



Minutes of Niagara Erie Regional Coalition Reception
July 29, 2010

Co-Chairs

Hon. Clyde Burmaster
Hon. Edward Rath III

Members

James Allen
John Cappellino
Dr. Deborah Curtis
Hon. Paul Dyster
Hon. Wright Ellis
Samuel Ferraro
Renee Filip
Dottie Gallagher-Cohen
Robert Gower
Kathy Konst
David Lacki
Gregory Lewis
Joe McMahon
Hon. Peter McMahon
Hon. Barbara Miller-Williams
Hon. John Mills
Hal Morse
Christina Orsi
John Percy
Hon. William Ross
Salvatore Sciandra
Peter Wendel
Arlene White
Hon. Maria Whyte

Ad Hoc

Michael Casale
Matthew Enstice
Melinda Rath Sanderson
Lawrence Witul

Executive Director

Tod A. Kniazuk

Present: Burmaster, Rath, Ellis, Ferraro, Gower, Konst, P. McMahon, Morse, Ross, Wendel, White, Whyte, Rath-Sanderson

Excused: Cappellino, Curtis, Dyster, Gallagher-Cohen, Lacki, Mills

Absent: Allen, Filip, Lewis, J. McMahon, Miller-Williams, Orsi, Percy, Sciandra, Casale, Witul

Guests: Hon. Christina Bove (ECL), Mr. Clinton Brown (Clinton Brown Co.), Hon. Dino Fudoli (ECL), Hon. David Godfrey (NCL), Hon. Kevin Hardwick (ECL), Mr. Darren Kempner (EC DEP), Ms. Jessica O'Neill (ECL staff), Mr. Thomas Prohaska (Buffalo News), Hon. Russ Rizzo (NCL), Hon. Antoine Thompson (NY Senate – 2 proxies), Hon. Raymond Walter (ECL), Hon. Barry Weinstein (Amherst)

Niagara Erie Regional Coalition Co-Chairs Clyde Burmaster and Edward Rath III welcomed those in attendance to the reception, and thanked Dick & Jenny's Bake and Brew for hosting the event.

Co-Chair Burmaster began the presentation by giving a brief history of the organization, founded in 1998 as the Erie-Niagara Regional Partnership, a subcommittee of the two counties' Legislatures, and recognized former NERC co-chairs Barry Weinstein and Kathy Konst. He noted that the Coalition is unique in New York State. Its mission has always been to bring the two counties together and connect them to other important groups to work collectively for the betterment of the region. That remains the core focus of the group today. The Regional Coalition has done a lot of good over its 12 years, but every once in a while you need to get motivated and recommitted, and that's what today is about.

Regional Coalition Executive Director Tod Kniazuk then presented the new focus of the group – "The 3 A's" of access, advocacy, and action.

Access is what the Coalition has always been about; at one meeting, in

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one room, members can connect with colleagues from two counties and multiple sectors and learn what they're working on. This exchange of ideas and information will continue at our quarterly general meetings and in committee. In addition, we will return to the concept of bringing in guest speakers to our general meetings to further learn about items of regional importance and investigate potential topics and projects. Finally, we encourage members to share items through e-mail and we have established a Facebook page for more immediate information sharing.

Kniazuk noted that the Regional Coalition has always been willing to work in the background and not make too much noise, but that it's time to step forward and be more assertive in taking our rightful place in shaping the regional agenda. This will be accomplished through advocacy. We will develop shared legislation for the two counties to be able to speak in a common voice, and will issue reports on the Legislatures' activity as well as periodic newsletters. As always, the membership will determine what issues are important and what position to take on those issues, but unlike the past we will be more vocal in advocating for our priorities.

Over the years, the Regional Coalition has also worked on targeted projects in multiple capacities. This action will be refined to be the facilitator of projects where multiple entities will be involved. A past problem has been a funder or participating agency "taking over" a project and in some cases the project then being abandoned or diminished. To avoid this in the future, we will be very clear at the onset that these projects will be "owned" by all participants and will seek agreements to that effect, with the Coalition facilitating both the agreement and project.

Kniazuk then moved on to the Regional Coalition's two areas of impact (and therefore two subcommittees) – Economic Development and Government Affairs. Economic Development will encompass tourism and transportation issues. Government Affairs will include education and advocacy efforts, and also seek county government collaborations. James Allen will continue to chair the Economic Development Subcommittee, and Peter McMahon will continue to chair Government Affairs.

Kniazuk concluded his portion of the presentation by thanking the three members who have remained with the group for its entire existence – Burmaster, Samuel Ferraro, and Peter Wendel. He then noted that the presentation was the vision of the co-chairs and himself, but that in the spirit of the Coalition we wanted to hear from those in attendance and see what they thought of all this.

Former co-chair and current Town of Amherst Supervisor Barry Weinstein noted that when he proposed the creation of ENRP, he envisioned it as a

replacement for the regional planning board, and proposed it to be filled more with planners than politicians. While that is not the direction in which it has gone, he affirmed the group's mission and work.

A representative of New York State Senator Antoine Thompson's office noted that the idea of legislative updates is a good one, and that they would be happy to assist us in including state issues in those updates.

Coalition member Maria Whyte inquired as to the relationship between NERC and the Framework for Regional Growth, asking whether NERC was the Framework's working group? Kniazuk replied that NERC has always been a participant in and supporter of the Framework, but that it is a bi-county effort led by the Niagara County Center for Economic Development and Erie County Department of Environment and Planning. Kniazuk and Wright Ellis serve on the Framework working group as official representatives of the Regional Coalition, and many of the other participants are also members of the Coalition.

Local architect Clinton Brown told the group that he liked what he heard at the presentation, and offered up a potential project in the 2011 National Trust for Historic Preservation conference taking place in Western New York.

Niagara County Legislator David Godfrey offered another potential topic of state and federal mandates in general, and the 2012 E-911 requirement in particular.

Co-Chair Rath noted that he would like to see the group take the good research of the University at Buffalo Regional Institute and look for implementable projects from that work. The next general meeting will take place Friday September 24 at 8:30 a.m. where we will set our agenda, followed by a round of committee meetings to choose action items. He then wrapped up the presentation by encouraging the members to participate and bring their ideas to the table, and once again thanked everyone for being there.

Submitted by Tod A. Kniazuk
August 17, 2010