Regional Vision & Values

Where Do We Want To Go?

Community Congress Meeting #1
January 29, 2013, 7:00pm – 9:00pm
Asbury Hall, Buffalo, NY

This Meeting

This summary provides an overview of the first meeting of the One Region Forward Community Congress, where participants were introduced to the project and asked where we want to go as a region.

The Community Congress

Because no plan for sustainable development can succeed without the creative contribution and informed support of our region’s citizens, the Community Congress has been created as a regular forum for all citizens in our region to guide and shape the One Region Forward process.

One Region Forward

One Region Forward is supported by a broad-based collaborative effort of local elected officials, businesses, community groups, and citizens at-large – all working together to move our region towards a more prosperous and sustainable future.

Who Participated?

221 in attendance
Representatives from 39 different ZIP Codes and 96 different community or civic organizations

Attendees were asked to identify themselves with a local community organization if they choose. The following organizations were represented:

- 21st Century Park
- 500 Block Association of Downtown Buffalo
- Albright-Knox Art Gallery
- Alt Press
- Amherst Democratic Committee
- Amherst Energy Advisory Committee
- Amherst IDA
- Arts Services Initiative of WNY
- Association of Erie County Governments, Belmont Housing Resources for WNY, Inc.
- Binational Alliance
- Black Rock Good Neighbors
- Buffalo CarShare
- Buffalo LISC
- Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy
- Buffalo Municipal Housing Authority

Distribution of participants by ZIP Code
What Did They Say?

Our audience was presented a series of “regional value statements” culled from an analysis of 160+ neighborhood-based, municipal, county-level, and regional plans. Organized around ten themes, these interrelated statements were presented to the audience. To gauge whether or not each statement reflects where we want to go as a region, each participant was provided an electronic device that allowed her/him to evaluate the ten statements.

This is what the Community Congress told us:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme: Economic Development</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regional Vision/Value Statement:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discussion/Feedback from Audience:</td>
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<tr>
<td>▪ I’m stuck on this idea of “competitive.” It’s about quality of life, too.</td>
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<td>▪ A concept of “resilience” needs to be part of the discussion.</td>
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<td>▪ There are pages and pages in the REDC plan about the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus but there are only about three paragraphs on renewable energy. That’s wrong.</td>
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<td>▪ There’s an overemphasis on “development” and under-emphasis on education. Equity is key.</td>
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<td>▪ If you want to be competitive go after the best in employees, not just Buffalonians.</td>
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<td>▪ The phrase “21st century economy” is good. I think the 21st century economy is by definition environmentally sensitive, equitable, and sustainable.</td>
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<td>▪ Why “growth”? Growth is a feature of cancer. Make sure it is a kind of growth that can be sustainable.</td>
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<tr>
<td>▪ We’re already competitive – over the scraps of what’s leftover. The phrase is too vague. We need to consider materials, energy, etc.</td>
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<td>▪ Health has to be part of it – health for the environment and health for people.</td>
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<td>▪ Concerned that environment is not being considered as part of the economy.</td>
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<td>▪ Economic growth will not create happiness.</td>
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<td>▪ Needs to be more prosperous for all-community wealth, not just a small subset.</td>
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<tr>
<td>▪ Underemphasizes education.</td>
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<tr>
<td>▪ Don’t need “21st century” label.</td>
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<tr>
<td>▪ Statement does not include the word “sustainability.”</td>
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<td>▪ We are on the border, an international asset.</td>
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<td>▪ We need to think holistically, including true costs and externalities (such as clean air/water).</td>
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<tr>
<td>▪ Include safety - low crime, pedestrian safety, community being more civil to one another = prosperity.</td>
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<td>▪ Promote local business ownerships - part of our decline comes from the fall of large entities in the past.</td>
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Theme:
Smart Growth

Regional Vision/Value Statement:
Build on existing infrastructure and invest in developed areas to lower costs, improve efficiency and enhance quality of life.

