



Minutes of Niagara Erie Regional Coalition Meeting
December 11, 2009

- Co-Chairs**
Hon. Clyde Burmaster
Hon. Michele Iannello
- Members**
James Allen
John Cappellino
Drew Cerza
Dr. Deborah Curtis
Hon. Paul Dyster
Hon. Wright Ellis
Samuel Ferraro
Renee Filip
Robert Gower
Kathy Konst
David Lacki
Celeste Lawson
Gregory Lewis
Joe McMahon
Hon. Peter McMahon
Hon. Barbara Miller-Williams
Hon. John Mills
Hal Morse
Hon. Jason Murgia
Hon. Sean O'Connor
Christina Orsi
John Percy
Hon. Edward Rath III
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, Iannello, Curtis, Ellis, Ferraro, Filip, Gower, Konst (Kempner), Lacki, Lawson, Morse, Orsi (Greco), Percy, Rath, Ross, Sciandra, Wendel, White, Casale, Witul
- Excused:** Allen, Cappellino, Cerza, Dyster, P. McMahon
- Absent:** Lewis, J. McMahon, Miller-Williams, Mills, Murgia, O'Connor, Whyte
- The meeting was called to order at 8:40 a.m. by Niagara Erie Regional Coalition Co-Chairs Clyde Burmaster and Michele Iannello. Director of Aviation William Vanecek and the Niagara Frontier Transportation Agency were thanked for hosting the meeting. Vanecek, the NFTA's Pascal Cohen, and former Coalition member Jo Nasoff-Finton were welcomed as guests.
- Departing members Michele Iannello, Jason Murgia and former Coalition co-chair Sean O'Connor were thanked for their service. It was noted that O'Connor is retiring from the Niagara County Legislature after 24 years, and that his family held that seat since the legislature was formed in 1970. The group thanked Iannello for her efforts as a member and current Erie County co-chair.
- The Niagara Erie Regional Coalition Distinguished Service Awards were presented to former members Jo Nasoff-Finton and Hector Titus (who could not make the meeting due to weather). Nasoff Finton and Titus both began as proxies for other members, but their dedication to the organization made the Coalition revise its policies regarding membership. Nasoff was instrumental in finding the Coalition a home at the ECIDA, and was a champion of the Regional Economic Development Strategy's cluster work. Titus was a champion of small business issues, had near-perfect attendance at our meetings, and chaired the Economic Development Subcommittee. Nasoff thanked the group for the award and called the Coalition "one of the few places you leave your politics at the door."

Minutes of the March 2009 meeting were approved.

Regional Coalition Executive Director Tod A. Kniazuk presented the sustainability report. The report was received and filed. Kniazuk also presented the 2010 Regional Coalition budget, which was approved.

Tourism & Culture Subcommittee Chair David Lacki presented a joint Economic Development / Tourism & Culture Subcommittee report. The report was received and filed, with mention made of the air travel survey project being at the funding stage.

Subcommittee Member Wright Ellis presented the Government Affairs Subcommittee report. The report was received and filed. The subcommittee suggested that, after the 2010 Coalition co-chairs are in place, the organization review our 2006 strategic plan, update it, and brainstorm new ideas to "refocus" the group. Burmaster affirmed that this will be done early next year.

Coalition Member Samuel Ferraro updated the group on the Framework for Regional Growth. He and Coalition Member Kathy Konst have met and will reconstitute the Framework's working group, with a first meeting scheduled for mid-January. Iannello suggested that an effort be made to reach out to the Erie County Legislature, especially Legislator Whyte who headed up the Erie County Planning Board effort. Erie County Department of Environment & Planning Deputy Commissioner Darren Kempner (proxy for Konst) assured her they would, if they have not already done so.

Coalition Member Arlene White informed the group of a "Border Remedial Action Study" her organization, the Binational Tourism Alliance, is proposing. She noted that while there is 90 percent compliance with the new identification requirements at the US-Canada border, overall traffic is down 50 percent. The BTA believes this is due to the new requirements and confusion about them, but elected officials want proof of the cause. For this reason, the BTA is proposing the aforementioned study. They need to raise \$50,000 from local partners (including \$25,000 on the US side), which in turn will leverage \$600,000 from the Canadian federal government. White asked the Coalition for letters of support for this effort, and perhaps a contribution to the study.

Ferraro suggested they approach the bridge commissions for funding, and requested a more detailed budget and deliverables for the study. White responded that the commissions are interested, but first want to see demonstrations of support by others. Lacki added that the dollar amount is high for another study, and also noted that the tourism industry on the US side might be content that travelers are staying on this side of the border; that said, a long term solution should be found. Rath mentioned that we need to expand the number of ways people can get passports so they don't have to stand in line.

Under old and new business, Burmaster again thanked Iannello for her service to the Coalition and to Erie County. The next meeting will be announced following the appointment of a new Erie County co-chair.

Vanecek and Cohen presented an update on the Niagara Falls International Airport, a project the Coalition has supported since the inception of the group. Vanecek noted that Cohen – who has an MBA in marketing – will be the NFIA's acting manager.

The new air terminal's first flight is set for December 18 on Direct Air. The NFIA is in a key location, with over eight million people in the area (four million being from Toronto), and with good accessibility from both sides of the border. The \$40 million project has resulted in a brand new 75,000 square foot terminal (the previous one was 25,000 square feet). It has four gates and two jet bridges, and can accommodate both 747s and 757s and therefore can handle international flights. Further, it has a low cost to airline users; landing fees are only 90 cents per 1,000 of takeoff weight, compared to \$16 in Toronto – a 747 would save a half-million dollars a year on one weekly flight.

The NFIA is targeting domestic, European, and charter passenger service. Direct Air is there because it's cheaper than at the Buffalo Niagara International Airport, and they're not in the same building as other low cost carriers like Jet Blue and Southwest. Direct Air began service at NFIA in March 2007, have had

an economic impact of \$5.5 million, and have carried 88,000 passengers to date. Other domestic and international carriers are being courted. Gambling charters are being looked at, and the terminal will be promoted to locals for non-stop service originating from NFIA and for its convenience.

Burmaster noted that the airport, like the casino, is a means to an end to get tourists here. Coalition Member John Percy stated that the casino has leveraged investment in downtown buildings, hotels, and the airport. Vanecek replied that the NFTA is working with the Niagara Tourism & Convention Corporation to market the NFIA. He added that the "broken window syndrome" in a city like Niagara Falls can, however, hurt efforts.

The Co-Chairs thanked the presenter and the group, and the meeting was adjourned at 9:50 a.m. for a tour of the new terminal.

Submitted by Tod A. Kniazuk
April 16, 2010