

ERIE-NIAGARA REGIONAL PARTNERSHIP
INSTITUTE FOR LOCAL GOVERNANCE AND REGIONAL GROWTH
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Co-Chairs:

Hon. Sean O'Connor
Hon. Barry Weinstein, MD

Members:

James Allen
Robert Blanchard
Daniel Boody
Hon. Clyde Burmaster
Hon. Elise Cusack
Hon. William Davignon
Brian Eldridge
Hon. Wright Ellis
Samuel Ferraro
Hon. Judith Fisher
Hon. Samuel Granieri
Hon. Dale Larson
Celeste Lawson
Maria Lehman
Hon. Peter McMahon
Hon. Gerald Meal
Lawrence Meckler
Hal Morse
Jo Nasoff
Laura Roberts
Laurence Rubin
Hon. Mark Schroeder
Hon. Demone Smith
Hector Titus
Peter Wendel
Lawrence Witul

Ad Hoc:

Michael Casale
Tim Doolittle
Richard Geiger
David Rosenwasser
John Sheffer, II

Administrator:

Tod A. Kniazuk

Minutes of Erie-Niagara Regional Partnership Meeting
June 6, 2003

Present: O'Connor, Weinstein, Allen, Blanchard, Cusack, Eldridge, Ellis, Ferraro, Lehman, McMahon, Meal, Meckler (proxy), Morse, Titus, Wendel, Casale, Sheffer

Excused: Burmaster, Davignon, Lawson, Nasoff, Roberts

Absent: Boody, Fisher, Granieri, Larson, Rubin, Schroeder, Smith, Witul, Doolittle, Geiger, Rydelek

The meeting was called to order at 8:32 a.m. by Erie-Niagara Regional Partnership Co-Chairs Sean O'Connor and Barry Weinstein, MD.

Co-Chair O'Connor noted the presence of new county manager Greg Lewis. New member Lawrence Witul (NCIDA) was welcomed. Minutes of the March, 2003 meeting were approved.

Subcommittee Chair Hector Titus presented the Economic Development Subcommittee report. The report was received and filed, with **approval granted to invite Thomas Kucharski and the Buffalo Niagara Enterprise to be the guest presenters at the ENRP general meeting in July.**

Subcommittee Chair Peter McMahon presented the Government Affairs Subcommittee report. The report was received and filed. McMahon also gave an update on the Local Governments Forum, taking place Wednesday, June 11, 2003 from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. in the "G" Building Auditorium at Erie Community College's North Campus; a follow up to last year's governments brochure.

Subcommittee Chair Robert Blanchard presented the Tourism & Culture Subcommittee report. The report was received and filed, with **approval granted for ENRP to offer its services to the Regional Cultural Tourism Initiative to act as the implementer of a comprehensive attraction sign program for Erie and Niagara Counties.** This follows a pilot project in

Buffalo that ENRP is administrating. Blanchard also gave an update on the Regional Cultural Tourism Initiative.

Subcommittee Chair Hal Morse presented the Transportation Subcommittee report. The report was received and filed. Morse also gave an update on the job development and public transportation pilot project. ENRP Member Maria Lehman notified the group of a difficulty related to the upcoming Family Motorcoach Convention coming to Hamburg. NYSDOT is requiring permits for the motorcoaches to travel on the thruway due to their size and weight, and this is resulting in people canceling their trip. **ENRP unanimously approved recommending that both counties pass resolutions urging NYSDOT to drop their permit requirements for the Family Motorcoach convention.**

Co-Chair O'Connor gave a quick background of the Seneca Niagara Casino, noting that it took 100 days to open, employed 2,000 construction workers, and since its opening on December 31, 2002 has employed over 2,000 workers. He then introduced guest presenter Mickey Brown, President & CEO of the Seneca Gaming Corporation.

Brown began by speaking of the 1998 Indian Gaming Regulatory Act, federal legislation that gave Native Americans the right to set up casinos if their reservation is in a state where gaming is allowed anywhere in any form. He came over from Foxwoods Casino in Connecticut, the largest casino in the western hemisphere, employing 11,000 and taking in over \$1 billion gross.

The Seneca Niagara Casino employs 2,105 with a payroll of \$60 million, and also \$9.2 million in operating costs – 75 percent of which are spent within 50 miles of the casino. The casino is averaging 10,000 visitors per day during the week, and 15,000 to 20,000 per weekend day. Presently 55 percent of these visitors come from Erie and Niagara Counties.

Brown listed parking as the greatest challenge to date, with 3,000 to 4,000 parking per day. In response, the next thing to be built is a parking garage. They are also increasing bus trips to the casino. Between 4,400 and 5,500 per week come on bus trips, from places like Rochester and Erie, PA. Future building plans include a 450-room spa/suite hotel, two restaurants, a 430-seat venue for concerts, and meeting space.

