



This document reflects a preliminary draft outline of the strategies and actions developed by the Working Teams. This content is being presented to the Working Teams for a “big picture” review. It will continue to be refined and will be incorporated into a draft version of a plan in the coming months. Today we are asking: Is the shape and direction of this draft content right? Are there any glaring omissions? Is there a major idea that needs clarification? Tell us your thoughts today as we continue to build a plan for One Region Forward together.

## Draft Strategies and Actions for the Plan to Move One Region Forward

The Plan for Moving One Region Forward is driven by three simple interconnected ideas: that we need to repair and protect our natural and built environment as we build an economy for the 21st century and beyond, while we expand opportunity and make access to the benefits of life in Buffalo Niagara more equitable for all.

This is the essence of sustainability. Economy, community and environment are not mutually exclusive properties to be traded off against one another. All three values must be brought forward together – for everyone in Buffalo Niagara today as well as all those who will come after us.

The agenda embedded in the plan for moving One Region Forward is ambitious but can be stated simply in five overarching goals. We must work together to:

- **Promote a more efficient and healthy pattern of physical development**, using land more wisely to reduce the costs of transportation and other infrastructure services, conserve energy, protect our water, save farmland, grow jobs and prepare for the negative impacts of climate change.
- **Develop a transportation system** that provides convenient and energy efficient access to the places people need to go by expanding options for travel and aligning infrastructure and service with land use to serve workers, students, children, seniors, individuals with disabilities the disabled – everyone.
- **Use less energy and immediately transition to renewable energy** to power our economy while transitioning from dependence on fossil fuels to reduce our carbon footprint. prepare for climate change that will increasing impact our region.
- **Foster neighborhoods** that are great places to live and provide housing choices for a changing population – choices that are affordable, accessible, well-served, energy efficient, and suited to the needs of a diversity of residents.
- **Improve the health and security of our population and our economy by developing our local food supply**, protecting the land where food is grown, strengthening farm economies, reducing the chemical and carbon inputs to agriculture, improving the links between farms and family tables, and promoting a culture of healthier eating.
- Establish the structure and process to **adopt, implement, monitor, and revise the plan** as we go forward, relying on a model of network collaboration, shared accountability and mutual problem-solving and supported by tools for broad communication, informed decision-making, and continuous community-wide learning



**Promote a more compact pattern of development**, using land more wisely to reduce the costs of transportation and other infrastructure services, conserve energy, promote mobility, encourage mixed-use development, foster the redevelopment of great neighborhoods, protect our water and watersheds, save farmland, grow jobs and prepare for the negative impacts of climate change

1. **We need to define a land use pattern** that will produce the “spatial efficiency” needed to support our continuing economic development; manage the long-term costs of roads, utilities, and other public infrastructure like schools, libraries, parks and recreational facilities; help us create a region in which jobs, education, health care, and shopping are readily accessible to all; provide the framework to create great neighborhoods with housing choices; and allow us to protect farmland, forests, and natural lands for the benefit of posterity.

How we achieve that pattern is addressed in sections below, but the first step is to sketch out where we want to go, “paint the target,” and agree to work together to make it happen. In precedent plans, discussions in our steering committee, the work of our subject matter experts, and the deliberations of hundreds of citizens in a participatory scenario mapping exercise, we have produced the outline, at least, of such a land use pattern to:

- **Concentrate most development within the existing urbanized area.** Although already “developed,” there is a significant amount of undeveloped, under-developed, or vacant land within the urbanized area where new housing, offices, shops, and other facilities could be located. What doesn’t make sense is to continue the practice of abandoning land, buildings and supporting infrastructure near the center and replacing it with the same on the periphery.
- **Focus development in existing urban centers and villages.** Established downtowns like Buffalo, Niagara Falls, Lockport and the Twin Cities can accommodate significant additional growth in jobs and housing through the development of vacant sites and parking lots and redevelopment of existing sites to higher and better uses. So can village centers like East Aurora, Lewiston, Lancaster, Hamburg, Orchard Park and Williamsville. In all cases, we need to take care to preserve what people recognize as great about those places.
- **Redevelop brownfields for job creation.** The end of the era of heavy industry in Buffalo Niagara left thousands of acres of land and millions of square feet of buildings unused and in many cases damaged by pollution. With the help of federal and state programs and strong local planning and implementation, many of these sites are being cleaned up and made available for redevelopment. Citizens see these sites as ideal for job creation, especially to support the emergence of advanced manufacturing, expansion in transportation and logistics, and growth in back office operations. Citizens at scenario mapping exercises concentrated office industrial development in former industrial areas in Lackawanna, South Buffalo, the Tonawandas, Niagara Falls and Lockport.
- **Connect land use to transportation, especially public transit.** We have developed a land use and transportation system that only serves people well who travel by car. Promoting a more compact pattern of land use, denser development with a mix of uses, in walkable neighborhoods and districts along “complete streets” can bring destinations closer together and make walking, biking, and using transit more attractive, even as it allows those who choose to drive to continue doing so. How this can be accomplished is addressed in many elements of the plan discussed below and links to a series of recommendations in the section on transportation.
- **Protect farmland, watersheds and natural areas.** The sustainability of our way of life depends, ultimately, on the health of our environment. Protecting our farmland will give us greater food security in the years to come. Safeguarding our waterways and watersheds will ensure the health of both land and water. Natural areas both within the urbanized area and in rural lands beyond provide valuable “environmental services” – a technical way of saying they filter our water, recharge our aquifers, absorb storm water, provide shade to cool our cities, provide habitat for animals and more. Sections below will detail how we protect these areas. Our land use concept emphasizes our intention to preserve these lands from development.

2. **Manage the cost of public services.** One of the major features of “sprawl without growth” is the continuing extension of our public infrastructure – sewers, water and roads, but also schools, libraries, parks and more – to serve a smaller number of people. Each additional mile of infrastructure and each new square foot of building space is both a new capital cost and a new long-term maintenance obligation which falls directly on the shoulders of local taxpayers. Over time, we can reduce the costs of local government, utility service, public education and more by following our land use concept and working to make provision of a range of public services more efficient.

- **Implement the Erie Niagara Regional Framework for Growth** recommendation to prevent the extension of water and sewer districts and service to previously un-served areas, and to limit the expansion of the regional roadway network. Clear policy direction from county governments and support from municipal governments can help make this happen. Support from the Greater Buffalo Niagara Regional Transportation Council can achieve the same for road infrastructure.
- **Pursue shared service agreements, public-private partnerships and consolidations** in the provision of water, sewer, police, fire, parks, highway maintenance and other services to manage capital investments, manage operating costs and improve service quality. The possibilities require careful study to make sure they will achieve the stated goals and to determine which approaches are likely to work best for which kinds of services. Decision-makers also require reliable evidence-based policy advice before approving such structural changes. The Buffalo Niagara Regional Planning Network should sponsor a comprehensive study of the opportunities.
- **Address education needs regionally.** Enrollments are declining in many public and parochial schools. Some school facilities are new or recently renovated. Others are aging and some are empty. Meanwhile, there are great disparities in educational outcomes from one community to the next. At the same time, perceptions of school quality have a big impact on where people choose to live. We need a regional strategy not only to control the cost of education but to ensure access to a high quality education for all. The Buffalo Niagara Regional Planning Network should convene a group of government, educational, and civic leaders to frame a way forward.