Discussion/Feedback from Audience:

- Rebuild the transportation infrastructure that we dismantled – including efficient transit.
- I like the idea of building reuse but that’s something that should be done by the private sector, not government.
- Think about infrastructure as a way to improve access to our waterfronts. Remove and/or add infrastructure to improve the quality of life.
- There is a lot of infrastructure that we shouldn’t build on. It’s the wrong kind of infrastructure or it’s in the wrong place.
- Public infrastructure leads private investment. Youngstown shrunk its way to prosperity. Focusing on improving quality of life also leads to investment.
- Climate change and the impacts that it will have must be a key in where and what we choose to develop.
- Growth itself is not sustainable. Suburban townships are not aware of the limits to their growth. Meanwhile, triple-A farmland is being eaten up.
- We have a sea of white faces here. When we talk about reducing costs; who is that for? When we talk about efficiency or quality of life; who is that for? We need more diversity in the conversation.
- Smart growth doesn’t mean giving tax dollars to companies to bring minimum wage jobs to our region.
- Should be “quality of place” rather than “quality of life.”
- Bad planning in the past led to costly decisions to undue mistakes (e.g. in 1970’s, decimated downtown with rail, put equipment where it has to be moved – high cost).
- There are many “developed” areas that shouldn’t have been developed in the first place, so we don’t want to invest more – focus on town, village, and urban cores.
- Statements are too broad to have impact. Readers are not getting enough good information to make decisions.
- “Existing infrastructure” was sometimes a mistake.
- Don’t want to lose American freedom of private property/ownership. Shouldn’t deny people the opportunity to live where they choose.
- “Lower cost” – there are multiple ways to develop. Cost is not the only factor that should be considered.
• Focus on building on resources, especially walkability.
• Don’t exclude parts of existing infrastructure. If we disinvest, new roads will just be built to connect.
• Portland put a circle around the city and is still prospering. Our future is in concentrating on the urban core.
• We don’t have smart politicians/true leaders. We’ve been waiting too long for a Peace Bridge, cars on Main Street. We need more business leaders making decisions.

Theme:
Transportation

Regional Vision/Value Statement:
Provide broader transportation options to improve access to jobs and services and promote energy efficiency and safety.

Discussion/Feedback from Audience:
• “More” transportation options aren’t necessarily what we need. More appropriate options will make things better.
• The rail line is above ground where it should be underground, it didn’t go to UB. Now we have studies again about extensions. Don’t just talk about it. Do it.
• Reducing Porter Avenue to one lane to put in bike lanes? Are you kidding me? Put the car lanes back, and stop talking about gas shortages. We have a lot of gas. Drill, baby, drill!
• We have to call this what it is. This is Agenda 21. Go to the website. You’ll see that it’s true. This will erode our personal freedoms and liberties. Who will pay for all the things being discussed? This is about a wealth transfer from the US to the other 160 countries that are signatories to Agenda 21. We need action in the private sector, not the United Nations.
• “If you build it they will come,” doesn’t always work. Don’t try to talk about transportation investments without considering population density. It doesn’t work.
• We’ve got multiple IDA’s competing. We’ve got jobs being drawn to North Tonawanda and Amherst. Instead, we need to concentrate the jobs where the transportation capacity already is instead of remaking the transportation capacity.
• Misses the point of peak oil. Current transportation systems were built on oil. We have to find other solutions because that will be too expensive.
• More equity needed in transportation, especially to rural areas (like Springville) and for the elderly.
• Focus on energy conservation, not just efficiency.
Theme: Housing and Neighborhoods

Regional Vision/Value Statement:
Preserve our housing stock and foster neighborhoods that are great places – safe, well-served and distinctive.

Discussion/Feedback from Audience:
- Add the word “walkable” to a definition of good neighborhoods. Walking supports greater security, local economic activity, energy conservation, and better health.
- We do have great buildings with great bones, and we have great neighborhoods, but we also have some that have come back (e.g. West Village, Grant Street). We have other neighborhoods that can be great again.
- We have some choices to make about where to invest and how to deal with vacant houses and vacant land.
- We need to redesign and retrofit our existing older housing to reflect social change, like changes in household size and composition, or health issues like lead, and energy efficiency.
- Meeting the goal of neighborhoods “safe and well-served” needs help from housing court and inspectors. The onus of dealing with problem properties is on the shoulders of the residents. The city says they have too many calls to 311 – but many of the calls are about the same problems. Community policing is another strategy for dealing with this problem.
- Change “preserve” to enhance. Add “healthy.”
- The word “preserve” is too static, maybe “reinvest” or “improve.”
- Include diversity – of all kinds.
- In order to preserve, they need to streamline government process for older buildings to bolster efforts. The city has been too quick to demo.
Theme: Agriculture and Food

Regional Vision/Value Statement: Protect farmland, support farmers, connect farms to local markets and ensure access to healthy food.

