

NIAGARA ERIE REGIONAL COALITION

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MEMORANDUM

To: Co-Chairs Clyde Burmaster & Kathy Konst

From: Government Affairs Chair Peter McMahon

Re: August, 2008 Meeting

Date: October 24, 2008

The Niagara Erie Regional Coalition Government Affairs Subcommittee met August 26, 2008 at the Niagara County Center for Economic Development (NCCED) in a joint meeting with the Economic Development Subcommittee. Present for the meeting were subcommittee members Ellis, Ross, Wendel, and Witul; as well as Economic Development Subcommittee members Burmaster, Cappellino, Ferraro, Morse, and Murray.

Smart Permitting:

After a lengthy absence, the topic of smart permitting is once again on the radar. Erie County, the Regional Coalition, Empire State Development, and the University at Buffalo Regional Institute (UBRI) have been in conversations regarding the project.

To recap: The Regional Coalition was involved (as ENRP) in the development of the smart permit project, which was funded by Erie County and executed by the UBRI (then ILGRG). It included several pilot municipalities, including one in Niagara County, and entailed making available on-line these municipalities' building permit forms. The project was completed, at which time Erie County decided it would house the system. Due to funding and staffing cuts at the county, the project was never made active.

At the March meeting the subcommittee reaffirmed its support for the project and discussed what our desired role would be if it is in fact relaunched. One idea was that we could serve as the advocates to municipalities to get involved in the project.

Dr. Kathryn Foster, director of the UBRI, was invited to the April meeting to speak about smart permitting and other topics. Foster noted that in addition to the aforementioned entities, the municipalities involved in the pilot have also been approached, as have developers. (It should be noted that the Regional Coalition

was not approached by the UBRI, but rather had independent conversations with Erie County and ESD.)

Further, it was shared that the previously completed project is now so out of date as to no longer be workable. The project would need to be rebuilt. As such, it offers the opportunity to immediately include additional municipalities. Foster indicated that there has been an initial interest and support for resurrecting the project, but that now fundraising would need to begin.

Following her presentation, Subcommittee Chair James Allen informed her that smart permitting was a concept that came from the Coalition, and that we need to be more involved going forward. Likewise, Subcommittee member Samuel Ferraro added that Niagara County stands ready to work on it as well.

Ferraro also reminded the group of three issues that came out of the pilot project – technology for smaller municipalities, submission of stamped drawings, and payment for permits. McMahon added that one of the ideas behind the project was to get “a win” that could lead to a more unified process, other permits being offered on-line, or unified zoning codes.

Foster informed the group that she is putting together a “team of advisors and advocates” and that anyone from the Regional Coalition interested should inform her of such interest.

The group – including James Allen, Hon. Peter McMahon, representation from Erie County and the Niagara County Center for Economic Development, and Tod Kniazuk – met over the summer and again in September to explore the interest and feasibility of the project. It was agreed upon by those in attendance that there remains a need for the project, but that issues of funding and management will need to be worked out sooner rather than later in the process. Further, while the Regional Institute can remain involved, in the absence of a contract for services the level of their involvement would have to be determined.

Ferraro credited Foster for reconvening the group. He also suggested that a shared services grant should be explored to fund the project, and that standardization of permits be explored. Subcommittee member John Cappellino added that speed to market remains a top issue for those wishing to develop here, and that smart permitting could help reduce the time it takes for the process.

Other Topics:

Other topics discussed included the Empire State Development/New York State Council on the Arts cultural blueprint process and forum, proposals for an Erie County Planning Board, and the Framework for Regional Growth.