3. **Redesign revenue-raising structures to promote land use goals.** Tax policy is one of the elements of a system that has promoted our sprawling and inefficient pattern of land use over recent decades. The structure of local property taxation, for example, prompts municipal leaders to pursue new development to generate new revenues only to see that development creates more demands for service in response. We need a revenue structure that promotes our land use goals, fosters real economic development, and produces adequate revenue for the operations of local governments and public education.

- **Review local revenue-raising structures toward the design of fundamental reforms.** A new study demonstrates how “smart growth” projects contribute much more to the tax base of municipalities where they are located than conventional sprawl development. Further investigation should guide development of revised revenue-raising mechanisms to promote more efficient forms of development and discourage sprawl.
- **Consider tax increment financing** as a means to support targeted redevelopment efforts, reserving increases in tax revenue to finance site preparation and infrastructure development for transit oriented development, urban infill, and “smart growth” projects.
- **Target IDA incentives to “smart growth” projects.** Six Industrial Development Agencies in Erie County and three (?) in Niagara County have authority to abate local property taxes as incentives to development projects. Most of the revenues not collected during the abatement period, however, would have gone to other units of government in those counties. In short, one town can promote its development with funds that would otherwise go to all the other municipalities in the county. At the very least, incentives should go only to projects that meet “smart growth” objectives and foster real job growth.



4. **Establish mechanisms to manage brownfields and declining neighborhoods.** Deindustrialization, population decline, and churn in regional housing markets have left a legacy of damaged industrial land and buildings and vacant and abandoned homes and lots. We need to improve our ability to bring this kind of properties back to useful and / or taxable purposes.

- **Strengthen the land bank.** Erie County took a big step forward recently in the creation of the Buffalo Erie Niagara Land Improvement Corporation – a land bank – with hopes to include Niagara County soon. The land bank will have the authority to acquire, hold, maintain, redevelop, and re-market abandoned homes and land. A \$2 million allocation from the State of New York last year will make it possible to get the land bank up and running.
- **Redouble brownfields efforts.** Meanwhile, the City of Buffalo and Niagara County have both been aggressive in the use of the Brownfields Opportunity Area, Brownfield Clean-up, and Environmental Restoration programs to plan for the clean-up and reuse of old industrial sites. Regional leaders should re-emphasize these programs and advocate for their preservation and expansion.
- **Continue to promote “shovel ready sites.”** Expand assessments, develop a regional inventory, and provide marketing strategies for vacant, under-utilized and brownfield properties within the framework of a region-wide land use concept and consistent with “smart growth” principles. This should include encouragement to municipalities to preserve and properly zone larger-scale sites with potential for research and development, technology, manufacturing or distribution activities.
- **Expand use of historic preservation tax credits.** Adaptive re-use and preservation of historic buildings, including old industrial facilities, among others, can be an important part of smart redevelopment. Expand promotion and training for use of Federal and State historic preservation tax credits and related programs.
- **Create a regional “Main Street” organization.** The National Main Street Center has provided an extraordinarily successful model for strengthening the commercial centers of small towns and villages. A partner organization for Erie and Niagara Counties could help implement citizen visions for redevelopment of villages in the region to be like they are now only better.

5. **Promote a more compact pattern of development.** As noted throughout the plan, our current pattern of dispersed development carries costs in energy consumption, land use, transportation demand and otherwise that we need to contain. A more compact pattern of development can help us make land use and transportation more efficient and protect natural and agricultural lands.

- **Urge municipalities to revise zoning codes.** Authority for land use controls remain with cities and towns. All municipalities should be encouraged to revise their zoning codes to promote mixed uses, allow more intensive development in hubs and corridors, and protect valuable natural and agricultural lands from development.
- **Promote form-based codes.** An increasingly popular approach to development regulation focuses on the control of the built form as much as land use. The City of Buffalo has pioneered the adoption of form-based code in Western New York – a new ordinance that will promote the redevelopment of the city as walkable, mixed use and dense while retaining the prevailing character of its great neighborhoods. Best practices in the One Region Forward “tool-kit” – including those from Buffalo – should encourage other municipalities to develop and adopt their own form-based codes.
- **Locate new public facilities strategically.** Schools, university facilities, government buildings, cultural venues, sports facilities and entertainment centers can give density and vitality to urban places – or they can generate auto-oriented transportation demand on suburban sites. Encourage the sponsors of such facilities to choose locations that are well-served by bus, rail, bicycling and walking and connected with restaurants, shops and housing that can benefit and be benefited by proximity to these facilities.

6. **Protect and restore natural places and farmland.** Because streams and stream corridors, woodlands, wetlands, and farmland – in crops or fallow – encompass a wide range of environments and provide an array of benefits, a variety of strategies are also needed to protect them.

- **Complete the inventory of natural places and farmland.** Making informed decisions about how to protect these resources requires complete and accurate information on what they are. A number of different agencies and not-for-profit organizations have undertaken some part of this task – or are working on it now. Convene a working group of organizations involved to create a single complete data base, assembling and coordinating the pieces that are already complete and filling in with additional survey work where gaps exist.
- **Quantify the economic impact of parks and open spaces.** It is often supposed that parks and open spaces are amenities without a discernible dollar value. But these lands support job-creation, enhance property values, or provide environmental services that would be expensive to provide otherwise. Build on the work of the Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy and the Buffalo Niagara Riverkeeper to document the argument for investments in parks, trails, and preserved open spaces.
- **Update or create local open space and farmland protection plans.** Many towns already have these plans. These can bring the broader policies to ground in each jurisdiction. Where these exist they may need to be updated, and implemented. Where they are missing, localities should work to create them, in part to identify lands for protection.
- **Preserve land through a variety of voluntary mechanisms.** Both the natural places and farmland can be protected through acquisition, the purchase of development rights, or with conservation easements. Each of these mechanisms should be voluntary, can be purchased, donated, or both, offer financial benefits to landowners, and for farmland, maintain productive agricultural uses. A range of programs that do this already exist but more needs to be done. Municipalities like Clarence (and Pittsford in Monroe County) have programs to purchase natural and farmland outright. Both the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets and the federal Natural Resources Conservation Service have funds that support purchase of development rights for farmland. And the Niagara River Greenway guides funding to protect open space. But we need advocacy to make the federal tax incentive to donate conservation easements made permanent, to expand Federal and state farm protection funding programs, and to raise revenue locally for open space and farmland preservation.



7. **Protect and restore water quality and quantity.** Water flows over and through the land. Thus, how we use land, design buildings and create infrastructure can have a big impact on the quality and quantity of water. We need to understand better what policies and practices degrade our waters and which protect them. But there are some things we can do right away to improve the situation.

