



Finger Lakes Regional Economic Development Council Community Workshops

Public and Stakeholder Input on Regional Strengths, Critical Issues, and Opportunities for Economic Growth

The Finger Lakes Regional Economic Development Council held a series of community workshops to gather stakeholder and public input on the region's economic strengths, critical issues, and opportunities. The sessions were held in Batavia on August 29th, Brighton on August 30th, and Geneva on August 31st, 2011. The input from these sessions will aid the council in its formation of a five-year strategic plan for economic growth in the Finger Lakes region.

Nearly 500 local residents participated in the three community workshops. Following a presentation on the regional council's purpose and a review of the council's work completed to date, participants at each session broke into small groups for a facilitated discussion of the region's economy.

The first part of the facilitated session focused on regional strengths. Participants were asked their opinion on the most important strengths of the Finger Lakes region that can be used to promote economic growth. At the end of the discussion, the groups narrowed their brainstormed list down to the region's top three strengths.

Next, based on the region's current strengths, participants were asked to think about future opportunities for economic growth. Once again, the groups narrowed their list down to what they believed were the top three opportunities for economic growth in the region.

Finally, participants were asked about the roadblocks to economic growth that exist in our region, and to come up with the top three critical issues that must be addressed for the region to improve economically.

The ideas generated at the community workshops were shared with the regional council at their September 6th, 2011 meeting. On the next pages, a list of the top economic strengths and critical issues identified by stakeholders appears first, followed by a listing of opportunities that were identified. The ideas generated by the small groups at the public sessions included many similar ideas within the "strengths" and "critical issues" categories. There was much more variety in the opportunities identified by participants. Thus, the list of opportunities is significantly longer.



Regional Strengths

- Quality higher education system
- Skilled workforce
- Natural resources
- Education System K-12
- Agriculture and food processing industry
- Tourism industry
- Water resources
- Technology-based industries/Advanced manufacturers
- Quality of life
- Proximity to major markets
- Entrepreneurial spirit
- Research capacity
- Health care system
- Affordable housing
- Diverse economy

Critical Regional Issues

- Taxes
- Government regulations
- Lack of access to capital
- High cost of energy
- Insufficient workforce development funding
- Lack of sufficient infrastructure: road, water, sewer, broadband
- Lack of collaborative leadership
- Disparities in public education system
- Aging workforce; flight of younger workers
- Lack of skilled and middle-skilled workers
- Negative perception of the region
- Need to effectively market the region
- Public transportation needs improvement
- Threats to our environment
- Lack of government interagency cooperation

Economic Opportunities

- Support technology commercialization and creation of spin-offs from area research institutions
- Create incubators to support university research
- Market area strengths to attract business, residents, and tourism
- Use land/natural resource availability to promote and grow tourism
- Work to better align education resources with entrepreneurship
- Redevelop and reuse existing assets such as infrastructure, land and brownfields
- Take advantage of wine, water, and wilderness resources
- Focus on small business development
- Promote on-shoring by bringing specialty manufacturers back to the region

- Brand our regional agriculture assets
- Promote connectivity of investors and entrepreneurs
- Take advantage of our proximity to major markets and population centers
- Strengthen our higher education sector
- Promote entrepreneurship in the region
- There is capacity for growth in the tourism and hospitality industry
- Build on existing collaborations and industry clusters
- Promote agricultural innovation that creates supporting business
- Take advantage of our healthcare leadership
- Create more agriculture and food processing markets
- Take advantage of our strong biomedical research capabilities
- Match workforce and workforce training to existing jobs

- Drive investment and entrepreneurship opportunities in the supply chain and business services areas
- Capitalize on our water resource by attracting business that need that resource
- Utilize local suppliers and vendors
- Research and development of agriculture, biofuels and optics offers great potential
- Re-purpose existing facilities to retain and attract new businesses
- Attract new tech companies
- Encourage suppliers to stay
- Rebuild our energy potential through green-job innovation
- Take advantage of the agriculture industry's proximity to major markets
- Leverage recreational resources to grow tourism
- Support growth of small businesses by using incentives

- Align the educational system to meet businesses' workforce needs
- Re-purpose existing infrastructure and space for businesses
- Create better connections between colleges, businesses, and communities
- Market larger combined regions
- Promote lakefront development
- Establish model for efficient water use and capitalize on our water resources
- Market the low-cost availability of large facilities in the region
- Create job opportunities for all educational levels and ample workforce that is well-trained
- Improve the K-12 education system
- Engage and retain youth who come to the region for college
- Leverage higher education and healthcare system to attract physicians, researchers and students

- Pursue successful community development in neighborhoods and rural communities
- Market our available shovel-ready industrial sites and vacant buildings
- Support entrepreneurs through training and networking
- Endorse sustainable businesses
- Brand & expand Finger Lakes tourism
- Transform innovation into commerce
- Promote existing resources by growing companies locally
- Support better regional transportation, including high-speed rail
- Build on arts and natural resources to promote tourism
- Use local workforce for government contracts by using community benefit agreements
- Develop career pathways for students beginning in junior high school

- Revitalize downtown Rochester
- Help our business environment by lowering taxes and providing cheaper energy
- Utilize untapped intellectual property to develop new technologies
- Develop & grow green technology
- Pursue shovel-ready project sites for housing manufacturing & industry
- Capitalize on natural resources & transportation system
- Support collaborative regional tourism
- Use higher education and excellent K-12 schools to our advantage
- Spread Rochester's resources to other parts of region to grow the economy
- Connect kindergarten through higher education for career growth & skill development

- Develop school/business program to educate parents, students, and counselors of job and training opportunities
- Create a one stop shop for small business services
- Focus on growing medical businesses to support excellent medical facilities
- Build our workforce to support entrepreneurs
- Low-cost real estate aids in developing our assets
- Look to expand distribution businesses, as we have low cost transportation
- Take advantage of export opportunities
- Small town character allows for adaptable & affordable reuse/growth/expansion
- Get the next generation ready to engage
- Higher education- trained workforce draws people to the area and helps develop small businesses
- Create ways to not only retain, but also bring back talent pool (stop brain drain)

- Market our region to the talent pool and make opportunities known
- Utilize our training capacity for workforce development
- Preserve and enhance our natural environment
- Improve the condition of regional transportation systems
- Develop markets for local products and promote the region
- Forge higher education-technology partnerships to create internships, improve workforce
- Attract sustainable industries
- Use tourism/attractions as a draw to attract new residents and businesses
- Expand wine industry and allow wine sales in grocery stores
- Use green energy to draw people to our communities
- Brand our region with our tourism opportunities
- Educational institutions should respond to local needs via curriculum development

- Provide a better balance between secondary and post-secondary education would attract more people to region
- Support more direct, practical application of universities and research centers like Geneva's NYS agricultural experiment station
- Expand the arts, business base, and talent to attract new residents & tourists
- Promote quality of life via organic farming, clean water, etc.
- Expand advanced precision manufacturing
- Buy local
- Develop niche markets, especially for small winery and culinary businesses
- Create amenities to support tourism, recreation industries
- Attract food processing businesses based on our agricultural resources
- Expand vocational/skilled trades education for all

- Expand marketing of Finger Lakes tourism to attract residents
- Support agriculture industry including wineries, organic farms, family farming
- Develop Seneca Army Depot's potential as a manufacturing/renewable energy/distribution center