Discussion/Feedback from Audience:
- We need to promote affordable healthy food.
- Make it sustainable agriculture – in terms of reuse of waste and careful use of water on farms.
- Support urban agriculture – not community gardens – as part of food production. We have the land to do it. We need the policies.
- Include food production. It’s not just about growing food. It’s also value added processing for food.
- Integrate knowledge about food and farming as part of children’s education.
- Eliminate debt tax to support farmers. Next generation in family cannot afford to keep up the farms.
- We should develop closer relationship with Cornell University as a resource.
- Need to leverage local products.
- Need to think systemically/holistically.

Theme: Energy and Climate

Regional Vision/Value Statement: Use less energy, generate green energy, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Discussion/Feedback from Audience:
- We need to focus more on the hopefully not inevitable impacts of climate change – drought, severe weather, and dislocations – than just on mitigation.
- The slide shows power transmission towers. That’s the old paradigm. We need to support a shift of paradigms to distributed energy production.
- Air quality deserves focused attention.
- Preservation of historic architecture – and thus our own history – is also a key issue.
- Climate change transcends all, not just energy. Where is nature being considered?
- Using geothermal is an opportunity that should not be overlooked.

**Theme:**
Protect Natural Resources

**Regional Vision/Value Statement:**
Protect our water and other natural resources to promote a healthy ecology, economy and community.

**Discussion/Feedback from Audience:**
- Our place on the planet isn’t changing. We’re on the Great Lakes. Water is key to everything we do — economically, environmentally, and otherwise.
- Education about natural resources is a key to advancing our protection of natural resources.
- Access to water is also part of it.
- Keep in mind that the environment is the Big Economy and what we usually think of as the economy is the Small Economy.
- Didn’t see the word “air” included. Need to use terms like “protect” and “restore.”
- Sustainable development is an oxymoron. Needs to include social sustainability in the definition.
- Do we have the capacity to protect our natural resources? How are we defining “healthy”?
- Water is an asset. Protecting our water includes preventing piping it elsewhere.
Theme: Culture and Heritage
Regiona Vision/Value Statement: Protect and develop culture, heritage, and waterfront resources for economy and quality of life

Discussion/Feedback from Audience:
- Connect the city to the waterfront with bikeways, greenways, and trails. Connect all of our Olmsted Parks to the network and thus the waterfront – as Frederick Law Olmsted himself intended. An Olmstedian outer harbor park is a key element in that.
- We need to celebrate culture and heritage in diversity that is appropriate to our population.
- “Historic preservation” belongs in this part of the discussion.
- If developing our water resources is only for the economy, I’m against it. What are we talking about? Putting factories on the waterfront? Not good.
- Not just “protect,” but celebrate.
- Add “share” because access is important.
- Culture/heritage is our identity – who we are.
- Looking at past mistakes, we need to draw lines in the sand and create density. That’s what creates progressive culture.

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Theme: Parks and Recreation
Regiona Vision/Value Statement: Maintain, improve, and connect our parks, recreation, and open space.

Discussion/Feedback from Audience:
- Expand our parks. Not just protect or maintain. We don’t have enough.
- We could learn something from New York City – make our parks smaller. Smaller parks are safer and better distributed around the city.
- Trails and roads to connect to parks – like in Anchorage, AK.
- Trails should be accessible and multi-use. They should accommodate horse, seniors, the disabled – everybody.
- Support the Niagara Greenway.
- Add the word “restore.”
- Connect urban interior to state parks.
- Needs trails.
- Integrate park-like qualities in urban areas.
- Need to think about health connection with parks.
- Include vacant lot and brownfield opportunities.

