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## Officials don't want Warren County to be the middle child



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Straddled by two major metropolitan areas with different strengths and economic bases, Warren County is something of a middle child.

But pulled in two directions in an ever-growing mega metro, county officials say working as one group will be the key to future development there.

At a **Dayton Development Coalition** meeting updating the county on the latest growth in West and Southwest Ohio, the fast-growing cities in the county like Middletown, Mason and Monroe have seen new interest from companies looking to take advantage of both Dayton and Cincinnati. The combined cities have 3.1 million people, and many companies have moved toward the middle of them.

Activity is picking up in Warren County and the region overall, DDC officials say.

Through May 30, the Dayton Development Coalition has won 14 projects with 2,448 jobs, \$92 million in payroll, and \$458 million in investment. It's already an improvement over last year when the DDC saw slower numbers, said [Jeff Hoagland](#), president and CEO of the DDC. And the remainder of the year could be busy too, with 66 projects representing 6,276 jobs and \$1.74 billion in investment on the DDC's radar.

The Cincinnati-Dayton region's recent designation as one of several manufacturing communities in the country could boost efforts in the whole area, which is now eligible for a share of \$1.3 billion in federal funds, Hoagland said. As the DDC looks at growing west Ohio's economy, it's working with startups, big companies and government alike.

It's also raised the prospect of more communication between Dayton and Cincinnati, whose mayors are both calling for more collaboration as the cities compete against multi-metro hubs

like Dallas-Fort Worth.

"We work well with the folks in Cincinnati," Hoagland said. "Our two cities have different prospects, theirs with a major downtown and a lot of professional services, ours with the 'feds, eds and meds.' We can take advantage of both of our strengths."

This as Ohio has sought to be more attractive to business growth at the state level. Efforts at the Statehouse have focused on tax reductions affecting small businesses, said State Rep. [Ron Maag](#), R-Lebanon.

"Ohio has made it a much easier place to do business than it used to be," Maag said. "238,000 jobs in the private sector in the past few years, that has been (businesses) doing that."

For that reason, State Sen. [Shannon Jones](#), R-Springboro, said her push for education in the state has been driven by keeping the area competitive.

"Building the workforce to sustain jobs and business growth in the county is more important than ever," Jones said.

[Martin Russell](#), director of economic development for Warren County, said recent growth in the area by companies like **FedEx**, ADVICS North America, and **UGN** have upped confidence in the county. More work is underway there, such as a 700,000 square foot industrial building being constructed in the Park North business park.

Now, Russell said, initiatives to grow business should be county-wide. Recently the county has established its own Small Business Development Center and put together an alliance of the six chambers of commerce to coordinate more effectively.

"As we get push from Dayton and Cincinnati, we should be making sure Warren County is speaking with one voice," Russell said.

County officials say the growth of the two cities means more eyes on them.

"Cincinnati and Dayton are two different cities, but that makes Warren County one of the most important places in the region," said [Denise Hamet](#), economic development director for Middletown, who said she works with both Cincinnati and Dayton economic development groups frequently, and that both have been very responsive to the county's needs.