What can we do together?

Joint Meeting between One Region Forward Local Government Council and Private Sector Council
February 11, 2014, 6:30pm – 8:30pm
One Canalside, Buffalo, NY

This Meeting

This summary provides an overview of the second official convening of the One Region Forward Local Government Council and Private Sector Council. These groups met collectively to receive an update on the initiative to date and discuss opportunities for building and strengthening collaborations for implementation.

Local Government Council

To capture the input and perspective of our municipal and county government leaders, every town supervisor, city or village mayor and the county legislators of both counties were invited to participate in the One Region Forward Local Government Council. This group has been formed to ensure local municipal and county leadership have a clear seat at the table in guiding the One Region Forward initiative.

Private Sector Council

To capture the input and perspective of representatives from our business and development community, the leadership and staff of each local chamber of commerce throughout Erie and Niagara Counties as well as members of the development advisory council of the Buffalo Niagara Partnership were invited to participate in the One Region Forward Private Sector Council. This group has been formed to ensure representatives from our region’s diverse private sector have a clear seat at the table in guiding the One Region Forward initiative.

Who Participated?

37 in attendance

Local Government Council representation covered 13 local municipalities, 2 Erie County Legislative districts, the Niagara County Department of Economic Development, the Erie County Department of Environment and Planning, and the Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority.

Private Sector Council representation included four local chambers of commerce or business organizations, the Buffalo Niagara Partnership, Empire State Development and seven development-related businesses.

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1 In instances when geographies or key constituencies were not represented by local chambers of commerce or the Buffalo Niagara Partnership’s Development Advisory Committee, the One Region Forward Steering Committee sought out and invited organizations that fill in gaps of representation.
In Attendance from the Local Government Council:

- Ross Annable (Town of Hartland - Supervisor)
- Ben Bidell (Niagara County Department of Economic Development)
- Patrick Burke (Erie County Legislator – District 7)
- Anthony Carauna (Town of Tonawanda – Supervisor)
- Mary Cooke (Town of Grand Island – Supervisor)
- David Cummings (Town of Newstead – Supervisor)
- Tom Dearing (Erie County Department of Environment and Planning)
- Tom DeSantis (City of Niagara Falls – Planning)
- Daniel Engert (Town of Somerset – Supervisor)
- David Hartzell (Town of Clarence – Supervisor)
- Darren Kempner (Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority)
- John Kennedy (Erie County Legislative Assistant – District 7)
- Harry Milligan (Town of Alden – Supervisor)
- Glenn Nellis (Town of Eden – Supervisor)
- Aaron Nellist (Village of Baker – Mayor)
- Edward Rath (Erie County Legislator – District 6)
- Rosaline Seege (Town of North Collins - Supervisor)
- Donald Witkowski (Village of Hamburg – Village Administrator)
- Steven Walters (Town of Hamburg – Supervisor)
- Randall Wayner (Town of Somerset – Deputy Supervisor)

In Attendance from the Private Sector Council:

- Bob Gilmour (Ken-Ton Chamber of Commerce)
- Michael Lydecker (WENDEL Companies)
- Robert Sanders (Watts Architecture & Engineering, P.C.)
- Edward Schiller (KHEOPS)
- Carl Montante Jr. (Uniland Development)
- Jennifer Parker (Black Capital Network)
- Jacob Schneider (Schneider Design Architects PC)
- Steven Ricca (Jaechle Fleischmann Mugel LLP)
- Richard Cummings (Black Chamber of Commerce)
- Susan Johnson (Fruitbelt Advisory Council)
- Lawrence Strother (Gim Sue Enterprises LLC)
- Dan Barone (Barone Architecture + Consulting, PLLC)
- Tom Barrett (CBRE)
- Duan Madyun (Fillmore Business District Association)
- Jennifer Gregory (Empire State Development)
- Laura Smith (Buffalo Niagara Partnership)
- Dan Leonard (Buffalo Niagara Partnership)
Presentation:

Hal Morse, Executive Director of the Greater Buffalo-Niagara Regional Transportation Council and Chair of the One Region Forward Steering Committee, welcomed guests and offered comments on what One Region Forward is, what it is seeking to accomplish, and a summary of why we are doing this work. Hal then asked steering committee members Supervisor Ross Annable of Hartland and Steve Ricca of Jaecle Fleischmann & Mugel, LLP to offer remarks.

Dean Robert Shibley of the UB School of Architecture and Planning was then welcomed to present the themes from the effort’s broad community engagement work as well as the work-to-date by the five Working Teams.

Comments made during the discussion period:

Following the presentation, an open discussion was facilitated asking participants their impressions on the community expression to date as well as their thoughts on how the preliminary concepts for implementation presented could be achieved. Below are notes on what the participants said:

- How do you get people of varied interests to recognize they have interests in common?

- We’ve avoided talking about solutions and focused on performance.

- There’s no fun for our kids and grandkids. We have to make a lifestyle for those who come after.

- Villages? How do we see them distributed? (The mappers used them in various ways – in the city, in existing villages...)

- Resources are key. We need to figure out how we generate the money to implement the plan. Public private partnerships? (The REDC/ Buffalo Billion are showing the way in part).

- How do we change the codes to address energy efficiency – products, etc. Can we make that change? We need products that have been validated.

- Do people want new communities that have suburban homes in the city? In Hamlin Park... not enough commercial strips... things are changing... it’s not walkable now because there’s nowhere to go. Zoning has to change.

- The plan seems to be focused on eliminating one aspect of the energy portfolio. Municipal hosts to power plants are making the transition in tax base. Make a more balanced portfolio. Use infrastructure to move fuels.

- We have communities that are reliant on single industries or homogenous economic base. We need to take care of their needs – steel, chemicals, even agriculture.

- This is good. Mind boggling work. But implementation is dependent on economic growth and wealth, which is tied to health of business. We need to ask ourselves to make the environment more business-friendly.
- When we get down to implementation we need to consider the next level of resources – align what towns and cities, businesses, localities are doing with the broader plan. Look at the criteria for CFA, etc. match what those are at the municipal level.

- Zoning at the local level is an important aspect of the implementation. Resident aspirations don’t necessarily match what the local zoning allows. “I didn’t sign up for this.” (Re: Tourist homes).

- Yes we want business... but not next to me.

- The toolkit needs to provide local elected some “cover” so they can make the smart decisions for the region that won’t be popular with the locals.

- Municipalities have an uneven capacity to use the tools you put in the toolkit. There is a lot of legwork to operationalize the plan and the tools. (That’s what the citizen planning school is for. Decision-making data, too).

- We need to connect not-for-profits with small businesses to redevelop our under-performing neighborhoods.

- In some of the older towns, we have some serious water and sewer issues with stricter environmental requirements. We’re forced to raise taxes. There needs to be some money in the toolbox. We built a lot of it with Federal money – but there’s no more. It extends to the costs associated with brownfields.

- There has to be a way to show someone in Holland what is happening in Somerset is important to them. It’s a key educational need.

- How do we measure our success and keep at the task? (REDC does it on a distributed basis, small scale in the localities).

- There needs to be a rewards system for municipalities that meet certain goals or criteria or actions. In the REDC the towns are putting forward the projects. Here the plan is proposing what is to be done.

- The state has had a local government efficiency program for a long time. They’ve just underfunded it. Local governments want to do it but they need some cash help. And they also get “beat up” for using these tools and so do the developers. Education is also needed about the long term gains for using these tools. Need a dedicated funding source to implement the plan. No one will say the plan is a bad idea. They’ll ask “how do we make it work?”

- We’re all connected. We’ll all rise together or go down together. We need serious conversation about finding the best in each area and prop it up.