

ERIE-NIAGARA REGIONAL PARTNERSHIP

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Co-Chairs:

Hon. Clyde Burmaster
Hon. Barry Weinstein, MD

Minutes of Erie-Niagara Regional Partnership Meeting
December 9, 2005

Members:

James Allen
Hon. Vince Anello
Drew Cerza
Hon. Elise Cusack
Hon. William Davignon
Hon. Albert DeBenedetti
Tim Doolittle
Hon. Wright Ellis
Matthew Enstice
Samuel Ferraro
Richard Geiger
Hon. Timothy Kennedy
Celeste Lawson
Maria Lehman
Hon. Peter McMahan
Hon. Gerald Meal
Hal Morse
Jo Nasoff-Finton
Hon. Sean O'Connor
Dr. Gary Praetzel
Melinda Rath Sanderson
F. Tim Reese
David Rosenwasser
Hon. William Ross
Diane Ruzala
Laura St. Pierre
Christopher Schoepflin
Hon. Demone Smith
Hector Titus
Timothy Wanamaker
Peter Wendel

Present: Weinstein, Ellis, Ferraro, Lehman, Morse, Nasoff-Finton,
Rath Sanderson, Ross, St. Pierre, Witul

The meeting was called to order at 8:50 a.m. by Erie-Niagara Regional Partnership Co-Chair Barry Weinstein, MD. As Co-Chair Burmaster is on vacation, Niagara County Legislature Chair and ENRP Member William Ross agreed to co-chair the meeting. ENRP Member Laura St. Pierre and the Buffalo Niagara Partnership were thanked for hosting the meeting. Co-Chair Weinstein thanked those who braved the weather to attend, and due to the storm we will not compile our usual lists of "excused" and "absent" members for the minutes.

Minutes of the October, 2005 meeting were approved.

The Co-Chairs welcomed new members Erie County Industrial Development Agency Deputy Director Jo Nasoff-Finton and USA Niagara Development Corporation President Christopher Schoepflin. Nasoff had been a steady proxy for the ECIDA's Charles Webb, and so was asked to become the "official" representative from the organization. Schoepflin replaces former USA Niagara President and ENRP Member Meredith Andreucci.

Ad Hoc:

Michael Casale
Hon. George Holt, Jr.
Lawrence Witul

The Co-Chairs recognized departing members Meredith Andreucci, Drew Cerza, Hon. Elise Cusack, Hon. William Davignon, Hon. Albert DeBenedetti, and Hon. Gerald Meal. Co-Chair Ross noted that with both Meal and Legislator Lee Simonson retiring, the Niagara County Legislature is losing a combined 52 years of experience.

Administrator:

Tod A. Kniazuk

The Inaugural Erie-Niagara Regional Partnership Distinguished Service Award was given to Hon. Gerald Meal and Hon. Charles Swanick. Meal and Swanick were the Chairs of the Niagara and Erie County Legislatures at the time ENRP was created. Meal was also ENRP's first Niagara County Co-Chair and a founding member – serving all seven years of the organization's existence. Co-Chair Ross declared that Meal is "deeply deserving" of the award. Swanick, while never a member of ENRP, allocated staff to the group and as Chair of the Legislature authorized the funding to transfer ENRP to the

University at Buffalo. "He let us do our thing," according to Co-Chair Weinstein.

On the topic of ENRP membership, ENRP Member Samuel Ferraro asked if there will be a move to ask new Erie County Department of Environment and Planning Commissioner Andrew Eszak to join us (there is a designated position for the commissioner of that department as well as for the Erie County Executive, both of which are currently vacant). He called approaching Eszak "in the best interests" of ENRP, and said that without Erie County administration representation he has been put in an awkward position in the past as some Erie County Legislators have approached him for information about Erie County projects. Co-Chair Weinstein said that we will honor Ferraro's request.

ENRP Administrator Tod Kniazuk noted that we also need to "reconnect" with the Erie County Legislature due to the turnover of nine of the 15 seats. Co-Chair Weinstein added that there are already two or three vying for the Legislature chair. Co-Chair Ross told the group there isn't much turnover at the Niagara County Legislature; Simonson and Meal are retiring, and Davignon – who Ross called "a good legislator" – was defeated.

Ferraro presented an update on power relicensing, <http://niagara.nypa.gov> "I guess congratulations are in order to Erie County" for striking a deal, he said. That leaved Niagara University as the only outstanding entity. In Niagara County, a municipal distribution corporation is being set up. Co-Chair Ross added that the "covenant of the Niagara County agreement is the power."

