

North Country Regional Economic Development Council
Public Forum on Monday, October 17, 2011 at Clarkson University, Potsdam, NY

Council Members and Staff: Tony Collins, Garry Douglas, Terry Gach, Bill Murray, Sally Brothers, Roseanne Murphy and Sean Maguire

Introductions were made by Tony Collins. Review of the REDC's role in reviewing grant applicants through the Consolidated Funding Application process, review of the planning process and award allocation. Review of work groups and strategic clusters.

Tony Collins discussed impediments to economic development. Garry Douglas reinforced the value and role of the plan in the future of economic development for the region.

A question was asked about what is the plan? Garry Douglas responded about the plan as part of a process for economic development. Bill Murray talked about the regional implementation agenda.

A question was asked if there will be stronger performance standards put into place. Garry Douglas responded that yes there will be. The REDC will be expected to re-evaluate standards and criteria set in order to respond to the economic environment. The state is also changing its position to a results-driven economic development program where funds are released upon positive performance, not prior to actions.

Tony Collins noted that population and geographic inequities will not be held against regions.

Tony Collins opened the floor to questions about process.

Q: I have not heard much about transportation at a regional level. Over the long-term, you need to seriously consider pushing for the Interstate 98 project.

Tony Collins mentioned that there is an infrastructure workgroup and I-98 is likely something that needs to come from a federal level. The I-98 project is not really a fit for state funding. If the project is determined to be a priority for the plan, then we should include it.

Q: Is the public participation workgroup going to be ongoing? It seems that only a few hundred people have been involved so far. Everyone needs to be involved.

G Douglas stated that public participation is a permanent component. It is required for and will be rated as part of the plan.

Q: I am a little confused. How does the 20%/80% play into the \$40 million?

T Collins: It doesn't. The 20%/80% relates to the \$80 million.

Q: How do you coordinate this CFA? Are all agencies involved? Do we apply to the CFA and Ag & Markets for funding?

R Murphy: All agencies are not involved at this point. Certain programs are currently involved and there is interest in expanding it. You may need to submit a CFA and talk with agencies at this moment.

T Collins opened the floor to general questions and comments.

- I represent YES11.org. We are a group interested in repairing Route 11 instead of developing I-98. There is a national meltdown associated with existing infrastructure. We would like to see Route 11 as part of the strategic plan. You will see some numbers about who is for and opposed to the Roof-Top Highway. We don't think that the numbers are accurate. We feel that NYSDOT had experience at looking at these things and they support the improvement of Route 11. In regards to regional values, I would like to see it assessed. It hasn't really been done.
- I am from Lyme Mountain and grew up in Chateaugay. I believe that dairy farmers have seen a recession turn into a depression. Dairy farmers are not making it alone. They need to transition into commodities. They should consider vertical farming (aeroponics, hydroponics) as a new opportunity. It is a sustainable way of farming. It decreases costs associated with fuel. It eliminates the need to pesticides and herbicides. This would also create a local source for food and supports the local economy.
- I spoke at a previous forum about YES11.org. I want to tell you a story. Around the region, you will see sheds around with hip roofs. The Amish work a lot of local wood in those buildings. Those woods are provided locally. The demand for hardwood has dropped and the Amish are now using softwoods like pine now. A friend of mine sits and looks at maps of the county to determine how to get wood around the weight restricted areas (roads, bridges). These bridges are getting old and deteriorating. In our Region 7 (NYSDOT) 1,210 bridges; 1 in 3 are deficient. In St. Lawrence county 126 bridges are deficient. [Various facts and figures supporting the speaker's position about the number of roads and bridges that need repair were given.]
- I've spoken at the last couple public meetings that I have attended. Canton has had a history of working effectively with state agencies to obtain funding, primarily for recreation and tourism development. We are anticipating that in this next round, we will submit more applications. We have a hard time attaching a job number to these projects. Will these projects with past history be given additional consideration without a hard jobs figure? My primary concern is that if there are other projects with a large number of jobs in the process...

