

December 31, 2009

Hon. Clyde Burmaster

Co-Chairs

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Co-Chair Burmaster:

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Executive Director

Tod A. Kniazuk

Attached please find the Niagara Erie Regional Coalition 2009 year-end report.

This past year, our eleventh, was one of transition. As you'll notice, we end this year without an Erie County co-chair, as Michele Iannello leaves her position as an Erie County legislator, and therefore also as our co-chair. This followed the move of former co-chair Kathy Konst from her position as an Erie County legislator to that of commissioner of the Erie County Department of Environment and Planning.

Fortunately, we were able to keep Kathy with us in her new capacity, just as we were able to do when our Tourism & Culture Subcommittee chair David Lacki changed careers.

For these, and other, reasons it was more difficult than usual to schedule meetings of the subcommittees, and attendance was down slightly across the board, and especially at the Government Affairs Subcommittee.

That said, the Regional Coalition was successful at moving some key initiatives forward, and by the conclusion of the year stood ready to revisit our strategic plan with the goal of re-energizing the organization in 2010.

As always, I thank you and the entire Coalition for the opportunity to serve as your executive director, and look forward to our efforts in 2010 to make the region a better place to work, play and live.

Sincerely,



Tod A. Kniazuk  
Executive Director

## **Air Travel Survey**

The Regional Coalition Tourism & Culture Subcommittee took the lead in developing an air travel survey project. This project would collect demographic and other data for arriving and departing travelers at the Buffalo Niagara and Niagara Falls International Airports.

The survey would be conducted over the course of two years in order to examine trends and gather comparative data. Reports would be generated quarterly, annually, and at the conclusion of the project. The Regional Coalition would serve as the project coordinator through the Tourism & Culture Subcommittee, and the data collection and analysis would be conducted by the Niagara University Hospitality Training and Research Center under the direction of Dr. Deborah Curtis.

Data collected would include zip code of the traveler, reason for traveling, destination, and other demographic items. Currently, this data is not collected, and would be of use to the region's transportation, economic development, tourism, and government agencies – which makes it an excellent fit for the Regional Coalition.

It is anticipated that the agencies that would be able to use the survey's results would include:

- Buffalo Niagara Convention & Visitors Bureau
- Buffalo Niagara Enterprise
- Buffalo Niagara Partnership
- Empire State Development
- Erie County Industrial Development Agency
- Greater Buffalo Niagara Regional Transportation Council
- Niagara County Center for Economic Development
- Niagara Frontier Transportation Agency
- Niagara Tourism & Convention Corporation

Not coincidentally, these are the agencies that will be approached to help fund the project. By the end of the year a tiered funding request was developed, asking the agencies who will have the most use for the data to contribute the largest amount, but with no one agency being asked to contribute more than a third of the total cost of \$41,250 per year.

### **Framework for Regional Growth**

The Niagara Erie Regional Coalition has been a staunch supporter of, and participant in, the development of the bi-county Framework for Regional Growth. In 2009, some of the Coalition inquired as to the progress of the Framework's implementation. This came partially as a response to the call from some members of the Erie County Legislature for Erie County to create a planning board – one of the items necessary to advance the Framework's goals of having the two counties' planning boards communicate and collaborate, and the eventual creation of a bi-county planning organization.

As was pointed out, before those steps, the Framework called for the reconvening of the effort's steering committee. It was also rightly noted that some significant implementation steps were occurring, but in the absence of the steering committee meeting or any other organized outreach, there was a lack of information flowing to the stakeholders.

Founding Coalition member Samuel Ferraro of the Niagara County Center for Economic Development and newly appointed Erie County Department of Environment and Planning Commissioner and long time Coalition member and co-chair Kathy Konst agreed to work together to move the Framework forward.

By the end of the year, Ferraro and Konst announced that the Framework steering committee was being brought back together in early 2010, and that the Coalition would continue to have a presence at the meetings. The Coalition is proud to be involved in this important effort, and happy that the effort continues to move forward.

## **Distinguished Service Awards**

Every year the Regional Coalition presents its Distinguished Service Awards to former members who have made a lasting impact on the Coalition and its efforts. This year's awardees were Jo Nasoff-Finton and Hector Titus.

Jo Nasoff-Finton served in her capacity at the Erie County Industrial Development Agency. She began her service to the Coalition as a proxy for ECIDA's then-director, but the Coalition recognized her dedication to the group and its mission and requested that she become the official representative of the ECIDA. She was instrumental in the Coalition finding a home for its administration at the ECIDA following its stint at the UB Institute for Local Governance and Regional Growth. Most important, she supported and worked on our economic development efforts, especially the Regional Economic Development Strategy and its cluster development. Jo retired from the ECIDA and therefore from the Coalition, but her service to us lives on in our home at ECIDA.

Hector Titus also began his service as a proxy for the representative from the Niagara County Building Trades, and likewise became the official representative through his dedication to our organization. Hector served as our Economic Development Subcommittee chair, and brought small business issues to the organization. He was one of our most active members and most frequent attendees at both subcommittee and general meetings. Hector's service to the Coalition ended not because of his retirement, but because he assumed additional duties in contract negotiations and other matters for the Building Trades.

Both Hector Titus and Jo Nasoff-Finton redefined the membership qualifications of the Regional Coalition, enlightening us that the passion and dedication of the member is more important than their title at the organization they represent.

## **Cultural Data and Cultural Blueprint**

For a second year, the Regional Coalition consulted with the Arts Council in Buffalo and Erie County in their involvement on cultural advocacy and resources in the community.

We were primarily involved in two projects. The first was the development of a series of radio shows meant as a follow-up to the 2008 New York State Council on the Arts Cultural Blueprint effort. These shows would have gathered those in the cultural, economic development, government, and academic sectors together to discuss the Blueprint's "I's" of innovation, international, etc. Regrettably, though the Regional Coalition fulfilled its role in the development of the series, the Arts Council did not implement the programs.

We also consulted the Arts Council on the local involvement with the Cultural Data Project, meant to gather agencies' financial data in a central location for analysis and report. That effort is underway, but with local involvement spearheaded more by Advancing Arts and Culture. Again, however, the Coalition filled its role.

In an unfortunate turn of events, while work was provided to the Arts Council, three-quarters of the promised payment for consultation in lieu of our membership fee has not been received. It is our hope that this situation be remedied and the Arts Council continue its involvement with the Coalition under new leadership or in whatever form it takes next.

### **Direction of the Regional Coalition**

While good work was indeed done this year, it became evident that there was a decreased level of involvement and enthusiasm in 2009. Part of that is to be expected following our 10 year anniversary celebration of 2008, but overall it was more difficult to schedule meetings and to get our members to attend those meetings. Things were most evident at the Government Affairs Subcommittee where there were often just two or three members in attendance.

Turning a challenge into an opportunity, the subcommittee recommended that the Coalition take the early part of 2010 to revisit our strategic plan of 2006 and examine ways to revitalize the Coalition. The full board agreed with this plan at our final meeting of 2009, and we will look at everything from membership to meeting times to areas of involvement. As an example, over the last couple of years we have become more involved in cross-border issues, which could become an area of opportunity for us. More to come!