

Regional Economic Development Database (REDD)

Subcommittee: Economic Development

The Project: A database housing firm, geodemographic, parcel, and infrastructure data primarily for Erie and Niagara Counties (but also containing data for Allegany, Cattaraugus, and Chautauqua) that allows users to generate customized responses and mapping to locate potential sites under client consideration for economic development projects. The REDD has greatly shortened response times. Its main user is the BNE.

Status: The project budget for 2004 is \$100,000 (\$60,000 from Erie County, \$30,000 from BNE, and \$10,000 yet to be determined). It continues to be housed at the UB Institute for Local Governance and Regional Growth. Data is constantly being refreshed and new layers are being added, such as merging and aligning new parcel layers and air photos. BNE has also provided several hundred job and investment reports on local firms that we have integrated into the firms database.

Next Steps: Programmatically, 2004 will see a redesign of our web-based interface to these data holdings, as the current one is a bit dated. This redesign has been underway since December 2003. It will also include measures to track usage of the site, as we have requested. ENRP can play a role in this redesign by choosing members to work with BNE and the Institute on it. We need to increase usage of the REDD beyond BNE, especially in Niagara County. Also, Government Affairs Subcommittee Chair Peter McMahon suggested that we ask each municipality to choose their best sites to be actively included in REDD and in BNE's marketing efforts. Finally, as we do every year, we need to consider funding and housing issues for 2005. Perhaps we need a long-term action plan for this?

Regional Economic Development Strategy (REDS)

Subcommittee: Economic Development

The Project: Following the ENRP's Economic Development Working Group (EDWG) calling for a regional economic development strategy as a precursor to a one-stop shop for economic development, the REDS was formed to create said strategy. The ECIDA contracted with the Institute for Local Governance and Regional Growth, and the Amherst IDA provided in-kind help. It was intended that the REDS would coordinate with the Framework for Regional Growth.

Status: A Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) was put together, and a SWOT analysis was completed. A draft strategy was completed and presented to a smaller group of stakeholders that included the BNE, ECIDA, NCIDA, and others. At this point, there is no longer a formal agreement with the ECIDA for completion of the project, nor is there any longer a formal link to the Framework. That also means that the ECIDA has discontinued the funding the Institute was to receive for the second year of the project. The Institute, however, will complete and distribute the report. The report focuses on developing clusters in the new economy based on strategic goals in the areas of life science, back office/professional support firms, advanced manufacturing, tourism, and logistics.

Next Steps: The latest draft of the report went out to the TAC on March 17 in anticipation of an April 2 meeting (8 a.m. at the Amherst Pepsi Center). Following feedback from the TAC, the Institute will complete and distribute the final report. ENRP can then reconvene the EDWG to analyze the report and begin working on the one-stop shop or governance ideas that can come out of the REDS. Perhaps we can also play some role in the advocacy of implementation of the REDS?

Small Business Development Project

Subcommittee: Economic Development

The Project: To be determined based on an analysis of existing small business programs currently being conducted.

Status: The research for the project is being conducted in three phases. Phase one of the project is an inventory of small business assistance programs available in Erie and Niagara Counties that has generated information on 230 programs at 57 local, state, and federal agencies, including information on usage, advertising, and program details. Phase one will be complete by month-end. Phase two, which will take place in April, is a qualitative analysis of small business use of these programs. This will be conducted through interviews of different types of recently opened or expanded small businesses in the two counties, and will determine their awareness of, usage of, and issues with the programs identified in Phase one. Phase three is analysis and development of recommendations for specific projects.

Next Steps: The subcommittee will receive the data analysis and recommendations at their April meeting, for revision and presentation to the full group in May. Projects may include better coordination or advertising of existing programs, and/or development of new programs. Once concept approval is granted, the subcommittee can work on the project in the second half of 2004.

Electronic Permitting (Smart Permitting)

Subcommittee: Government Affairs

The Project: Development of an on-line site to facilitate the application for building (and other) permits for municipalities in Erie and Niagara Counties. This was done through development of a pilot site for the Town of Lockport, Wales, the Village of Hamburg, Amherst, and the City of Tonawanda. Ellicott and Ciminelli Development have tested the site, and the City of Buffalo has consulted on the pilot. The site will then be presented to the other municipalities for their voluntary inclusion.

Status: Erie County contracted with the UB Institute for Local Governance and Regional Growth to execute the pilot. The initiative is in the final phase of the contract. The site is functional. Both the Erie County Association of Local Governments and the Niagara County Supervisors Association have heard presentations on the site, and several in each county have expressed interest in joining. The Town of Aurora, in fact, has signed on in principle already.

Next Steps: The site has not yet gone live. This is because at the end of the pilot it was to be transitioned to and housed at the Erie County Department of Environment and Planning. They, however, are not yet ready to receive the site, and have asked the Institute to prepare a proposal to extend the contract for six months. This contract would see the Institute work on the transition from the pilot to live deployment of the website and continue to bring new municipalities on-line as requested – but for Erie County. Niagara County has an opportunity to “jump in” to this contract, but we need to act soon.

Cultural Tourism Directional Signage

Subcommittee: Tourism & Culture

The Project: Two, really. The first is development and implementation of directional signage on municipal streets within the City of Buffalo (this was a direct request by the city) leading to major cultural destinations along the following designated corridors: Elmwood, Delaware, Broadway, Genesee, South Park, and Porter/North. This will act as a pilot for a comprehensive signage system for the two counties that will begin on the highways and expressways, continue along municipal streets, and conclude at the destinations. This will be developed as a recommendation of the Regional Cultural Tourism Initiative.