Ferraro presented an update on the Framework for Regional Growth, www.regionalframework.com They are completing the report and creating a platform for it to continue in its next life. The Steering Committee will meet again after the holidays. ENRP Member Hal Morse suggested that as the Framework approaches rollout, it should be determined what the rollout mechanism should accomplish. Co-Chair Weinstein asked if the goal of the Framework has been vocalized. Ferraro replied that it was "somewhat esoteric" in the beginning, but as time moves forward the ideas have taken shape. The goal is to have it be carried on in action steps for areas like planning, economic development, and local government initiatives. St. Pierre added that the goal is to reduce expense, and to increase and improve coordination. Ferraro noted that funding is always an issue, but the Steering Committee didn't want to get bogged down in that

and is rather going to move ideas forward first. Co-Chair Weinstein concluded that the Framework has evolved into a bi-county regional planning initiative.

Kniazuk gave an update on the Regional Economic Development Strategy (REDS) from an e-mail he received from ENRP Member James Allen (who anticipated the storm). Three of the five cluster strategies are fully developed – tourism, back office / professional support firms, and life sciences. Advanced manufacturing will be finished within the next two weeks. There is considerable question as to the viability of the fifth cluster, logistics and trade, and therefore it is not certain that it should be included in the final draft of the REDS. Allen will further discuss that cluster with Luke Rich, as its inclusion was his suggestion.

Allen and University at Buffalo Institute for Local Governance and Regional Growth Director Kate Foster intend to circulate the draft of the REDS to the initial steering committee (ENRP, ECIDA, Erie County DEP, BNE, BNP, Niagara County Center for Economic Development) in early January, 2006. After soliciting comments, it will then go to the larger technical advisory committee (the Economic Development Working Group) for approval in mid to late January. Once that has been accomplished, work will then be done to integrate and coordinate the REDS with the Framework for Regional Growth, as soon as is practical.

Kniazuk began our strategic planning discussion by providing details on a meeting between himself, Co-Chair Weinstein, and ENRP Member Tim Doolittle regarding ENRP being housed at Empire State Development. That is a physical possibility, but ENRP and its staff would be completely separate from ESD. We would therefore need to create a 501c3 and would need to figure out things like payroll and benefits. Nasoff reiterated the offer to house ENRP at the ECIDA, and said that they do not have any of those concerns about being separate as the ECIDA has a history of housing other folks. St. Pierre offered the BNP as an immediate 501c3 to accept funding while we work out a permanent solution.

Ferraro raised several points. First, he suggested that we not make any decisions that day due to the attendance. Also, since ENRP is an entity of the two Legislatures, we should talk to them prior to any final approvals. Finally, if the ENRP administrator becomes a full time job, to whom is that person responsible and what is the scope of duties. On this last point, Kniazuk replied that the administrative side

of the job is pretty well defined and quantifiable, as are duties related to existing and ongoing projects. As to how the remainder of a full time position is allocated, that is really dependent on the members and what projects and policies they want developed. Obviously, what we undertake is in part limited by the time members and staff have to spend on these projects and policies. That said, accountability is always needed and should be in place.

Co-Chair Weinstein suggested that we do hold off on making any decisions, and call a special meeting for early January for the full group to exclusively discuss strategic planning. Following that meeting, we will offer a chance for the two County Legislatures to comment or revise the document, then bring it back to the group for our regular January meeting.

Ferraro suggested devoting a meeting to telling the story of ENRP, especially to the new legislators. Co-Chair Ross noted that when ENRP was founded the two bodies were brought together, and that perhaps it's time for that to happen again. Nasoff added that our current members from the Legislatures need to talk about why they've bought into ENRP. Ross decided that in Niagara County a small group (perhaps the Co-Chairs, Ferraro, and Kniazuk) would make a presentation to the Legislature, then invite them to a joint meeting. Weinstein suggested that Ross could also be the one to reach out to Erie County to set up the joint meeting.

Kniazuk noted that the membership fee request letter had not yet gone out, pending a decision on housing. Ferraro replied that we could adjust the letter to ask for a commitment to funding, but that it should be sent out as soon as possible in order to create our budget.

There was no old business. Under new business, St. Pierre told the group that companies are being asked to post requests for proposals on a W/MBE website through BNP, and asked anyone interested to submit them to her or BNP's Tracy Houston.

The next general meeting date was set for Friday, January 27 at 8:30 a.m. at the Niagara County Center for Economic Development (thanks to ENRP Member Samuel Ferraro), with a special meeting to be held the first week in January. The Co-Chairs thanked the group, and the meeting was adjourned at 10:15 a.m.

Submitted by Tod A. Kniazuk
January 3, 2006