- **Remedy Combined Sewer Overflows.** In municipalities, like Buffalo, one system handles both sanitary sewage and storm water. When heavy rains fall the water treatment plant exceeds capacity and a combination of sewage and runoff is discharged into regional waterways. Some combination of “gray infrastructure” and “green infrastructure” can make such events less frequent or severe while working toward meeting Federal mandates to resolve the problem.
- **Address Federal Areas of Concern.** Polluted waters and underwater sediments are another part of Buffalo Niagara’s legacy of industrialism. The International Joint Commission has targeted “Areas of Concern” (AOC), including the Niagara River Buffalo River, and Eighteenmile Creek. Remedial Action Plans (RAP) have been adopted in some cases, but clean-up has been incremental. The Buffalo Niagara Regional Planning Network should assist the Buffalo Niagara Riverkeeper as the RAP coordinator to push for additional resources to complete the plan and de-list the Buffalo River AOC.
- **Promote green infrastructure development and green development practices.** In the long run one of the most effective ways to address the Combined Sewer Overflow issue as well as water quality and quantity issues is to retain storm water on site, allowing it to be cleansed and infiltrated into groundwater. Rain barrels, rain gardens, bioswales, graywater recycling, detention areas, wetland preservation and related tactics can reduce storm water demands on waste water treatment plants (conserving energy) and promote groundwater recharge. New (federal?) storm water regulations make much of this mandatory for new development. (Other, more distributed efforts might extend these practices?)
- **Plan with the watershed and water use in mind, and review land use practices for water impacts.** Our watersheds do not respect municipal, county or even state and national boundaries. What happens in Lancaster and Cheektowaga, for example, determines, in part, the quality and quantity of water in the Scajaquada Creek as it flows into the Niagara River in Buffalo. The Buffalo River watershed encompasses lands in many towns and two counties – Erie and Wyoming. As a guiding principle for all of our planning, we must keep in mind that land uses in natural areas, not political jurisdictions, affect the quality and quantity of our waters. We must also consider, how, when, and where we use our water, in order to ensure the resource remains for future generations.



**Develop our transportation system** so that it provides convenient and efficient access to the places people need to go by expanding options for travel and aligning infrastructure and service with land use to serve workers, students, children, seniors, individuals with disabilities the disabled – everyone.

1. **Develop a regional “hub and corridor” transportation system.** Although decades of “sprawl without growth” have created a land use pattern for which it is increasingly difficult to provide convenient and energy efficient transportation service, the historic pattern of development in our region still offers an opportunity to match transportation – and transit – to land use. The region grew up along the major arteries emanating from Buffalo and Niagara Falls creating a system of hubs and corridors (e.g. Broadway as a corridor with hubs at Fillmore Avenue, and the Villages of Depew, Lancaster and Alden). If we concentrate development – of transportation infrastructure and service as well as jobs and housing – we can create an urban pattern that is more efficient and can be better served by transportation.
  - **High quality transit.** The quality of regularly scheduled transit service has declined for decades as the system has been caught in a vicious cycle of declining ridership, falling revenues (federal and state operating subsidy as well as fares), resulting cuts in service all leading to more losses in ridership. All of this has occurred during decades of sprawl without growth and rising automobile use. Recent upticks in ridership, however, combined with recent developments in the Metro Rail corridor, offer a ray of hope that the situation can be turned around. A program of targeted service improvements, partnerships with major institutional destinations (e.g. the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus), well-designed incentives and promotions and linkages with carshare and bikeshare hubs could shift the momentum in favor of transit. None of this, however, can happen without additional funding. The Buffalo Niagara Regional Planning Network should make transit funding and system improvement a top priority for advocacy and action.
  - **TOD/ Joint development.** Transit Oriented Development, in which new homes, including affordable housing, offices and shops are built in close proximity to high quality transit service – especially rail transit – has proven in many cases around the nation to be a good way to improve land use, neighborhood quality, and transportation access. The concept of joint development opens the possibility of coordinating investments in transit infrastructure with investments in new buildings to reinforce the relationship between transportation and land use. Tax increment financing might provide a way to capture newly created value for reinvestment in transportation infrastructure. UB’s forthcoming School of Medicine building atop the Main-Hospital Metro Rail station is a good example of both TOD and joint development. A TOD Station Area Study for the NFTA Metro Rail line should be conducted to better understand the economic environment in which regional partners can plan for TOD and develop specific strategies related to the types and intensities of uses that appropriate for the different station areas.
  - **Complete streets.** If we want to promote alternative modes of travel – walking, cycling, transit, etc. – we need to provide the environment and infrastructure to make it safe, comfortable, and interesting for those travelers. A comprehensive concept has been developed to accomplish this commonly called “complete streets” which provides for ample sidewalks, street trees, on-street park, bike lanes and other aspects of street infrastructure design to make pedaling, walking or waiting for a bus more attractive.



- **Corridor makeovers.** Part of the difficulty in promoting alternative modes of travel can be seen in the character of many suburban “main drags,” where multi-lane roadways without sidewalks serve retail establishments with big set backs and big parking lots. These environments make walking, waiting for a bus, or riding a bicycle not only unpleasant, but often dangerous. Developers in many places, however, have shown how such environments can be transformed, step by step, by bringing activities to the building line, tucking parking in back, creating pleasant sidewalk paths, and throwing in a bit of complete streets to boot. Work to remake the Village of Williamsville is headed in this direction. A pilot project on Transit Road, Sheridan Drive, Niagara Falls Boulevard or McKinley Parkway could show the public what might be possible in the transformation of our least pedestrian friendly environments.

- **Bicycle infrastructure.** A crucial element in promoting travel by bicycle – not just for recreation but for getting from here to there – is to provide the appropriate infrastructure to make it safe and convenient – on the way and at the destination. Regional and municipal officials should work with bicycle advocacy groups to promote development of bike lanes on streets and “sharrows” where pavement widths are inadequate for bike lanes. Major employers, office building managers, public parking facilities, schools, colleges and others should be encouraged to provide secure bike racks for bicycle commuters. And where possible, major employers should be encouraged to provide showers and storage for the same commuters.

- **Establish transportation management associations.** The Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus Inc. has been a local pioneer in bringing together multiple organizations to promote alternative transportation options collaboratively. This includes managing parking options, installing alternative fuel vehicle infrastructure, making accommodations for bicycle commuters, and promoting the use of public transit for employees and visitors to partner organization workplaces. This approach could be scaled up for an even larger district, or for an entire downtown.

- **High Speed Rail.** With an average speed of 51 mph a passenger rail trip from New York City to Niagara Falls currently takes 9 hours. A competitive passenger rail system that delivers faster, efficient, environmentally-friendly and reliable service to both New York City and Toronto in the future is necessary.

- **Explore public private financing opportunities.** Building 21st century resilient infrastructure is vital to improving the health of our transportation system, regional economic growth and development. Bureaucratic procedures and red tape can often slow down construction of infrastructure projects. As in other areas, Buffalo Niagara needs to explore public private partnerships to finance

transportation infrastructure projects and identify ways to streamline the permitting process and accelerate project delivery methods to contain construction costs. Methods such as Design Build and other time and cost saving construction approaches to should be considered for bridge and other relevant infrastructure projects in the region.

