

# Framework Basics

Erie-Niagara Framework for Regional Growth



## Introduction

In collaboration with stakeholders from across the region, Erie and Niagara Counties are exploring ways to guide the region's growth and development through the year 2020. Under review are a wide range of policies, strategies, and partnership to **increase efficiency, improve livability, promote economic vitality, and conserve sensitive natural and cultural resources.**

Through the Spring of 2004, the Counties will work with a Steering Committee and team of planners led by the HOK Planning Group to study regional patterns of growth and development, analyze County powers and authorities, explore best practices from across the state and the country, define a vision, and prepare a "tool kit" of strategies and initiatives. Community and regional stakeholders will be engaged in the process through interviews and focus group meetings, presentations to civic and community groups, and public workshops.

## Mission Statement

To guide the planning process, Erie and Niagara Counties adopted the following mission statement:

*The Framework for Regional Growth is a document prepared and supported by Erie and Niagara Counties. It is to be utilized as a blueprint to support the actions of county and regional agencies relating to the area's physical development. It will also be used to inform state and local governments, private developers, and non-profit organizations about the process and actions County government could undertake when making decisions affecting the region's development.*

*The Regional Framework will help the Erie and Niagara Counties region make decisions about its growth and development on a coordinated and consistent basis. It will establish a framework for development within the region, and describe policies, programs, and projects that will encourage and facilitate development that is consistent with such framework. The Plan will help local officials coordinate their decisions so they can anticipate how one decision may affect another.*

## Frequently Asked Questions

### ***What is the Framework for Regional Growth?***

When complete, the Framework for Regional Development will be a written and graphic document, which establishes basic policies and principles to guide the future growth and redevelopment of the region. The framework will provide the following:

- A vision for how we wish the region to grow and redevelop over the next 15 years.
- Clear direction regarding growth redevelopment matters to county decision-makers and other regional organizations linked to the two Counties via funding, membership, or other relationships.
- Information on the ways local governments, private sector, and non-profit actions and initiatives can reinforce the overall regional vision.

- Mechanisms to insure that the goals, concepts, and recommendations of the Framework for Regional Growth are implemented in an efficient and accountable manner.

***What is to be accomplished with a regional Framework?*** A Framework for Regional Growth will help all sectors and jurisdictions within Erie and Niagara counties make better, more coordinated decisions about growth and redevelopment. The document will establish a regional development vision, and will outline policies, programs, and projects consistent with that vision. As such, the plan fosters development coordination across political boundaries, and helps us grow in smart, sustainable, and efficient ways.

***Why is there a need for a Framework to guide growth and redevelopment of the Region?***

Currently, numerous public authorities, local government, and private sector actions make decisions regarding area land use, growth, and redevelopment. Overall policies to guide these decisions are not present. This creates a development pattern that often causes inefficient infrastructure utilization, loss of important natural resources, abandonment of urban/village centers, and sprawling growth. A regional framework will provide a common reference point for decision-makers and insure a coordinated approach to area wide growth and redevelopment.

***How will the Framework for Regional Growth be different from the last Bi-County Land Use Concept completed by the former Erie and Niagara Counties Regional Planning Board in 1974?***

Undertaking this effort will have the full support of the Erie County Executive and Chairman of the Niagara County Legislature. Since the main authority for implementing the recommendations in the Framework is County government, the abovementioned support is critical to its success. Since the Regional Planning Board had no real authority to implement its recommendations, many of their plans were not utilized.

***What land area comprises the Region?***

Erie and Niagara Counties is the geographic area that the Framework will encompass. Although arguments can be made that the Framework should include a larger, more international region, the two-county area is the focus. This is due to the history of both Counties engaging in regional planning and common issues such as aging central cities, the Canadian/American border, waterfront development, and labor market.

***What elements will be included? Is this a land use plan, an economic development plan?***

The Framework for Regional Growth will not be a traditional zoning/land use plan. Recommendations regarding future residential or commercial zoning districts are not the intent of this effort. It is expected, however, to identify geographic areas such as urban centers, rural areas, and others. Policies and action strategies that serve to reinforce the goals established for these areas would be identified in the Framework. Economic Development, Community Reinvestment, and Livable Communities will also be addressed as key policy issues within the document. It is expected that existing and on-going economic development plans will be incorporated into the framework document. This recognizes the extensive work already underway by various agencies in pursuing a regional approach to the area's economic development issues.

