

NIAGARA ERIE REGIONAL COALITION

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MEMORANDUM

To: Co-Chairs Clyde Burmaster & Kathy Konst

From: Government Affairs Chair Peter McMahon

Re: March and May, 2008 Meetings

Date: May 9, 2008

The Niagara Erie Regional Coalition Government Affairs Subcommittee met March 26, 2008 at the Niagara County Center for Economic Development (NCCED) and May 5, 2008 in a joint meeting with the Economic Development Subcommittee at the Erie County Industrial Development Agency (ECIDA). Present for the March meeting were subcommittee members McMahon, Ellis, Ross, and Wendel. Present for the May meeting were subcommittee members McMahon, Wendel, and Witul; as well as Economic Development Subcommittee members Allen, Cappellino, Ferraro, Konst, Morse, Murray (proxy by Dan Barry), Orsi, St. Pierre Smith (proxy by Sarah Ham), and Titus; and also Regional Coalition Ad Hoc Member Michael Casale, Dr. Kathryn Foster of the University at Buffalo Regional Institute, Graham Smith of the Buffalo Niagara Enterprise, and Rich Guarino of the Greater Buffalo Niagara Regional Transportation Council.

Smart Permitting:

After a lengthy absence, the topic of electronic – or “smart” – permitting is once again on the radar. Erie County, the Regional Coalition, Empire State Development, and the University at Buffalo Regional Institute (UBRI) have been in conversations regarding the project.

To recap: The Regional Coalition was involved (as ENRP) in the development of the smart permit project, which was funded by Erie County and executed by the UBRI (then ILGRG). It included several pilot municipalities, including one in Niagara County, and entailed making available on-line these municipalities' building permit forms. The project was completed, at which time Erie County decided it would house the system. Due to funding and staffing cuts at the county, the project was never made active.

At the March meeting the subcommittee reaffirmed its support for the project and discussed what our desired role would be if it is in fact relaunched. One idea was that we could serve as the advocates to municipalities to get involved in the project.

Dr. Kathryn Foster, director of the UBRI, was invited to the April meeting to speak about smart permitting and other topics. Foster noted that in addition to the aforementioned entities, the municipalities involved in the pilot have also been approached, as have developers. (It should be noted that the Regional Coalition was not approached by the UBRI, but rather had independent conversations with Erie County and ESD.)

Further, it was shared that the previously completed project is now so out of date as to no longer be workable. The project would need to be rebuilt. As such, it offers the opportunity to immediately include additional municipalities. Foster indicated that there has been an initial interest and support for resurrecting the project, but that now fundraising would need to begin.

Following her presentation, Subcommittee Chair James Allen informed her that smart permitting was a concept that came from the Coalition, and that we need to be more involved going forward. Likewise, Subcommittee member Samuel Ferraro added that Niagara County stands ready to work on it as well.

Ferraro also reminded the group of three issues that came out of the pilot project – technology for smaller municipalities, submission of stamped drawings, and payment for permits. McMahon added that one of the ideas behind the project was to get “a win” that could lead to a more unified process, other permits being offered on-line, or unified zoning codes.

Foster informed the group that she is putting together a “team of advisors and advocates” and that anyone from the Regional Coalition interested should inform her of such interest.

Planning:

There are three planning related issues that the subcommittee will keep tabs on – the Niagara Communities Comprehensive Plan, the creation of an Erie County Planning Board, and integration/implementation of the Framework for Regional Growth.

Membership:

It was noted that Erie County is once again active in the Regional Coalition, and at the April meeting Dan Barry affirmed that County Executive Collins is supportive of the group. The new mayor of Niagara Falls, Paul Dyster, is also on board.

Efforts to reach out to City of Buffalo Mayor Byron Brown, however, have been unsuccessful. The subcommittee would like efforts to get Buffalo involved to continue. Recruiting more business members was also discussed, with the idea to identify some players in each of the Regional Economic Development Strategy clusters and invite them.

Other Topics:

Other topics discussed included shared services opportunities.