2. **Create innovative financing mechanisms.** The stark reality is that the improvements we seek in transportation are largely not possible without new sources of revenue. Local subsidies for transit have never been high and state and federal support has remained flat. . Meanwhile, the Federal Highway Trust Fund produces far less revenue today than it did twenty or thirty years ago in inflation adjusted dollars. Whether the project is for public transit, highways, or to repair aging bridges, we don’t raise and spend enough money to keep up with the transportation needs of a modern society and economy.

- **Advocate for highway trust fund reform. The Buffalo Niagara Regional Planning Network should mobilize leaders in business, government, health care, higher education and other sectors to advocate for reform in the Federal financing system for transportation. As vehicle miles traveled declines and fuel economy improves the per-gallon (not a percentage) tax on gasoline generates less and less revenue even as infrastructure needs go unmet and construction costs soar. Reform of the highway trust fund needs to ensure significant increases in revenue for**

**transportation and carve out a larger** proportion of revenue raised for transit, cycling, and redesign of transportation corridors.

- **Advocate for increased state investment.** The regional planning network also needs to press state leaders for greater and more predictable funding for transportation projects.

- **Examine options for regional financing.** Ultimately, if we hope to build a modern transportation system to support our 21st century economic

growth, we may have to raise the money to do so in our own backyard. Despite presumed public antipathy to taxes, a referendum on specified tax and fee increases for clearly-targeted and well-explained projects supported by community leadership could pass. There are many options for such financing. But the key first step is to put revenue raising for transportation on the public agenda. Success would mean, not only being able to finance projects that are consistent with regional goals and plans, but bring efficiencies in project delivery not possible under Federal rules and procedures.

3. **Create a Buffalo Niagara International Trade Gateway.** The Buffalo Niagara region has powerful assets to support taking a more prominent position in the global trade, transportation, logistics and supply chain industry. These include proximity to continental markets, our border location, strong physical infrastructure in air, rail, highway and water transportation, and a “soft infrastructure” of customs brokers, third-party logistics, legal and financial specialists and others. Logistics is a \$1.4 trillion industry annually in the US and Buffalo Niagara is well-positioned to claim more than its share. Just as important, the resurgence of manufacturing in our region will get a major boost from close connections with improved logistics services. Production of goods and their delivery to market are more time sensitive than ever before. To grasp this opportunity, Buffalo Niagara should create an integrated center for transshipment, storage, collection and distribution of goods, regionally-centered around a convergence point of rail lines, truck routes, water shipping routes and air transport modes and facilities. Some elements of the work include:

- **Establish an International Trade Gateway Organization.** Experience from other regions suggests a dedicated organization is needed to develop the trade gateway concept. Work is already in progress to create such an organization, recruit a board, hire staff, and finalize a strategic plan. Immediate next steps include expanding relationships with the Regional Economic Development Council and Empire State Development Corporation, linking to regional planning efforts, building communications and government relations capacities, and forging a link with the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey to gain status as an inland port.

- **Build the physical infrastructure for trade.** While the existing transportation infrastructure is robust, certain strategic capital projects need to be undertaken to strengthen the network. These include improvements to plaza renovations at both the Peace Bridge and Lewiston-Queenston Bridge,

planning and implementation of capacity increases at the Niagara Falls International Airport, and replacement of the Portageville, NY railway bridge – a very weak link in rail connections between the Port of Newark and Buffalo Niagara

- **Advance key policy initiatives.** Border crossing procedures, the workforce “pipeline” for logistics specialists, and overall federal funding for transportation infrastructure are all key issues for continued development of the Buffalo Niagara International Trade Gateway and require timely action on policy. Action by the US Department of Homeland Security and the Canadian Ministry of Defense is needed on procedures for pre-clearance for trucks and to facilitate legitimate border crossings in general. Coordination with WNY REDC and the regional workforce development system is needed to beef up training programs for logistics professionals. And broad advocacy efforts are needed to break the Congressional logjam on transportation funding.

- **Research key issues in logistics.** Advancing the development of the Buffalo Niagara International Trade Gateway will require better answers to key questions about the regional logistics system in terms of competition, markets, governmental policies and global trends . This will require research and analysis on current freight flow (via rail and ship) thru the region, projected freight movements going forward and the potential for increased water-borne transport on the Great Lakes. Additional analysis of our on assets and needs for warehouse space and sites, supply and demand for personnel in key specializations, and outreach to international shippers to better understand the market is also required. The International Trade Gateway Steering Committee has formed key sub-committees in the areas of infrastructure, workforce, marketing and government relations to address these research gaps and advance the Gateway initiative.



## Preparing for Climate Change Action

**Use less energy and immediately transition to renewable energy** to power our economy while transitioning from dependence on fossil fuels to reduce our carbon footprint. prepare for climate change that will increasing impact our region.

1. The biggest impact we can make right away and in the near term is to work for **greater energy efficiency and conservation in our buildings and transportation systems** (understanding that efficiency and conservation are not the same thing; one uses technology to reduce the energy demand of our current behavior while the other requires that people behave differently to use less energy). Some of the things we can do to make this happen include:

- Mounting a broad-based program to provide **energy audits** for homes region-wide as the basis to install **energy efficient technology** (lighting controls, heating and air conditioning) and weatherize more than 400,000 homes. We can save \$X and X MTCO2E if we do. PUSH Buffalo is pioneering such a program with capital improvements financed directly by immediate savings by the consumer.
- Encouraging local governments, major institutions, and companies to lead the way by conducting organizational **climate action plans** that will help our largest energy users manage down fossil fuel use through performance contracting, adoption of renewable technologies, and transportation demand management programs. The University at Buffalo is implementing the climate action plan they adopted three years ago with dramatic results...
- Working with hospitals, universities, companies, business improvement districts, parking garage operators and others to **expand the electric vehicle recharging infrastructure throughout the region.**
- **Modernizing building codes** (is this done on a local level or is there a uniform building code for the state? Is this already being done? Where does LEED fit in here?) to enforce contemporary energy efficiency standards, encourage the use of renewable energy in new and retrofitted buildings, and incorporate passive solar design in all buildings.
- Embedding conservation and green energy requirements in **public funding review processes** like the CFA process or IDA incentive package approvals.

2. **Promoting the spread of renewable energy production** requires a challenging mixture of local initiatives with actions not immediately under the control of actors in Buffalo Niagara. Together, however, these actions – policy changes, market innovations, and capital investments – can create the system that will quicken our transition to renewable sources of energy.

Other energy saving strategies are incorporated in sections of this plan dealing with land use (promote compact development), transportation (reduce vehicle miles traveled), housing and neighborhoods (reuse existing building stock), and food access and justice (promote locally-sourced produce and reduce energy inputs to farming).

- **Develop power infrastructure** to promote the proliferation of distributed renewable energy production, upgrading energy and storage capacity, improving the operations of the New York State Independent System Operators A, and promote the development of micro-grids to facilitate renewable generation at the local scale.
- Move all **municipal and public buildings onto renewable energy** to increase demand and to save public dollars. (might be a good idea to talk about fossil fuel price fluctuation while renewables have free fuel – slip it in somewhere).
- **Extend and mandate New York State’s Renewable Portfolio Standard** by the PSC and continue to increase the proportion of total energy that utilities are required to produce as renewables, that customers are allowed to produce as renewables, and that certain state entities are required to consume as renewables. This will continue to build both demand and supply for green energy.
- **Support creation of pricing mechanisms** for sale of power from distributed renewable generators to grid operators (often known as a **Feed-in Tariff**), net metering to facilitate the same, and programs to finance



# Preparing for Climate Change Action

conservation and renewable energy investments such as on bill financing and Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) in which repayment obligation attaches to the property, not the original borrower (we need to be able to say who should do these things and at what scale they occur).

