

# ERIE-NIAGARA REGIONAL PARTNERSHIP

275 OAK ST. SUITE 150  
BUFFALO, NEW YORK 14203  
PHONE: 716-856-6525 x121 FAX: 856-6754  
E-MAIL: [tkniazuk@ecidany.com](mailto:tkniazuk@ecidany.com)  
[www.erie.gov/enrp](http://www.erie.gov/enrp)

## Co-Chairs:

Hon. Clyde Burmaster  
Hon. Barry Weinstein, MD

January 9, 2006

Hon. Clyde Burmaster, Co-Chair  
Hon. Barry Weinstein, MD, Co-Chair

## Members:

James Allen  
Hon. Vince Anello  
Colleen DiPirro  
Tim Doolittle  
Hon. Wright Ellis  
Matthew Enstice  
Andrew Eszak  
Samuel Ferraro  
Hon. Joel Giambra  
Robert Gower  
Hon. Timothy Kennedy  
Hon. Kathy Konst  
David Lacki  
Celeste Lawson  
Gregory Lewis  
Hon. Cynthia Locklear  
Hon. Peter McMahon  
Hon. John Mills  
Hal Morse  
Jo Nasoff-Finton  
Hon. Sean O'Connor  
John Percy  
Dr. Gary Praetzel  
Melinda Rath Sanderson  
David Roll  
Hon. William Ross  
Laura St. Pierre Smith  
Christopher Schoepflin  
Hector Titus  
Timothy Wanamaker  
Peter Wendel

Co-Chairs Burmaster and Weinstein:

Attached please find the 2006 year-end report of the Erie-Niagara Regional Partnership (ENRP).

This has been a year of rebirth for ENRP. We began in January by approving a strategic plan for the organization, and by December had set in motion projects on several fronts that will result in major achievements for us in 2007 and beyond.

We managed to keep up a full schedule of meetings – four general meetings (five were scheduled, but one of those was on the day of the “October Surprise” storm and was therefore cancelled), and a total of 31 meetings of our four subcommittees – despite being staffed at a half-time level.

Statistically, overall attendance was down slightly, but if you look at the numbers without the small group of members who literally never show up, attendance was up from the previous year. General meeting attendance is particularly strong, and in 2006 the Tourism & Culture Subcommittee emerged as a major part of our efforts as you will see on the pages that follow.

## Ad Hoc:

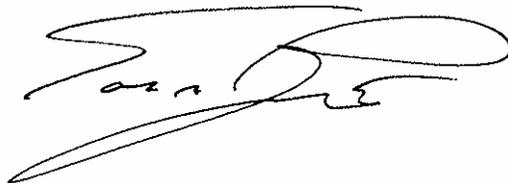
Michael Casale  
Lawrence Witul

## Executive Director:

Tod A. Kniazuk

It was my pleasure to continue to serve as the sole staff person for ENRP, and thank the board for their continued confidence in my work. I look forward to a productive and prosperous 2007 for ENRP.

Sincerely,



Tod A. Kniazuk  
Executive Director

## Strategic Plan

In January 2006 the Erie-Niagara Regional Partnership adopted its first ever strategic plan, laying the foundation for the organization for years to come.

The following was adopted as ENRP's mission statement:

*"The Erie-Niagara Regional Partnership is a non-traditional regional collaborative forum for linking multiple organizations and initiatives, and also serves as a catalyst to identify and pursue opportunities to grow the region."*

The group also identified what we referred to as ENRP's "positive core" – that which makes us a unique and valued organization in the region:

### ENRP's Positive Core

- Non-traditional regional collaborative model of civic engagement
- Broad range of participants in a collaborative environment leading to diversity (of geography and interests)
- Demonstrated success in diverse models of engagements with specific projects
- Finding members to meet emerging issues
- A forum for addressing future issues
- Our ability to play multiple roles as a clearinghouse, advocate, forum, coordinator, incubator, project manager, implementer, catalyst, supporter, and advisor

Further, we assessed our successes and challenges for the future:

### ENRP's Successes (what we do well)

- Line of communication fostering positive relationships
- Bring politicians together with "real people"
- Expose ideas to a larger group
- Participation remains high
- No "threat" or turf wars involved, just a collaborative effort
- Provide a genuine help to agencies
- Identify needs of the area
- More than just talk
- "Doers" as opposed to "leaders" and that gets a lot more done
- Non-legislative members invest time and staff effort

- Civic engagement through non-traditional models are a common thread in successful regions – that's ENRP
- Product driven, not process driven
- Open environment; anyone can propose an idea or project
- People on committees can focus in on interest issues
- Multiple models for implementing
- Clearinghouse of ideas
- Willing to take on some of the smaller initiatives

