

NIAGARA ERIE REGIONAL COALITION

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MEMORANDUM

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

From: Government Affairs Chair Peter McMahon

Re: March 2007 Meeting

Date: May 11, 2007

The Niagara Erie Regional Coalition Government Affairs Subcommittee met March 20, 2007 at the Erie County Industrial Development Agency (ECIDA). Present for the meeting were subcommittee members McMahon, Allen, Nasoff, and Weinstein.

Regional Economic Development Strategy (REDS):

The focus of the entire meeting was the Regional Economic Development Strategy (REDS).

The subcommittee began by examining what components of the REDS are currently underway – especially cluster work. Subcommittee Member Jo Nasoff noted that the Buffalo Niagara Partnership (BNP) is currently more focused on the Framework for Regional Growth, but that there is talk of them finishing the industry work. Subcommittee Member James Allen added that the IDA Council is looking at IDA policies and procedures to see how they can coordinate with the Framework. (The REDS, as a reminder, was to be the economic development portion of the Framework.) Allen was also on the advanced manufacturing advisory group that has been working on that sector; former UB president William Greiner and UB Professor Al Price did a studio class at UB with the Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority that is turning into the logistics piece; and the Buffalo Niagara Enterprise (BNE) did, and is now updating, the back office cluster. Executive Director Tod Kniazuk noted that the GBNRTC freight study could also fit into the logistics cluster, and that the BNE is also working on the agriculture and food processing cluster although implementation steps are still needed. Co-Chair Barry Weinstein added that in his opinion education as an industry has a lot of potential. On that note, Allen advised looking at the UB 2020 plan as they want to take a lead role in economic development.

Subcommittee Chair Peter McMahon then asked if it makes sense – and if it’s possible – to get all the folks who are working on these different clusters together to provide copies of and to explain their work to each other and to us. That could be used to build momentum; if we gather them periodically perhaps it will help spur them to complete the clusters. Then we would collectively pull together the implementation strategy and pull in the new leadership at Empire State Development (ESD). Nasoff cautioned that we shouldn’t approach ESD until “our act is together.”

Nasoff offered the opinion that the Coalition itself doesn’t have the clout to own the REDS, and suggested that we build out a steering committee that also includes the BNE, BNP, and perhaps the UB Regional Institute. Allen agreed, saying there are a small group of people who feel that they own this effort and that they don’t see the Coalition as a part of it. This is despite the fact that they aren’t doing anything to complete or implement it (although they may say that they are).

Nasoff asked where the necessary resources will come from for the REDS. She added that if the state provides funding it could take away local control of the project’s direction. On the other hand, Nasoff continued, if it is entirely led by the private sector then there may not be a buy-in from the public sector.

Both Allen and Nasoff agreed that we should work with St. Pierre Smith on this, and that she could perhaps be the person to invite the aforementioned organizations to get together on this. Nasoff will talk to her about this conversation and get her feedback.

Weinstein then offered “a completely different perspective” – release what’s done, list the clusters, then release them individually when they’re completed with additional press events. As for the BNE and BNP, work around them as they were part of the initial effort and failed to complete the REDS.

Allen noted that we haven’t yet presented the completed portion of the REDS to any broad group of people, and so another idea is to have a forum with local public officials and others. Weinstein countered that we should just release it to the media. Kniazuk asked if we would convene those working on the clusters before or after the public release. Weinstein replied that we should try to get one of the clusters to stand with us in the release. Allen thought

that logistics would be a good cluster to stand with us, and that perhaps Sam Ferraro could be the leader on that cluster.

Although Weinstein offered a strong dissenting opinion, the subcommittee decided on the following next steps:

- Nasoff will talk to St. Pierre Smith and e-mail the subcommittee her thoughts.
- Provided St. Pierre Smith is in general agreement, Kniazuk will draft a letter of invitation to the potential participants who are currently working on clusters.
- Allen will talk to Ferraro about the logistics cluster.
- A meeting will take place between the subcommittee and the invitees, with the goal of releasing the context piece of the REDS along with the completed clusters and a status report of those not yet done.

Other Topics:

There were no other topics discussed.