

**ERIE-NIAGARA REGIONAL PARTNERSHIP**  
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Tod A. Kniazuk

**Memorandum**

**To: Co-Chairs Clyde Burmaster & Barry Weinstein, MD**

**From: Economic Development Subcommittee Chair Hector Titus**

**Re: June 2004 subcommittee meeting & July 2004 small  
business steering committee meeting**

**Date: July 30, 2004**

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The Erie-Niagara Regional Partnership's Economic Development Subcommittee met June 15, 2004 at Pizzeria Uno's on Maple Road. Present for the meeting were subcommittee members Titus, Enstice, and Witul, as well as ENRP co-chair Weinstein and ENRP member Ferraro.

**Small Business Assistance:**

Following approval of the small business recommendations at the May 21 general meeting, the subcommittee met to prepare for the effort. The subcommittee assembled a list of those to be invited to serve on the steering committee. It was decided to provide the steering committee with the report, but "turn them loose" as far as recommendations and ideas – anything from minor tweaks of the recommendations to entirely new project ideas. The subcommittee will concentrate its efforts on the project by becoming part of the steering committee (although each subcommittee member can choose whether they want to be a member of the group), and subcommittee chair Hector Titus will also act as the chair of the steering committee. The subcommittee would ask its fellow subcommittees to continue to monitor projects like the Niagara Falls International Airport, the Regional Economic Development Database (REDD), Regional Economic Development Strategy (REDS), and electronic permitting while it is focusing on this single project.

**Small Business Steering Committee Meeting No. 1  
July 26, 2004**

Present: Hector Titus, Vincent Agnello, Meredith Andreucci,  
Michelle Barron, Donald Butzek, Michael Casale,  
Timothy Doolittle, Ann Enger, James Finamore,  
Reggie Grogan, Andrea Lizak, Althea Luehrsen,  
Paul Parise, Melinda Rath Sanderson, David See,  
Lawrence Witul

Erie-Niagara Regional Partnership (ENRP) Economic Development Subcommittee Chair Hector Titus welcomed the steering committee. The members introduced themselves.

ENRP Administrator Tod A. Kniazuk gave the committee an overview of the ENRP, detailing its creation in 1998 as an ad hoc subcommittee of the Niagara and Erie County Legislatures. Kniazuk continued that it is a public/private/non-profit entity that works on bi-county collaborations in the fields of economic development, government affairs, tourism & culture, and transportation. Some of ENRP's projects are the Regional Economic Development Database (REDD), cultural tourism directional signage, electronic permitting, yearly outreach sessions, tourist transportation, a public transportation/jobs access project, and now small business. Finally, Kniazuk noted that the UB Institute for Local Governance and Regional Growth took over administration of ENRP in 2003 at the request of the Legislatures.

Titus and Kniazuk presented an overview of the summary, findings, and recommendations of the small business project approved at the May 21 ENRP general meeting (copies of which were sent to all members). Titus noted that we are constantly trying to attract large companies, but that small business accounts for 85 percent of employment in the country.

Kniazuk asked the group for their feedback on the findings and recommendations. Michael Casale (Niagara County Department of Economic Development) agreed with the concept of an interactive website, and called access and awareness the key to its success. He asked if it will be a stand-alone website, or part of another website such as the REDD or the Western New York Regional Information Network (WNYRIN). Casale also noted that the Niagara County Economic Development Alliance's brochure will soon be available on-

line, and that our website should be linked to existing websites. He added that this project will be put on their agenda.

James Finamore (Buffalo & Erie County Workforce Investment Board, Inc.) asked about the state's small business website. Meredith Andreucci (USA Niagara Development Corp.) described the two and a half year old site as a portal for start-ups and those already running. There is a tree of linkages to different questions. They pay in order to make sure that their site appears in the top ten responses to key word internet searches. Finamore also mentioned the Erie County Department of Environment and Planning small business brochure and website.

Several members noted that there will be costs associated with creation of the site, marketing, and maintenance of the site.

Andreucci spoke favorably of the website, but mentioned that a Marist College study showed that 80 to 90 percent of small businesses receive their information by word-of-mouth.

Casale again endorsed the project, and stated that the project should be done by the UB Institute for Local Governance and Regional Growth, as they have the relevant experience in creating websites.

**After a discussion of the membership of the steering committee, it was decided by the group that the following should be invited to serve: Buffalo Niagara Enterprise (BNE), Bufflink, MicroBizNY, banks, the New York State Society of Certified Public Accountants, and representatives from small businesses.**

Finamore asked if this project had support in the Legislatures. Kniazuk replied that there are six legislators from each county on ENRP, and that the Erie County Legislature Economic Development Subcommittee received a presentation on the project. Furthermore, the project was e-mailed to all legislators.

Ann Enger (Greater South Buffalo Chamber of Commerce) recounted her experience that most businesses who seek help are looking for the free money. The CoC refers them to the proper programs, but 99 percent probably aren't qualified. They do, however, need information and assistance in the creation of a

business plan. Perhaps a document detailing what is needed to start a small business can be included on the site.

Althea Luehrsen (UB Center for Entrepreneurial Leadership) agreed that it can be confusing for prospective business owners, and that efforts should be taken to make it easier for them to access information and assistance. She noted that her organization and the Canisius College Women's Business Center formed a women's business network and have discussed creating a website along these lines.

Andreucci added that the state website has a calendar of events and workshops broken down regionally, and also has an activity/training book on-line. We need something like "B-Plan Breakfasts" to provide peer review and tough love. Melinda Rath Sanderson (Canisius College Women's Business Center) also noted the Women's Access to Capital report done by the Federal Reserve Bank, as well as SBTV.

Some members wondered if very small micro-loans were difficult to obtain (for instance one or two thousand dollars). Others asserted, however, that these loans were available.

Lawrence Witul (Niagara County Industrial Development Agency) made several points: NCIDA runs a program that, once you've gone through it, gives out loans of up to \$25,000; we should define "program" and determine the real audience for the website; and ultimately it is up to the businesses themselves to take advantage of these programs.

Michelle Barron (Buffalo Economic Renaissance Corporation) detailed the range of programs offered by BEREC including EAP, CARE, Empire Zones, and Renewal Communities. She stressed that we need to maintain contact between the businesses and the agencies – the phone call is important. Also, word of mouth is important, as evidenced by the success and continuation of BEREC's workshops that are filled despite no advertising of them.

**It was decided that the steering committee was interested in continuing work on the website. As such, the next meeting will focus on the technical, financial, and substantive needs to create the site. Representatives of the UB Institute for Local Governance and Regional Growth will attend to provide technical assistance.**

**The next meeting was scheduled for Monday, August 30 at 9 a.m. at Hayes Hall, UB South (Main Street) Campus.**

Titus thanked the groups for their attendance and participation, and adjourned the meeting.