Status: The pilot is in its final design phase. Erie County has agreed to construct the signs (approximately 85), and the city will put them up. They will be funded through a grant being secured by Shea's and the Burchfield-Penney. The goal is to have them up for this summer. At that point the full project will commence, with a (very) tentative beginning of installation in summer 2005.

Next Steps: Some work remains on the pilot, but the real work is in the larger project. Best practices will continue to be researched, an inventory of existing signage should be done, and the roster of attractions, routes, and signs will need to be designed and developed. The state, all the municipalities, and the attractions will need to be brought in to the effort. Funding will need to be secured. Finally, installation and maintenance agreements will have to be forged.

Tourist Transportation

Subcommittee: Tourism & Culture

The Project: Originally meant to be the resurrection of the Buffalo-Niagara Tourist Express – a shuttle offering regular, direct service between the two downtowns – the project has evolved into a more comprehensive system involving a downtown Buffalo-Museum District loop, express service from the Museum District to downtown Niagara Falls, integration of the Niagara Falls trolley into the system, and possible links from Niagara Falls to other Niagara County destinations.

Status: For this summer, we have settled for trying to get the BNCVB and NTCC to better integrate the NFTA's current service into their advertising – especially a map quest-like feature on the NFTA's website. The project itself is in the research and design phase, with a target of being ready for summer 2005. While this is being developed as a shuttle service, we are working in conjunction with the BNCVB's Cultural Tourism Committee on pursuing an eventual rail connection that could itself be a tourist attraction.

Next Steps: Continue the design phase and secure funding to implement the project in conjunction with the BNCVB and NTCC. Also, keep working with Tony Conte from Shea's on the rail piece. The Cultural Tourism Initiative should advise the project.

Buffalo Niagara Cultural Tourism Initiative (BNCTI)

Subcommittee: Tourism & Culture

The Project: Begun in January 2003, Phase II of the Initiative has engaged the region's cultural, arts, heritage and tourism stakeholder community in the development of a strategic plan for cultural tourism. Throughout 2003 a series of meetings and working sessions were held with the stakeholder community to identify obstacles and opportunities and develop actionable strategies for cultural tourism development, especially with respect to the issues of capacity building, marketing and implementation. The UB Institute for Local Governance and Regional Growth has served as Project Manager of the Initiative, reporting to a volunteer-based Steering Committee. ENRP is represented in the BNCTI.

Status: At the last full meeting of the BNCTI (December 4, 2003) cultural tourism stakeholders participated in an engaging, critical discussion of the full draft report, *A Cultural Tourism Strategy: Enriching Culture and Building Tourism in Buffalo Niagara*. By the close of the public comment period on December 18, the Institute had received dozens of comments, criticisms and recommendations regarding the report's strategies and approach to implementation. Since then the Institute has incorporated these comments, as well as feedback from the Steering Committee and other stakeholders, into a final report, expected to be released in spring 2004.

Next Steps: A new governance structure for cultural tourism will be formed to implement the strategic plan in coordination with the region's cultural, arts, heritage and tourism stakeholder community. ENRP has volunteered to work on signage and transportation projects, but what other role (if any) should we play?

Public Transportation / Jobs Access

Subcommittee: Transportation

The Project: First, a pilot project that links identified areas of transit dependent population (based on income and auto ownership) with areas of job growth opportunity that employ workers on non-traditional or staggered shifts. Essentially, getting people who need jobs to jobs that need people. When the pilot has demonstrated a need for this service, the long-term goal is to have transportation access written into policy at the IDAs and WIBs, so that wherever businesses are being located, public transportation can be developed as needed to better serve these businesses and potential employees.

Status: The pilot areas are the airport / Walden Ave. corridor in Erie County and the Seneca Niagara Casino / airport corridor in Niagara County. It needs about one quarter to finish. Locations of potential populations have been mapped, as have employers and potential employers, existing services reviewed, discussions with employers held, and potential service types assessed. Next is to combine into specific scenarios for both locations, do analyses, and prepare documentation. For the long-term project, a draft agreement has been prepared, and public transportation is being mentioned in the draft REDS.

Next Steps: Execution of the pilot in 2004, including securing funding. Then, an analysis of the pilot to inform the long-term policy. Finally, inclusion of the policy in the working of our economic development agencies. We need to develop a timeline and implementation strategy for this, and perhaps put together an advisory group or link this to the TAC for the REDS.

Shoreline Corridor MOU

Subcommittee: Transportation

The Project: Recognizing that a multi-use shoreline trail could be created from Old Fort Niagara all the way through Erie County and beyond to the Pennsylvania state line, the GBNRTC is securing signatures to a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that would promote coordinated signage, maintenance, and investment in the trail. Each municipality would retain ownership of and responsibility for their portion of the trail, but by uniting the possibility of attracting new grants and the overall user experience will be augmented.

Status: ENRP endorsed this project at our December 2003 meeting, and in fact were one of the first signatories to the MOU. Additional signatures are being secured by GBNRTC, and should be completed in the next four to eight weeks.

Next Steps: Erie County is providing funds and contractual assistance to develop and install consistent wayfinding/signage. A determination of additional or upgraded segments and priority needs to be made, followed by a strategy to accomplish it. Somewhere during the year should be a declaration of victory, ribbon cutting event, ride, etc. Does ENRP need to play a further role in this?