#### ENRP's Challenges

- Keeping continuity in the organization as members move on
- Securing permanent, reliable, and diverse funding
- Maintaining the respect and participation of the Niagara County Legislature, and fostering increased participation and interest from the Erie County Legislature
- Increasing diversity in the membership
- Keeping connected to the Erie County administration, while acknowledging that ENRP is a legislative initiative
- Securing permanent staffing
- Remaining nonpolitical and nonpartisan when tackling issues that have political overtones

All this form the basis for our future direction. We reaffirmed our work in four main areas – economic development, government affairs, tourism & culture, and transportation. We intend to continue to grow and foster ideas through active engagement of the members and legislatures. Finally, it was agreed that all the member agencies should financially contribute to ENRP. The first year of fundraising yielded over \$18,000 in general operating funding, and another \$5,000 in contract work.

#### **“Arts & Economic Prosperity II” Economic Impact Analysis**

The ENRP Tourism and Culture Subcommittee is acting as a steering committee for local participation in the national Arts and Economic Prosperity project.

Our work in formulating a regional economic development strategy has identified tourism as a growing cluster of importance to our economy, and cultural tourism an important component of that cluster. As would be done for any industry cluster, it is important to determine the economic impact of the arts and culture industry on the regional economy in order to best determine the level of

investment prudent to grow the sector. Arts and Economic Prosperity will provide that information.

This year-long project is a partnership between ENRP, the Arts Council in Buffalo & Erie County, AmeriCorps, and the national organization Americans for the Arts. Over 175 arts organizations in Erie and Niagara Counties are being surveyed to determine their economic impact. Similarly, a cross section of these organizations' audiences will be surveyed to determine the arts patrons' spending.

ENRP is the project manager for this effort. As a first step, we assembled the database of the organizations, and intend to perpetuate that database for further use in the region. We then conducted a survey of those organizations, recruiting them to complete a six page survey on their spending on everything from payroll to supplies. Essentially, this part of the project is a sector analysis of the arts and culture industry in the two counties. Response came in at around 30 percent (including all the traditionally defined "major" cultural). This puts us on par with the response rate for the other communities involved.

The other half of the study involves ENRP and a team of volunteers conducting the audience surveys. This effort will continue into early February 2008. In all over 800 of the one-page surveys will be collected, demonstrating the economic impact of arts audiences.

Americans for the Arts will employ professional economists to analyze the data. Our region and approximately 100 others across the country will be both reported on individually and cumulatively. Every organization participating in the project will receive a complementary copy of the report, and the findings will be provided to government and economic development officials as well as the general public. Findings will also be integrated into our Regional Economic Development Strategy as well as other regional tourism and economic development efforts. The report will be released in June, 2007.

### **Local Governments Economic Development Forums**

A continued focus of the Government Affairs Subcommittee is educating local government officials on a myriad of issues. In 2006 the committee – in partnership with the Erie County Association of Local Governments, Niagara County Supervisors Association, Niagara

County Center for Economic Development, Erie County Industrial Development Agency, and Buffalo Niagara Enterprise – organized two presentations on the region's economic development system. More specifically, municipalities were given information on how to access New York State SiteFinder, the Regional Economic Development Database, and the organizations charged with spurring economic development in the two counties.

The Local Governments Economic Development Forums took place on August 24 in Erie County and August 29 in Niagara County.

The Erie County presentation was part of the monthly Erie County Association of Local Governments meeting. Present were more than 40 local supervisors, mayors, and council members. Handouts and contact information were passed out.

The Niagara County presentation took place as a stand alone event at the Niagara County Community College. Present were representatives from six municipalities, the county planning board, and the county legislature. The presentation was recorded and replayed on LCTV. We also have a dvd of the event. Handouts were provided, and a lengthy question and answer period ensued.

### **Regional Economic Development Strategy (REDS)**

In 2006 ENRP reclaimed an important effort; the Regional Economic Development Strategy (REDS).

In 2002 we convened a working group toward the goal of creating a one-stop shop for economic development. That group concluded that a regional economic development strategy was first needed. The Buffalo Niagara Partnership and Erie County Industrial Development Agency offered to fund such a strategy, and the University at Buffalo Institute for Local Governance and Regional Growth (ILGRG) was commissioned to write the REDS. This was to be a two year effort, with a final document in 2004. Two complimentary components were to be completed; a contextual piece on the new economy and our place in it, and a cluster analysis of emerging industry sectors on which we should be focusing.

In 2003 a draft of the contextual piece was written, and the clusters were identified. However, the ECIDA decided not to fund year two of the project and instead commission its own cluster analysis. The

ILGRG, through Director John Sheffer and project manager James Allen, nonetheless continued the work and produced a fully formed contextual piece as well as a framework for the clusters. ENRP reminded involved throughout as an advisor and participant.