- **Expand programs** by New York State Energy Research and Development Authority to fund **solar energy projects** and create similar programs to fund wind power projects. (Were other forms of support anticipated here?)
- **Streamline permitting** for wind, solar, and other renewable installations supported by strong educational

programs about the benefits of such investments. [Basically, people were asking for a way to overcome local objections to renewable installations on lakeshore locations, rural hilltops, etc. We need to frame this carefully].

- Expand **collaboration between NYPA and Ontario Power**

3. **Make renewable energy development an economic development priority.** The development of renewable energy – part of what is known as the “blue/green” economy – can help create local community jobs, income and wealth – in the installation of renewable technology, the management of energy and carbon emissions at the organizational scale, and even for the research and development of new efficiency and renewable production technologies.

- **Train workers** for clean energy jobs in the manufacture, installation, maintenance of renewable energy and efficiency technology. Work with companies, unions, and educational institutions to establish a training and placement pipeline.
- Give **renewable** (sun, wind, water and geothermal) **energy projects priority** in CFA funding at REDC.
- **Promote the development of renewable energy manufacturing** for renewables through an expansion of the industrial supply chain of materials/products made in WNY.
- **Expand education and training** for carbon accounting such as the green building certificates offered through the UB Educational Opportunity Center, as well as programs to educate professionals in the application of LEED standards.

- **Develop distributive energy systems** in which a large number of owner/producers contribute electric power to the grid; coordinate with the creation of **energy cooperatives** which serve member-owners. Both schemes help create local wealth as they serve communities.

- **Engage area universities to tap research and development resources** on renewable energy production, distribution, storage, and conservation toward creation of a “green” energy industrial sector centered in Buffalo Niagara.

4. As a region, we need to **act and advocate for the phase-out of fossil fuels as rapidly as possible.** Even as efforts to exploit reserves of oil, gas, coal and tar sands continue, demand is outstripping the supply of fossil fuel energy, raising prices across the board. Worse yet are the costs of actually burning these fuels. We need to move to renewable energy sources for all of our needs and sooner rather than later.

- Buffalo Niagara should begin planning now to **decommission coal, gas, and nuclear powered electricity** generation stations to reduce carbon emissions dramatically and for the long term. Careful preparations must be made for the transition, with compensation or adjustment for lost jobs and lost local tax revenue. But we must act to wean ourselves from fossil fuels.
- The region should **support efforts to prohibit extraction** methods that threaten aquifers and pose other environmental threats and **forego** short-term investments in infrastructure for “fracked” fuels. Such investments should go, instead, to renewable energy sources.
- We should **push national and international agencies to revamp incentive structures** to discourage extraction and consumption of fossil fuels and nuclear power, either regulating carbon emissions or placing a price on such emissions, and eliminating federal tax subsidies for oil, gas and coal industries.

5. We need to **plan now to prepare the region for climate change impacts and anticipate adaptive responses.** Even if we reduced carbon emissions suddenly and dramatically, our climate would continue to change before it stabilized again. We need to develop the ability to withstand shocks to regional systems and learn how to bounce back after they hit.

- Counties and municipalities should develop **community risk assessments** to guide planning and investment in climate-related preventive measures.
- **Review and revise land use policies** (e.g. flood insurance, zoning, riparian buffers) to address foreseeable climate impacts. A range of actions can serve to mitigate the worst damage from climate-related events. Reducing the incentive to build in flood-prone areas provided by the National Flood Insurance Program would be one step, although not within our control regionally. Zoning to limit building in flood plains and regulation to protect stream corridors from development would also help.
- **Update flood maps** and use the 500-year flood plane for site planning review. As extreme weather events become more common the notions of 100- and 500-year floods become less useful. Just as a light-year is a measure of time, not distance, a 500-year flood is a measure of extent of flooding not frequency. Ultimately – an ounce of prevention being worth a pound of cure – the point is simply to discourage or prohibit building in areas that are likely to flood. This will require accurate information and acting on it appropriately.
- Local and regional officials should review, expand and maintain **disaster and emergency preparedness plans and programs**, anticipating an increase in the number of events – blizzards, flooding, heat emergencies, high winds, water shortages, disruptions in power and data – that may be caused by aspects of climate change. Localities that understand the likely consequences and prepare for them will be more “resilient” in the long run.



**Foster neighborhoods** that are great places to live and provide housing choices for a changing population – choices that are affordable, accessible, well-served, energy efficient, and suited to the needs of a diversity of residents.

### 1. We need to provide data and analytical resources for informed decision-making for housing and neighborhoods.

A strategic approach to preserving and modernizing our housing stock and neighborhood environments will require a clear picture of where we are and where we are headed.

- **Develop a Regional Property Information System** including open source data on housing, land, neighborhoods and municipalities to support ongoing planning and policy-making around housing and neighborhoods. The need is for a system that will be continually refreshed rather than provide a single point-in-time analysis; encompass a breadth and depth of data from neighborhood level indicators on assets and needs to parcel level data; and provide data for use by the public in general, although some categories of data might be private and password protected. Key questions include what local organization or institution might host such a system and how it would be sustained financially over time. Finally, a Regional Property Information System might be part of a larger data and analysis capacity to serve the overall planning and implementation effort behind One Region Forward.
- **Conduct a current analysis of housing supply and demand** as a starting point for discussion of planning and development strategies for neighborhoods. No comprehensive assessment of housing and neighborhoods has been conducted in recent memory. But one would provide the basis for the informed decision-making we seek. It should address market and neighborhood dynamics on both a broad regional and hyper-local basis. This might be a first use of the developing Regional Property Information System and a step toward implementing other recommendations in this plan.

### 2. Anticipate, accommodate and embrace demographic shifts in housing development and neighborhood revitalization.

As noted above, the impacts of an aging population, an influx of New Americans through immigration, and changing lifestyle preferences by younger generation all promise to put a strain on existing housing resources and provide incentives for new designs, forms of tenure and neighborhood environments. We need to deploy information, promote proto-type projects, and provide tangible supports for development of new housing types and forms of tenure in mixed use neighborhoods.