**Theme:**
**Planning Together**

**Regional Vision/Value Statement:**
**Foster collaboration, coordination, and strong implementation, and plan with an engaged public**

**Discussion/Feedback from Audience:**
- Public education is a key part of the public planning process.
- Plan with the general public, yes, but also work with public bodies – planning boards, town councils, etc. – the people who have much of the power to implement plans.
- Extend the discussion to Canada.
- Non-profits don’t have a seat at the table. They represent social capital to be tapped and voices to be heard.
- Engage CBO’s. They are a link to the grassroots. They are the conduit to share expert knowledge with the grassroots and for grassroots knowledge to reach the experts.
- Communication – There needs to be a better cross section, broader population reached.
- Add “diversity.”
- Add “transparency.”
- Engage the public AND politicians.
An open invitation to tell us what’s working, what is not working, and what we need to do to become more sustainable...

Our audience was presented the opportunity to write about three basic reflections on the region – Here’s what they had to say:

To me, the single thing I like the most about my community/region is...
- People big city benefits, without most of the hassles and negatives.
- Overall quality of life as long as you have a job.
- Extraordinary opportunity as a testing ground for sustainable practices, policies, and values.
- Down to earth, not pretentious. People here wrestle with the real issues and seek healthy solutions.
- The Border.
- Quality of Life. (Schools, Arts, and Cultural)
- It has so much room for improvement, but in theory it is improvable.
- Schools, Neighborhoods, Proximity to Everything.
- Wind & Sun (Free Energy), but we need to aggressively use this free energy.
- Location, Schools, Arts.
- Heritage – beautiful architecture, parks, cultural institutions.
- Affordable, walkable, historic neighborhoods.
- Short commute times.
- Water Supply
- Authenticity of 1. The architecture 2. Olmsted parks system 3. People of Buffalo.
- The nature of the people.
- The abundance of water and waterways.
- Lovely older neighborhoods, historic buildings, proximity to scenic wonders.
- Regional waterfronts – Buffalo, Niagara Falls, Lewiston....
- The History.
- Manageable, affordable, and climate.
- Clean Water, innovation for a blue economy, economic revitalization is achieved by restoring health and integrity to our greatest natural asset: H2O.
- Ability to get nice, fresh food. Diversity of community based organizations seeking to improve people’s quality of life. Proximity to the lake and other water bodies.
- Parks, waterfronts.
- Being on the Great Lakes & Niagara River.
- Buffalo pride in citizens here and abroad.
- Architecture and other built environmental features in cities and villages of Erie and Niagara Counties.
- Arts and Culture.
- It’s unpretentious, waterfront, climate, and architecture.
- Diversity and density of arts and cultural opportunities: museums, live music, dance, theater, sports teams, architecture and historic buildings.
- The rich variety of resources (natural, cultural...).
- Water: Buffalo River, waterfront, great lakes, and Niagara River.
- Diversity.
- Access to shopping, cultural institutions, and neighborhoods.
- Being close to work, shopping, the library, and great schools.
- No more than 20 minutes from anywhere. Arts, educational, recreational, and cultural amenities.
- Niagara River, watershed, tributaries, elevation above mean sea level.
- Scenic local, village atmosphere, and people help people.
- Established Resources.
- Many towns and villages have maintained the old look of our heritage. Our old buildings are our greatest asset.
- Quality of life, time to enjoy family and the regions assets.

