club's "Ready for 100" campaign, Clean Fuels Ohio electric vehicle infrastructure initiatives, or activities of local groups such as Green Umbrella and Rural Action, participants were eager to see GEO work with – and mobilize – like-minded entities. We could also anticipate that our partners would reciprocate on programming unique to GEO. There is strength in numbers and room for everyone.

### ***Public policy to advance clean energy***

We heard from participants in each location that policy changes were needed at both the state and local level to facilitate the continued growth of the clean energy industry. First and foremost, changes to the restrictive wind setback requirements are needed to allow for continued investment in utility-scale projects. Northwest Ohio is a prime location for these facilities, and the power they generate is increasingly in demand by large corporations seeking new locations for their operations. Protecting and retaining the Renewable Portfolio Standard (RPS) and Energy Efficiency Resource Standard (EERS) are also high on the list of policy concerns.

Net metering rules are critical to the success of residential solar installations and, as other states consider changes in their net metering protocols, Ohio needs to carefully assess the impact of any proposed revisions on the economic viability of the industry and the expectations of consumers.

The Power Forward initiative of the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO) is designed “to chart a clear path forward for future grid modernization projects, innovative regulations, and forward-thinking policies.” As a comprehensive look at the consumers’ energy experience, it is worthy of our attention and input.

Not all public policy is made in Columbus, however, and we were told of many local issues that require attention. Opportunities for aggregation, modernized local zoning requirements, and updated building codes were among the concerns. Many local officials don’t have the resources to adequately address technical or bureaucratic processes, and participants believed GEO could provide valuable services in that area.

As a summary of the discussions that we had throughout the state, this report could not include all of the wisdom that was so generously shared. Please know that we have made note of many additional ideas and recommendations and will use them as we move forward. Thank you to everyone who assisted in the arrangements, provided hospitality, joined the conversation, and showed continued support for Green Energy Ohio.



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