- **Develop a housing toolbox** for municipalities, developers, non-profits and residents to design and produce sustainable housing types and neighborhoods. This would include an on-line repository of best practices and case study information about a range of housing types (townhouses, lofts, and “mingles”) and forms of tenure (co-ops, condos, co-housing, etc.). But information would also be supported by in-person technical assistance.
- **Deploy housing models** to meet the changing needs and preferences of residents. But new housing models require local proof of concept. It has to work here. The Buffalo Niagara Regional Planning Network should organize a coalition of local governments, not-for-profit community development companies, developers and others to pioneer a range of new housing types and forms of tenure to meet the increasingly diverse needs of the regional housing market. This would include housing tailored to the needs or preferences of senior citizens, the disabled, artists, immigrants, students, young professionals, empty-nesters, and others. Requirements include a lead agency for advocacy and education, a market analysis for housing types not currently in production, and technical assistance to help communities implement new housing types and potentially funding mechanisms to support development types that do not fit within conventional lending products.
- **Relieve regulatory roadblocks to housing innovation.** In many cases zoning codes or other housing regulations may need to be amended to allow some new types of housing or forms of tenure. To lead the effort, the Buffalo Niagara Regional Planning Network could establish a regional coordinator for zoning and planning regulation reform to work with the coalition of municipalities, CDCs, and developers engaged in this effort.

**3. Pursue neighborhood-specific asset-based strategies for redevelopment.** Public and private resources for housing and neighborhood redevelopment need to be strategically targeted where new investments can build on strong neighborhoods nearby, leverage existing assets, engage active residents and help neighborhood-scale housing markets work again. Municipal leadership and collaboration with community based organizations and residents is key to set strategy, conduct participatory planning, and align capital investments with neighborhood plans.

- **Emphasize community based planning** with residents and stakeholders to maximize participation, leverage diffuse resources and focus on quality of life improvements. Working closely with residents and stakeholders is essential because so much of the knowledge, energy and money that is needed to regenerate neighborhoods exists at such a small scale. Success will depend as much on investments by home owners and small scale entrepreneurs as it does on municipal government, developers, or banks. The active engagement of all is needed to produce plans that work for specific neighborhoods and have the active support of those who stand to benefit. But neighborhood planning can be resource intensive. A strong commitment from local government, philanthropy and business will be needed to provide the support structure for local planning that lasts.

- **Focus and coordinate public investments in neighborhoods** with strategic assets and coordinate public policy and capital investment priorities with local plans. Even mundane capital projects like street paving, curbs, sidewalks and street lighting can buoy resident efforts at regeneration. Larger investments in parks, transit, schools, community centers, business districts and the like can have an even greater impact – but only if all of these are coordinated with local planning initiatives. Participatory budgeting and crowd-sourced project financing can support these strategic investments. But alignment of local, county, state and federal investments with local plans is the key. Also important is treating neighborhoods holistically where “complete streets,” local services and neighborhood retail are part of the mixed use environment that supports diverse, accessible, quality housing.

- **Identify and recruit demographic groups** to push revitalization in specified neighborhoods. Urban neighborhoods have long been identified with specific ethnic groups, industrial specializations or cultural tendencies. Neighborhood planning should embrace the potential for immigrant communities, artists, or other groups to lead regeneration efforts and use unique ethnic, cultural or occupational identities to leverage investment and customer traffic. These approaches can help create stronger neighborhoods if the initiatives are authentic, are supported by neighborhood input, and backed by reliable market information.
- **Design alternative long-term strategies** for areas where disinvestment has left few of the assets, anchors and actors that are needed to power successful neighborhood revitalization. For such neighborhoods the time for conventional neighborhood redevelopment may be decades away. Where housing stock and commercial fabric have mostly been eroded and anchor institutions have departed scarce public resources in conventional approaches cannot be expected to overcome immense private disinvestment. Both interim and long-term strategies are needed to support the redevelopment process and provide options for those who call these neighborhoods home.

**4. Improve the housing support delivery system.** The network of community-based organizations providing services for housing and neighborhood revitalization needs to achieve significantly greater productivity while retaining its responsiveness to local conditions and contexts. The Buffalo Niagara Regional Planning Network should identify a trusted institutional funder and trusted convener to lead a patient and broad-based collaborative effort to reform the system. Toward that end:

- **Reconsider the scope and scale of the system for housing support delivery.** It should be possible to increase region-wide capacity and share expertise across the system while remaining responsive to local constituencies. Small neighborhood-based organizations can serve as a conduit for high quality regional services for their communities even as they provide policy feedback to the broader organization. Redesigning long-term arrangements will not be easy. It will require skilled facilitation supported with patient resources and encouraged by state and federal-level funders of housing services to bring such a process to a successful conclusion.
- **Develop better opportunities, supports and protections for renters and home buyers,** particularly from traditionally vulnerable groups. Persons of color, those of low-income, seniors, immigrants, limited-English proficiency speakers and non-traditional families are among the groups that have been traditionally marginalized by the mainstream conventional housing and finance industries. The current housing support system attempts to break down barriers to quality housing for these – and all – demographic groups, but housing discrimination, public opposition and individual and institutional discrimination present tremendous challenges. Increased resources, focus and options need to be direct toward providing quality affordable housing as a precursor and support for broader opportunity for these populations.

- **Cultivate a positive image of housing aid to garner public support and improve participation.** A stigma often attaches to programs designed to provide assistance to households struggling to get or keep affordable housing. In some cases, the stigma is perceived by residents of neighborhoods where officials seek to locate affordable housing resources. In other cases, those who need and qualify for such assistance see the stigma in accepting help. Housing providers should launch a broad-based effort to rebrand affordable housing and educate the public on its collective benefits. This should include an extensive outreach effort to identify barriers to participation and to involve influential and officials in a marketing and advocacy program.

- **Improve the code enforcement system and link it to education and support programs.** Municipalities and housing providers should work together to develop new policies and tools to address slumlords and vacant properties more effectively. Better use of information technology and focused prosecution through a dedicated housing court are both possibilities. But homeowners in violation of housing codes and in need of assistance should be able to get help through the enforcement system. Therefore, work to integrate financial and technical assistance programs for homeowners with the code enforcement mechanism.



**Improve the health and security of our population and our economy by developing our local food supply, protecting the land where food is grown, strengthening farm economies, improving the links between farms and family.**

**1. Make the region's food system a Buffalo Niagara policy priority.** It should go without saying that food is one of the building blocks of regional sustainability. But in an era of looming climate change disruptions and a challenging energy economy, it makes sense for each region to take stock of its own capacity to produce and process food and for residents to get access to healthful foods.

- **Create the structure for developing and advancing food policy.** The Erie County Food Policy Council was recently created. We should establish a Niagara County counterpart with broad-based participation, whose early agenda would include and update to the Niagara County Farmland Protection Plan to increase farmer buy-in and promote a shared vision with other plans in the region.
- **Establish a regional food policy board to coordinate planning for food** throughout Western New York. Convene board with members of food policy councils and other local food advocates. Develop an online food system database resource for the Buffalo-Niagara region that would serve to: (1) identify organizations and foundations that can be leveraged to get healthy food to households in need, (2) use feedback from food banks, block clubs and other groups to inform farmers about the foods that are culturally-appropriate in our region, (3) link local growers to local retailers to get local foods into local markets, and (4) create a resource whereby consumers can shop for a local Farm Stand, CSA or Farmers' Market.
- **Emphasize food system projects in the Consolidated Funding Application.** Prioritize projects that seek to improve food justice, food access, agricultural viability, and a sustainable food system when they apply to the Regional Economic Development Council by adjusting scoring criteria to emphasize the role of the food system in enhancing economic development.
- **Increase awareness about food system issues across the board.** Educate local and state elected representatives on challenges and opportunities in food production and food access. Bring together food service and sustainability directors of local universities, school districts, and correctional and health care facilities. Develop a collaborative network of colleges, universities and their students to support, strengthen and spur innovation in the local agriculture and food distribution industries. Undertake a regional education campaign at existing events to increase public recognition of the benefits and opportunities in local agriculture and to improve residents' knowledge about local farmers. Launch a consumer education campaign that enlists existing media networks including broadcast television, radio, 211, and public service announcements to promote the benefits of local, healthy food to the local public.