Tony Collins: Tourism and recreation is a working group and is highly regarded in the region. RM: I cannot speak for other state agencies.

- I am the Vice-President of Finance at St. Lawrence. In that role, I have seen the impact of not having a larger highway in this region. I am speaking today as a resident, not in my role at St. Lawrence University. I support the development of a four-lane highway, commonly known as I-98. A report by Wilbur Smith for DANC as made recommendations for highway infrastructure for the region. The impacts of the highway will improve jobs; reduce local costs and other benefits. The study found that transportation in the region has been a concern and has influenced companies to grow elsewhere. I strongly urge the council to include I-98 in its plan.

- I am here representing the five child care coordinating organizations in the region. Child care is often overlooked. Any job creation must consider the need for child care and capacity. Child care is also small business and has a multi-million dollar impact to the region.
- I am not representing anyone. I am very glad seeing your strategic plan has an emphasis on small and local. I don't want to see more business because we need more business like everyone else. We have a lot of unique resources here. Quality of life matters a lot here. Keeping this place a different place is important. How much help is there for centralized projects that impact small-scale businesses, like common facilities (e.g. slaughterhouses).

Garry Douglas: Our agriculture working group discusses these topics.

- For over 20 years I have represented the League of Women Voters. I am here to bring information back to the LWV on matters. I am concerned with water quality on the St. Lawrence related to ballasts for ships. There are funds available from EPA to develop water treatment facilities. I hope you will consider this.
- I heard earlier that there are 55 places to get funding other than those included. I was thinking of the economic stimulus for distributing those funds. The true natural resource is here, farmland. The concrete cylinders you see along the road are signs of our farms. It became disdainful to be a farmer. The value comes through the farms and the earth. We've seem to forgotten this. We need milk bottling plants. California has happy cows. How they can afford to ship that across the country is unbelievable. We need simple financing at reasonable rates for farms. I cannot get banks to finance me. Tourism is a byproduct of a strong economy. Academia seems to be pushing people away from working the land. Our only two resources are the land and hard work. Can we get some equity in our taxes? In Manhattan, a \$9 million condo pays less in taxes and a \$1 million outhouse here?
- Thank you to the council. I have had a concern about this process in the speed versus depth category. I'm unsure about how to get through seven counties in eight weeks. I am pleased to see that this process continues. It is impossible to canvass all of the counties from an arts and culture committee in ten days for this plan. I hope this process continues. Second, I was glad to identify arts and culture as a strategic area. There is little arts representation around the state except maybe in a tourism area. Arts and culture are typically only thought of under tourism. I think we are ahead of the game for emphasizing the role of the arts. The NYSCA is the primary source of funding for the arts in New York. The agency has been cut and cut each year. It limits our ability to develop art and culture resources. Many of the agencies in the CFA are not funding arts directly. My last concern is that I have not heard about our Native American communities and they have been traditionally overlooked. It is important to have their voice and be involved.

Garry Douglas: We reached out to Lindsey Tarbell with the St. Regis Mohawk at the start of this process. We extended an invitation to be involved in workgroups.

- It goes without saying that people leave this area for lack of work or opportunity. The young people leave and are not being retained. Over the past 20 years, a diverse group of people have been working towards the development of I-98. A significant number of municipalities and

elected officials have supported the development of this project. We must address the lack of east-west infrastructure. Only a limited access, four-lane highway will help the region grow. A large number of jobs would be created by this project according to the GAO. Nothing is more transformational than the development of I-98 for this region. It is imperative that the tiered environmental review begin for this project using earmarked funds. I would ask that this group look at the \$6.3 million cannot be spent on anything else except for the tiered environmental review and release those funds. This is the only region in the state without access to a four-lane highway.

- Comment from participant on energy.
- I am affiliated with an organization that has been here for 20+ years. We have been seeking a focus on the understanding and respect of culture in this region. We are operating without a dime from government and with volunteers. We need to work with what we have. We hope to have a cultural center here in this beautiful area.
- I want to clarify a point about the highway discussion. The 2002 study suggested a rural expressway, not a freeway like I-81.