

New York City Regional Economic Development Council  
Vision Statement Working Group Meeting  
Office of Empire State Development  
Thursday, August 18, 2011, 11 a.m.

Summary

Co-facilitators:

Steve Lemson, American Express  
Suri Duitch, CUNY

Attending:

Kenneth J. Knuckles, UMEZDC  
Marcel van Ooyen, GrowNYC  
Marlene Cintron, Bronx Overall EDC  
Ademola Oyefeso, representing Stuart Appelbaum  
Amy Sugimori, representing Mike Fishman  
Shauneequa Owusu, representing Francine Delgado  
Peter Spinella, representing Nick Lugo  
Josh Gold, representing Peter Ward  
Michael Slattery, representing Steve Spinola  
Raymond Sanchez, representing BP Diaz  
John Bittner, representing Melva Miller, BP Marshall's Office  
Tokumbo Shobowale, NYC Mayor's Office  
Merrill Pond, Partnership for NYC  
Jonathan Bowles, Center for an Urban Future  
Jay Hershenson, CUNY  
Howard Apsan, CUNY  
Joe Tazewell, ESD and Executive Director  
John Moyer, DOL  
Tara Brooks-Smith, DOL  
Nydia Lloyd, DOL  
Maisha Lopa, intern  
David Weinberger, intern

Steve Lemson, representing co-chair Kenneth Chenault, introduced himself and then introduced Suri Duitch, who was representing co-chair Matthew Goldstein, and explained that the group's task was to develop a vision (and a context for that vision) that will become the vision statement portion of the strategic plan.

Suri began by asking attendees to offer their views of what the vision statement should include, keeping in mind that the goal is a focused and clear statement that helps the council make a strong case for New York City; it should be both aspirational and achievable. She suggested that they focus on *who* the statement is about, *what* it is about (specific sectors or projects), and *where* it is about (specific neighborhoods and boroughs).

Responses included: job creation and competitive advantage; engaging the disengaged; the diversity of the region (all five boroughs) and expansion and retention (jobs and industry); having a multi-industry focus, multiple types of job creation, and creating “good” jobs; favorable business environment; sustainable economic development; creating a “sustainable” business environment (including removing the barriers to business development); addressing the challenges and opportunities in which the state can play the biggest role; maximizing assets and resources, bolstering each borough’s strengths, and creating jobs for the future; leveraging assets and retaining the city’s place as a “center of gravity”; building accountability into the plan; and incentivizing capital investment and lowering the cost of doing business.

Discussion followed about whether the plan should focus on points of leverage where investments are already taking place, with several attendees suggesting citywide investment, with a view to the totality of the region, and a focus not on a laundry list of projects but on programmatic elements that could be applied in different places.

Suri asked who the statement should be about. Several comments addressed the need to retain existing businesses by reducing regulation and strengthening workforce development, and helping all businesses, regardless of size, form, thrive, and grow. A focus on human capital was discussed, including addressing entrenched unemployment among black and Latino men; building and supporting the city’s workforce; and being competitive nationally and internationally. Other comments included the importance of the city’s economic diversity, the need to take advantage of growth opportunities, the need to retain a competitive workforce, and the need to build the skills of people who lack them.

Discussion followed about the fact that human capital development must be done in concert with the business community—i.e., marrying workforce development with the needs of business in order to be competitive. Affordable higher education and job training are key to helping people get ready for a global marketplace. A long-term investment in the structurally unemployed is important, including identifying sectors with low barriers to entry; training in the absence of jobs is an empty exercise. Engaging veterans was mentioned as an important part of developing human capital.

Several other areas of possible focus were discussed, including the city’s historical assets—the waterfront, for example—as well as industries with low barriers to entry, such as green tech; tourism (with 50 million visitors last year); and transportation. Incentivizing the energy that immigrants have brought to the city was discussed; they start a disproportionate share of jobs, but too few get to the next level. Removing regulatory and other barriers to opening businesses and facilitating their growth was also discussed. Attendees cautioned that if the statement is all inclusive, it is not meaningful, and that there is not uniformity within sectors; specific parts of health care, for example, are growing, while others are not.

Suri asked about leveraging opportunities, and several ideas emerged: the city’s PlaNYC initiative; the transit system (an asset controlled by the state, and the lifeblood of the city); the industrial sections of the city; wholesale markets; airports; higher education, particularly CUNY; tourism; and the tech sector.

Quality of life was introduced as a possible part of the vision, which led to discussion about removing the barriers to the creation of parks and waterfront construction (waterfront being the “next frontier”). Underutilized physical assets (such as the the High Line) exist across the city, which, through public-private investment, could bring in jobs and spur economic development.

Other considerations mentioned were the possibility of focusing on how to get the available money, which is small, into the right hands, perhaps through intermediary organizations that can distribute money to small businesses; the importance of addressing the public policies, regulatory barriers, and enforcement issues that could facilitate job and business growth; and looking at areas consistent with federal policy, e.g., the Coastal Jobs Creation Act in Congress, which would help in the future.

Near the end of the discussion, attendees focused on major emerging themes. Transit access and overall affordability (housing, energy) are key to quality of life and retaining skilled workers. A modernized, expansive transit system is critical to the city's future (it offers access to affordable housing). Transit could also include airports, high-speed rail, and local rail (freight), and would help with economic linkages to upstate. Job creation is also critical; pockets of New York City have been just as devastated by the recession as other parts of the state. Also, while New York City has done well in recent years, it is facing more competition for talent and businesses now. Major corporations have left the city because of high taxes, high rent, and a bad business environment; the city must be business friendly. Several themes seem to be competitiveness, human capital, and accessibility (transit), and the point should be made to the state that assistance in these areas helps the entire state.

The group adjourned at about 12:20 p.m.