This document has for the most part sat idle since the end of 2004, waiting for it to be determined how to complete the clusters, weave the two pieces together, release it, and implement the strategy. The ILGRG considered the ECIDA to be the "owner" of the work as they signed the original contract. In late summer of 2006 the ECIDA agreed to transfer stewardship of the REDS to ENRP, giving new life to a still much needed effort.

ENRP is committed to working in partnership with the region's economic development community to update and release the context piece for comment, as well as complete the clusters. We are actively seeking approximately \$25,000 to engage PhD level interns to work in cooperation with industry leaders on those clusters (as was successfully done in the life sciences community).

### **Minority/Women Business Enterprise Effort**

The Economic Development Subcommittee began work in 2006 on an effort to better assist those seeking certification as a minority or women business enterprise (MBE/WBE), and also to make it easier for existing M/WBEs to access available contracts.

To that end, we convened all the local M/WBE certifiers in the region, as well as a cross-section of interested government, business, and elected representatives. We first asked all present to share their processes and experiences in order to better assess the current picture. We found that there has been good progress on streamlining the process on several fronts, but all in attendance agreed that more could be done. Specifically, access to information before certification, and assessment and access to contracts after certification seemed to be areas of opportunity for improvement.

What was less clear was what the agencies felt was the mechanism to accomplish these goals, or how far the effort should reach. In 2007 we will continue to refine these concepts. At this point it would be premature to predict what – if any – specific projects may come of this effort, but we will examine the feasibility of any ideas that come from the group.

## **Small Business Assistance Website**

ENRP remains committed to securing the funds necessary to implement the small business assistance website.

To recap: In 2004 and 2005 ENRP researched the number of small business assistance agencies in the two counties, and what programs they provide. The results of our search tallied 275 programs at 60 agencies in Erie and Niagara Counties. These results were put into a database. We then interviewed several recently opened or expanded small businesses to hear their experience with accessing small business assistance.

The results of our research showed that there are ample programs and agencies out there, but that they are difficult to access. Our recommendation, then, was to create a website that would allow the user to gain information on these programs and agencies in a matter of minutes, shaving weeks or months off their search for assistance.

The key feature of the website will be an interactive search. After answering a short series of questions, a list of programs for which the user is most likely to be eligible will appear. Other features of the site include a listing of all the programs sortable by program, agency, or assistance type; a frequently asked questions and helpful documents section; a glossary of terms (clickable from anywhere on the site one of the terms appears); and a link to Empire State Development's calendar of events.

To advise us on the site's content and on making sure the site is widely employed by users and agencies alike, we put together a steering committee comprised of a cross section of agencies in the two counties. The site will be designed and developed in 2007 pending the securing of funding for the project. We will continue to work on outreach to the remainder of the agencies to ensure full participation, and will also develop a public marketing campaign to raise awareness and foster use of the site.

We continue our effort to secure funding for this worthwhile project, and have gotten a few promising leads. No more than three months after we have received funding, this project will be a reality.

## **New York State Music Fund**

In December 2006 we were successful in securing a \$90,000 grant from the New York State Music Fund for a project entitled "Bringing the Big Easy to Buffalo-Niagara." This will become a high profile and highly beneficial project for us in 2007.

We will produce a series of nine events, beginning in April 2007 to coincide with the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival and concluding on or around February 5, 2008 – Mardi Gras Day. For each event in the series, a New Orleans or Louisiana musician or band will be brought in to conduct a music education program at a local school. This will mainly occur in Buffalo and Niagara Falls public schools, but not exclusively so. We will then try to do some community event or performance with the artist. In the evening there will be a ticketed concert with the artist. Since the grant is paying their fee, all revenue will be used to purchase instruments for donation to the Buffalo and Niagara Falls public schools.

There are four distinct benefits to the project: the music education component; the instrument donation; the exposure of this community to a culture and music under-represented; and the employment of musicians still adversely affected by Katrina.

The Buffalo Niagara Convention & Visitors Bureau is acting as lead applicant and fiscal agent for the project. The Music Is Art Foundation is an active partner in all aspects of the project, and the Community Music School is an advisor on the music education component. ENRP will act as the project organizer and will take the lead on securing the talent, the school partners, and the venues.

## **Other Significant Efforts**

In addition to the aforementioned, ENRP continues its work on several other efforts, including:

- Cross border identification impact
- Freight study
- Niagara Falls International Airport
- NYSDOT transportation master plan
- Power relicensing
- Tourist transportation and signage
- Traffic signal coordination