**2. Improve access to healthy food to residents disadvantaged** by lack of transportation, proximity to stores, or lack of income. A range of both urban and rural neighborhoods suffer from a lack of accessible outlets for fresh and healthy food so that residents who are isolated, lack transportation or have very low incomes may not be able to get such food. A range of strategies might be employed.

- **Develop and implement a Healthy Corner Store program.** Start a pilot program with five corner stores in areas underserved by healthy food. Provide technical assistance to help store owners market fresh fruits and vegetables, and later provide capital assistance for equipment and store improvements. Or provide subsidies to food stores locating within low-vehicle ownership or low-healthy food access areas and selling fresh food, and to ones already located in those areas that begin to sell fresh food in place of other foods.
- **Encourage the use of mobile food trucks** to deliver healthy, locally-produced foods to neighborhoods and local schools lacking healthy food options nearby. Reduce licensing requirements or vary rates based on serving healthy foods.
- **Improve transportation access.** Review and modify transit routing and schedules to improve access to food providers, especially in areas where vehicle ownership is low. Or provide free rides home from healthy-food retailers to customers living in neighborhoods with low-vehicle ownership. Provide free rides to customers who spend more than a baseline amount of money at the store. Fund vouchers for free transit or taxi rides to and from healthy food stores.
- **Support and enhance public food assistance.** Promote, create new, and increase participation in existing “double-up bucks” programs used to increase value of public assistance dollars at fresh market retail options like farmers’ markets, and for purchases of locally-grown products at any retail destination including convenience stores. Work with public officials to educate and facilitate enrollment in public assistance programs at public institutions (libraries, schools, colleges) and food retail destinations, from corner stores to supermarkets.

**3. Promote urban farming and community gardens.** While it is important to differentiate urban farming and community gardening, both practices can help improve access to healthy food for residents, improve city economies, and strengthen neighborhoods. A range of supports should be provided for these activities.

- **Provide security of tenure to farmers and gardeners.** Institute long-term leases for community gardens on publicly-owned lands in Buffalo and Niagara Falls.
- **Facilitate access to land for urban agriculture.** Develop database of vacant urban parcels and their soil quality. Working with the Cities of Buffalo and Niagara Falls, identify and test the soil on the Cities’ vacant parcels. Prioritize parcels for remediation and inform the public which parcels are most suitable for agricultural use.

**4. Ensure a reliable supply of labor for food production and processing.** One of the most challenging issues for area farmers is how to ensure that they have workers to tend, harvest, package, and process their crops and produce.

- Promote workforce development in all food systems sectors and create fare-wage food jobs. Develop training programs that are built around food processing, preservation, distribution and preparation to limit food waste and reduce hunger locally. Establish a business incubator for food processing which leverages a network of food kitchens, culinary schools and other actors interested in business development.
- Create pathways to legal residence for immigrant agricultural workers. In the meantime, modify the constraints of the H-2A visa. Enable immigrant farm workers to work at multiple farms in the same year and to return to the same sponsor farm for multiple years.
- Analyze the impact of a federal farm-worker fair wage act on American competitiveness in the global agricultural market. Ultimately, create a federal farm worker fair wage law applicable to all states.

**5. Strengthen regional farm to table links.** Buying locally-produced goods will make our food healthier, less energy-intensive and more secure. But sustaining farms in our region will require that farmers have better access to local markets. A range of strategies are available to make this happen including:

- **Prioritize New York State goods in State purchasing.** Revise State purchasing policy and regulation to require State agencies to purchase foods produced in New York State and, more specifically, from within the regional food shed of the purchasing agency, when competing products are within a stipulated price differential.
- **Make CSAs more affordable and accessible.** Create and fund a revolving loan fund to help low-income people obtain shares in Community Supported Agriculture arrangements. Encourage volunteer support where members could buy shares through sweat equity. Establish refrigeration and freezer share at CSA drop-off sites.
- **Create a brand for specialty products from each County.** Brand and market Niagara County fruit as a County specialty. Determine a brand for Erie County agricultural specialties.
- **Promote links between local farmers and ethnic food markets.** Develop partnerships between refugee and immigrant organizations and farm groups to ensure farms to grow food that meets the needs of Buffalo-Niagara’s diverse cultures.
- **Create a regional “food hub.”** A food hub is both a facility and an organization that can help farmers share resources and aggregate products for more efficient sale to the market. Support the “Ready to Grow Food Hub Planning Project” by providing input on challenges and opportunities in the food system. More generally, support the development of programs and policies that increase the marketability of locally-grown food, including food hubs and farmer cooperatives.



**6. Preserve agricultural land.** Some of the region’s best farmland is vulnerable to conversion to new housing. Some of the best farmland has already been lost. Sustaining local agriculture in Buffalo Niagara will require preserving land for crops and livestock. Some of the means for achieving this goal will come to ground in the urban areas of the region. These are addressed in the section on Land Use and Development. But other direct means of preserving farmland need to be implemented.

- **Identify farmable soils.** Identify parcels not currently used for farming that could transition to agriculture. Determine parcel owners' interest in having the land farmed and find farmers looking to rent land. Connect interested parcel owners with farmers interested in farming more land. Identify farmable soils currently used for farming.
- **Protect valuable farmland** through purchase and transfer of development rights programs. Finance TDRs with revolving fund accounts used to pay farmers for development rights on their land. The municipalities' or counties' funds are later repaid by developers buying the development rights from the municipality or county.
- **Offer low-cost retirement planning services to farmers.** Our ability to keep farmland in agricultural production depends in large part on our ability to meet the needs of farmers who are retiring and have expected to retire on the proceeds from the sale of farmland.

**7. Promote sustainable agricultural methods.** Farming can have significant impacts on the environment, in both the food produced and in the by-products of production. More sustainable agricultural methods can help farmers use less water, energy, pesticides, protect streams and watersheds from farm pollution, and prepare for the impacts of climate change on farming.

- **Use less water.** Start by installing water meters on unmetered water delivery systems. Then build the capacity of farms to harvest rainwater.
- **Protect streams and watersheds.** Educate farmers about the environmental importance of stream buffers between agricultural land and waterways. Tie the education program to incentives for creating stream buffers. State or private funding agencies would reward farmers for creating stream buffers.
- **Facilitate Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) certification for local farmers** through grants and funding mechanisms, especially for small-scale farms. Encourage the minimization of pesticide use on farms.
- **Prepare for climate change.** Provide farmers with information on the effects of climate change on crop production to encourage them to grow products that will sustain a changing climate. Educate farmers about implementing long-term plans on their farms to diversify production.