***Will local governments' current land use authority be altered by recommendation in the Framework?***

As the name implies, the Regional Framework will provide a window frame within which local plans and actions can be developed. It will not usurp local planning powers. The document will include recommendations and action strategies to carry out the short and long term vision for the region consistent with the following principles:

- Voluntary. The Framework will inform local governments as to how the counties and other regional agencies will make their respective decisions regarding physical development. It recognizes that municipal land use authority is an important tool which can insure better realization of the regional vision. Thus, the Framework will evaluate the feasibility of developing financial incentives and other positive inducements to gain local buy-in of the framework document.
- Flexible. The Framework will be flexible and allow frequent adjustments to reflect changing conditions.
- Collaborative: Local governments will be major contributors the Framework. A successful regional plan cannot have credibility unless municipalities have a strong role in its preparation.

***How will the strategies and action included in the Framework be carried out?***

Although a legal mandate to utilize the Regional Framework is not present, a variety of techniques exist that can insure use of the document. An essential goal of the planning process will be ultimate adoption of the Regional Framework by both Counties governing body, and important regional entities. These include the Greater Buffalo-Niagara Regional Transportation Council, Erie County Water Authority, Niagara County Sewer and Water Districts and area industrial development agencies. Documents such as Memorandum of Understanding and Intermunicipal Cooperation Agreements will be explored outlining the intention of all parties to use the Regional Framework as a guide to future planning and redevelopment of the region.

A few specific ways the framework can be utilized include:

- Preparation of the Erie County and Niagara County Capital Improvement Programs. The Framework would be an important document to help direct capital expenditures for road/sewer/bridge improvements and major regional facility development.
- Reviews by both the Erie County and Niagara County Planning Departments of municipal activities relative to major zoning decisions, and local comprehensive plan development.
- Actions taken by County representatives serving on public boards/organizations that affect growth and redevelopment of the region. Such organizations include the Greater Buffalo-Niagara Regional Transportation Council, Niagara County Industrial Development Agency, Erie County Water Authority, Niagara County Sewer and Water Districts and others.

***Will a new regional planning board be created?***

An important element of the process to develop a regional framework is an analysis of possible mechanisms to insure the continued use and updating of the document. Formation of a Regional Planning Board is one option; however, many alternatives will be evaluated and discussed through the planning process. Other options range from expanding the duties of the GBNRTC, to a Memorandum of Understanding between the two Counties to jointly undertake the monitoring role through their existing planning departments.

***How will development of the Framework occur?***

The Erie County Executive and the Chairman of the Niagara County Legislature convened a meeting in August 2001 to begin discussing regional planning and related matters. As a result of that session, a Working Group was formed by the planning departments of each County, the two major cities and regional organizations. The Group's function was been to identify an appropriate approach to further more coordinated decision-making in the region. Following the Group's work, a Steering Committee was formed to guide the overall preparation of the Framework. This Committee, including public/private sector representatives, and will guide the efforts of a consultant team. To ensure the Framework reflects the region's diverse interests, the planning process includes

a comprehensive public outreach and involvement component. Numerous outreach tools will be employed to obtain maximum feedback and participation throughout the effort.

***Who will be the lead agency responsible for overseeing the day-to-day development of the Framework?***

The Erie County Department of Environment and Planning will perform this role in close consultation with the Niagara County Department of Planning, Development and Tourism.

***How long will it take to complete the Framework?***

The Framework is scheduled for completion in the Summer of 2004.

## **Steering Committee**

*Erie County Executive*

Laurence K. Rubin, Commissioner

*Niagara County Assoc. of Towns*

Eric Krueger, Supervisor, Newfane

*Niagara County Legislature Chairman*

William L. Ross, Chairman

*Town of Amherst*

Eric Gillert, Planning Director

*Erie County Legislature*

Barry A. Weinstein, M.D., Legislator

*Town of Wheatfield*

Tim Demler, Supervisor

*Niagara County Legislature*

Samuel Ferraro, Commissioner

*Buffalo Niagara Partnership*

Laura St. Pierre, Dir. of Regional Development  
Tim Loftis, Partner, Jaeckle Fleischmann & Mugal

*Erie Niagara Regional Partnership*

Richard Brox, Citizen

Wright Ellis, Supervisor, Cambria

*Niagara U.S.A. Chamber*

Robert L. Newman, President & CEO

*City of Buffalo*

Bonnie Kane-Lockwood, Federal/State Funding  
Coordinator

*GBNRTC*

Hal Morse, Director

*City of Niagara Falls*

Thomas DeSantis, Senior Planner

*Institute for Local Governance & Regional Growth*

John Sheffer, Director

*Erie County Assoc. of Governments*

Peter A. McMahon, Supervisor, Grand Island

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