**To me, the single thing I like the least about my community/region is...**
- Our communities are designed to foster dependence on personal vehicles.
- The scarcity/poverty consciousness.
- Lack of single seat regional public transportation.
- The way the great architectural treasures in neighborhoods are being torn down.
- Excessive layers of government and associated costs.
- Suburban sprawl.
- Massive income inequality that keeps us all from growing as a region.
- Parochial politics and the lack of good, strong visionary leaders.
- I don't like how politicians are in for their own special interests instead of meeting the needs of the region.
- Love the area, hate the taxes.
- Landscape decimated by autos, parking lots, sprawl.
- Our collective lack of resources to create improvements to infrastructure and jobs that are needed to take us to the next level as a city/region.
- The winter.
- High levels of segregation. Lack of jobs and services for poor. Lack of multi modal transportation.
- Buffalo/Niagara fail to look south, Springville and Gowanda are part of Erie County.
- The people who are so negative about the area and complain about everything.
- Historical lack of regional coordination and thinking.
- It’s failure to use science to solve economic problems to save the environment and capitalism.
- Car drivers don’t obey speed limits.
- The violence and shootings.
- Local leadership???. Who has a vision and the power to make it happen?
- Lack of a regional planning entity.
- Lack of regional planning in Buffalo Niagara.
- The city school system is a disaster, and it breaks my heart.
- Toxic legacy, pollutants.
- Decimation of the inner city, including downtown, by years of misguided urban renewal (clearance), demolitions, disinvestment.
- Not enough bike designated lanes (mainly outside of buffalo).
- Lack of serious regional planning.
- Niagara falls/County always gets the short end when partnering with Buffalo.
- Fatalistic.
- How tied to my car I have to be.
- People (and urban design) not embracing the winter season.
- Excessive taxes and most of all excessive regulations.
- Urban sprawl, especially without growth. Economic Inequality.
- Efficiency of public transportation crosses lines between east and west Buffalo.
- Too many cooks, nothing gets done.
- Politicians are slow to react, skeptical/unwilling to embrace new, progressive ideas (even compared to many other municipalities).
- Blind pessimism.
- Top down initiatives, grass roots knowledge of what is needed and wanted.
- Riverside not having access to waterfront can only look at a coke plant.
- Lack of reasonable and accessible public transport.
- Pollution, industrial legacy, investment in companies that create new pollution to WNY’s environment.
- Lack of respect for community residents.
- Sprawl gutted inner urban areas.
- Inequality and how it is hidden from most people, money, wealth, and knowledge inequality is not a good thing.
- Inadequate outreach to people of color.
- Politics who you know gets you jobs, not most qualified.

The most important thing for us to do to become more sustainable is...
- Act like one region and not two separate competing counties.
- Quality jobs and strong public services.
- Stop using good farm land for building housing developments.
- Agenda 21
- Reduce dependency on cars and increase use of alternative energy.
- Education working as one unit.
- Regionalize our schools and have poverty-level students spread out over the region. High busing costs but the best solution for an educated citizenry.
- Produce and conserve energy.
- Storm windows on every house. Storm windows first.
- Extend the metro rail and get people out of cars.
- Walkable neighborhoods.
- More marketing of region needed.
- Take regional planning serious.
- Curb car dependence.
- Support the arts and culture.
- Plenty of clean accessible water.
- Rethink energy. Policy (e.g. Feed-in-tariffs), Production, storage and distributions on all scales (micro-macro), Conservation (not just efficiency), Transportation.
- Make our entire region more accessible by transit and shared transportation.
- Inventory our historic assets.
- Think First.
- Extend light rail, connecting all areas along best corridors, boost economy, and conserve land.
- Take a holistic approach to planning and development.
- Get on the same page.
- Protect our water resources. Implement green infrastructure. Provide public access along our waterfronts. Sustainable food.
- Find a way to build creative economy.
- Live where we work, play, eat.
- Human waste water conservation recycles and reuse.
- Reduce cost of local governments, leverage intellectual capital and create local jobs, reform education particularly city of buffalo, get kids to graduate.
- Create incentives for companies, individuals, and investors to open alternative fueling locations for our vehicles.
- Promote and conserve our waterways.
- Eat local and develop protection for our water resources.
- Rebuild community (housing, jobs, education) in a more compact manner, downtown should be denser, more of everything there.
- Engaging more low income, minorities in dialogue on issues affecting their neighborhoods.
- Engage the growing older population in community, intelligent, experience, resilient, creative, spirit of volunteerism.
- Get the new bridge to Canada done. Extend light rail to the airport.
- Invest in innovation and education.
- Grey is the new green. Build up not out.
- Utilize our resources in the city and with neighboring Canada.
- Innovate towards and invest in a blue economy. Economic revitalization is achieved by restoring the health and integrity of greatest natural asset: WATER.
- Reuse vacant/under used buildings instead of building new ones.
- Run mostly on wind energy, understand peak oil, and don’t buy the fracking con.
- Diversify transportation options: bike lanes, rails to trails, NFTA bus service with technological enhancements for off board fare payment, improved bus shelters, etc.
- Think beyond border, both real and imagined.
- Preserve older public buildings and homes within the city of Buffalo.
- Think grass roots solutions not big box non-local “fixes”, face climate/fiscal realities.
- Efficient transit (especially light rail) that connects our region.
- Quality jobs that workers can sustain their families with and grow long-term community health.