**8. Promote a culture of healthier eating.** American eating habits have led to an epidemic of diabetes, heart disease, and obesity. Promoting healthier eating habits can help individuals live better lives and reduce the social costs of health care related to these diseases.

- **Transform the food environment in K-12 schools.** Launch a nutrition education program for local public schools that uses the classroom and the cafeteria to increase students' understanding of healthy and local food through local food purchasing and farmer demonstrations. Reward school districts financially for each locally-sourced meal they serve to students. Local funding agencies can promote procurement of the regionally-grown foods by paying school districts a fraction of the cost of each locally-sourced meal served.
- **Increase the consumption of fruits and vegetables.**
- **Encourage breast-feeding for the youngest members of the region’s population.** Modify building codes to mandate private areas specifically designated for breast-feeding mothers to feed their babies or pump breast milk.



Establish the structure and process to **adopt, implement, monitor, and revise the plan** as we go forward, relying on a model of network collaboration, shared accountability and mutual problem-solving and supported by tools for broad communication, informed decision-making, and continuous community-wide learning.

It’s a truism that plans are only as good as their implementation. One Region Forward has been designed from the beginning to promote the conditions and build a structure to ensure effective and timely implementation – even where it has been hard to get things done in the past.

- 1. Create the Buffalo Niagara Regional Planning Network.** Moving One Region Forward will build on the work of a broad-based stakeholder steering committee to create the Buffalo Niagara Regional Planning Network – a voluntary association of local governments, state and regional agencies, community based organizations, advocacy groups, and anchor institutions that will come together to share information, solve problems, hold one another accountable, monitor the results and otherwise “work the plan.”

The Planning Network will be supported by (an entity to be named later) to set a neutral table around which the members can convene. That supporting organization will prepare the agenda, facilitate its deliberations, and provide regular progress reporting. That work will be underwritten by membership fees from the participating agencies based on the size of their annual budget. However, much of the resources needed to make the process work will be provided in-kind by the participating agencies.

Participation in the Planning Network does not bind any agency to a particular course of action. Each participant retains all of the prerogatives they had when they walked in the door. They retain the right to pursue their own self-interest as they define it. However, they do bear a responsibility to work with others to promote the common interest – as defined, in part, by the plan.

- 2. Organize a regional public data gathering and analysis capacity.** Fulfilling the need for objective public data. Housing, property, transportation, energy use, land use, water quality, etc. etc. But also manifesting the commitment to build on existing staff – we’ll build a data team that puts staff from two counties, NFTA, GBNRTC, the larger municipalities, the University at Buffalo, NYS Department of Labor, and others as needed to plan the system and guide its management.
- 3. Provide best practices information and technical assistance.** Other regions have faced the same challenges we face in Buffalo Niagara and there is much we can learn from them. We will assemble a repository of best practices from around the nation and beyond on issues of transportation, housing, land use management, urban design, urban agriculture, green energy production and more. We will also organize the technical assistance capacity to help local officials and citizens put this knowledge into action.
- 4. Conduct and promote programs of public education on sustainability.** Broad-based change in the way we do things requires broad-based learning over time. One Region Forward will offer a Citizen Planning School in 2014 to kick off a long-range effort, providing elected officials, municipal staff, and citizens in general a comprehensive primer on sustainability topics. The consortium will organize on-line resources for continuing education. And partners in higher education and the public schools will develop on-going sustainability education programs for the long haul.

Certain core values animate our work to Move One Region Forward. These include collaboration, participation, learning, informed decision-making, stewardship for the future, and a commitment to build community wealth. The plan shows the way we can make these values a reality as we work to implement the actions needed to Move One Region Forward.

**C**ollaboration will be manifest, first and foremost, through the Buffalo Niagara Planning Network, where county and local governments, state and federal agencies, special purpose authorities, regional anchor institutions, community based organizations, advocacy groups and others will meet at the common public table to address together the urgent needs of our region. None must surrender their right to independent action in order to participate. All are entitled to define and pursue their own self-interests. But each must embrace the imperative to work together toward common goals and be accountable for what they do. In this way, we hope that the Network will inspire others in the region with a spirit of true collaboration.

**P**articipation is the cornerstone of a public plan that has democratic legitimacy. The development of the Plan to Move One Region Forward has been rooted in a continuous process of public outreach, engagement, and discussion. It has also been served by a sturdy structure of participation through a broad-based steering committee, representative bodies of local government officials and business leaders, open and interactive public events, and a continuous process of public communication. The work going forward will require the same kind of commitment to participation, with an ongoing emphasis on engaging populations traditionally left out of the planning process. We believe that democracy is sustainable and sustainability is democratic.

**L**earning must be an integral part of our work every step of the way. Achieving sustainability will require doing many things in a different way and that will require learning. We have already learned a great deal – in conversations with stakeholders and the public – on the way to creating this plan. We are all learning more about our region, how it works, and how it could work better. We have more to learn from other communities that are grappling with the same issues we are. The plan will organize ways to promote learning – among decision-makers, professionals, and citizens in general.

**I**nformed decision-making is the bedrock of responsible public action. The Plan to Move One Region Forward is rooted in the values we share as citizens. But it must also be grounded in objective data about the realities of what is happening – to our economy, our environment, our society and our climate. Gathering, sharing and understanding such data about conditions and trends has been a central part of the development of this plan and it must be a central part of the process of implementation, monitoring and adjustment going forward.

**S**tewardship for the future is one of our most fundamental responsibilities. What we do today will determine whether our children and our children's children are able to enjoy the same quality of life as we do. Many plans take a span of twenty years as their horizon. The Plan to Move One Region Forward looks ahead 40 years and beyond. At the same time we should keep in mind – however old we may be – it is likely we will experience at least some of the benefits of acting on this plan – or the burdens of failing to act.

**W**orking to build community wealth is another promise we make to each other. Whether we are producing goods and services for sale, building the places where we will make a life, or raising the next generation of citizens, we owe it to each other to ensure that the fruits of our labor stay here. Growing local and buying local are fundamental values for our work. Creating jobs that stay here and growing wealth that stays here are also fundamental commitments that are woven throughout this plan.

**F**ull-cost accounting must be a fundamental concept in how we understand the choices before us. It may seem cheaper to build houses on farmland, burn fossil fuels for transportation, shed storm water from building sites or abandon distressed or vacant homes, but each of these acts will come at a cost to be borne, not by the initial actor, but by others – neighbors downstream or downwind, government and taxpayers, or future generations. In other words, from a sustainability perspective, there's no such thing as an "externality." All costs and benefits are internal to the system and we need to think of them that way.

**E**quity is in our self-interest. Our society is riven by increasing inequality – in opportunity and conditions – and thus, so is our region. Many of our fellow citizens lack access to decent affordable housing, have limited options for getting around, inhabit environments that are unsafe or unhealthy, find it hard to find and purchase fresh healthy food and lack access to health care, education and employment. This is not just a burden on them, however. The degradation and disuse of this precious human capital is a burden on everyone, not just because of the cost of maintaining an increasingly threadbare "social safety net" but also because of the contribution to the commonwealth that they do not make. As we consider the future of our region, we must keep in mind that a more equitable society is in the self-interest of all and our decision making must reflect our aspirations for a more equitable and opportunity filled region.