On the matter of the Erie County/Buffalo casino, Brown stated that the Tribal Council's Economic Development Committee and the tribal planning department are "working on a site," and that a decision should be reached "very, very soon; probably in an existing building."

ENRP Member Elise Cusack asked Brown if there are any casinos located in Ohio or Pennsylvania, as these are logical markets from which to

draw visitors to our casinos. Brown replied that the closest casinos in the United States are located in Detroit and Atlantic City. To that end, he has met with an airline in an attempt to bring scheduled flights from nearby markets in to the Niagara Falls International Airport (NFIA).

ENRP Administrator Tod A. Kniazuk referenced the Transportation Subcommittee's job development and public transportation pilot project, and asked if the area around the Seneca Niagara Casino is a potential Niagara County site for the pilot. Brown noted that many employees come in from the Buffalo area, and the casino uses "flexible shift work," so yes there is a need for public transportation for employees and it could be considered a potential site for the pilot.

ENRP Ad Hoc Member Michael Casale asked if the NFIA is the key to growing overnight stays. Brown answered yes, through charters or scheduled flights.

Co-Chair Weinstein inquired as to how the Nation is going to recycle their casino profits. Senior housing, health benefits, social programs, and some revenue to the people are all on tap, according to Brown. First, however, the building needs to be paid off.

ENRP Member Samuel Ferraro asked if Brown knew what impact the Seneca Niagara Casino was having on Casino Niagara. Brown stated that the Canadian casino is off 30 percent since Seneca Niagara's opening. Some factors are that Americans want payoffs in American money, there is no charge to park at our casino, the war, and SARS. Casale followed up by asking how many Americans patronize the Canadian casino – 40 percent or less. Brown added that of the 186,000 members of the Seneca Niagara "Seneca Club" players card club, less than two percent are Canadian, and more than 50 percent are from Erie and Niagara Counties.

Co-Chair Weinstein asked if the Nation is aiming to change these figures in the long term. Brown replied that if they can get reasonable cost air transportation, they'd like to market out about 150 to 200 miles, and that naturally maybe 10 percent of the patrons during the tourist season will be international visitors who came to the region primarily for Niagara Falls. The casino is attracting a big Asian market who are now coming by bus. The Nation is trying to get direct flights from Asia to the NFIA.

ENRP Member Peter Wendel wondered if the Buffalo casino will draw people away from the Seneca Niagara Casino. Brown asserted that the region is capable of absorbing two or three casinos. He added that there will be joint efforts, such as a single players club for both casinos.

Co-Chair Weinstein offered the final question, asking if the casino would be willing to help support public transportation for its employees. Brown responded that they are already working with the NFTA to get scheduled service from the suburbs to Buffalo, and then from Buffalo to Niagara Falls.

ENRP Member James Allen gave an update on the Regional Economic Development Strategy. The SWOT analysis has begun, with the help of a 20 person technical advisory committee. We are discovering that in addition to having a lot of weaknesses, we do possess a lot of strengths. The SWOT is being based on the future, not the past. The Strategy is being integrated and coordinated with the Framework for Regional Growth and the Economic Development Working Group (One Stop Shop Group). Following the SWOT, a strategy and goals and objectives will be developed for the two counties.

ENRP Ad Hoc Member John Sheffer, II updated the group on the electronic permitting pilot project. The pilot will be tested by the end of the month. The pilot is looking at issues such as e-signatures, payment methods, and submittal of supplementary materials. Over the rest of the summer and fall the pilot will be ready for demonstration to other municipalities. The project is on track. Ferraro asked if this project could lead to a uniform written permit application? Sheffer replied, "Absolutely." This standardization is included in the pilot, but one thing it does not do is standardize the municipal codes themselves – although there has been some conversation about that as well. ENRP Member Gerald Meal added that Orleans County has standardized their process.

Ferraro gave an update on the Framework for Regional Growth, which is on track. He called the economic development component "a good fit." There was an initial round of interviews in May, and a second round is being set up for those key stakeholders who have not yet been contacted. A website will be launched soon.

Ferraro also gave an update on power relicensing, which is moving forward well. The first public hearing on the first scoping document will take place on August 13, at 2 p.m. and again at 7 p.m. This hearing will introduce the public to the document and receive public comment.

Under old and new business, Cusack recognized the work of Partners for a Livable Western New York, noting that they have been running a series of Smart Growth Tuesdays at the Burchfield-Penney Arts Center. She suggested inviting them to a future ENRP meeting.

Also under old and new business, Allen informed the group that last year the IDAs in Erie County adopted uniform standards, but that this year

there have been questions about the standards. As a result they are revisiting the discussion on eligibility policy this year. Is there a possibility of bringing Niagara County into this?

The next meeting will take place Friday, July 25 at 8:30 a.m. in Niagara County at the First Niagara Bank Offices (6950 S. Transit Road, Lockport). The meeting was adjourned at 9:39 a.m.

Submitted by Tod A. Kniazuk
July 17, 2003