

**OPEN FOR BUSINESS:
A NEW STATE GOVERNMENT APPROACH TO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
New York City Regional Economic Development Council**

**Infrastructure Work Group
Tuesday, September 20, 2011, 11 a.m.
Empire State Development Corporation**

Meeting Summary

Facilitator

Dr. Suri Duitch of CUNY

Attendees

Matthew Goldstein, CUNY chancellor (co-chair), represented by Jay Hershenson
Stuart Appelbaum, RWDSU, represented by Zayne Abdessalam
Cesar Claro, Staten Island EDC, represented by Steven Grillo
Dr. Marcia V. Keizs, York College/CUNY, represented by Dr. Alfred Ntoko
Steve Spinola, REBNY, represented by Angela Sung Pinsky
Douglas C. Steiner, Steiner Studios, represented by John Eddey
Robert Steel, NYC City Hall, represented by Tokumbo Shobowale
Ruben Diaz Jr., Bronx Borough president, represented by Raymond Sanchez
Curtis Cravens, DOS
John Moye, NYS Department of Labor
Marion Phillips, Empire State Development Corp.
Joseph Tazewell, Empire State Development Corp.
Sanjoy Banerjee, CUNY
Michael Bobker, CUNY
Ted Brown, CUNY
Hope Cohen, Regional Planning Association
Fredericka Cuenca, MTA
Amanda Daly, CUNY
Thomas Donaldson, NYC Council
Jack Friedman, Queens Chamber of Commerce
Laura Imperiale, Tully Construction Group
Jennifer Hensley, Association for a Better NY
Geoffrey D. Kravitz, Esq., Staten Island Chamber of Commerce
Andrew Manshel, Greater Jamaica Development Corp.
Michael Scotto, Partnership for NY
Joseph Simenic, LMDC
Gillian Small, CUNY
Bill Solecki, CUNY

MEETING SUMMARY

Facilitator Suri Duitch asked the participants to talk about specific projects that could be proposed for the five-year plan. The categories were: transportation; waterfront development; and environmental sustainability in buildings and construction.

She summarized the work that has been done so far, reminding everyone that Nov. 14 is the deadline for submitting the five-year plan to the state and that Oct. 31 is the first deadline for CFA projects. She asked everyone to keep the shaping criteria that the council has developed in mind when making suggestions, which will be presented at the regional council meeting on Oct. 4.

TRANSPORTATION

Moving Goods

The group talked about solutions for moving people and moving goods. There was general agreement that New York City is losing business because of traffic congestion, high tolls and inefficiencies in its transit systems, which often do not coordinate their efforts to provide the shortest, cheapest alternatives.

It was suggested that the tolling policy could be changed immediately to encourage travel at off-peak times and that businesses be given incentives to shift their schedules. Someone mentioned that there's a fruit and vegetable vendor on Staten Island who sends trucks all the way to Philadelphia three times a week to buy produce because it's cheaper than paying the tolls to go Hunts Point Market.

It also was suggested that Amtrak rails and LIRR rails that are not being used be opened to freight use. The idea was to "look at how to reclaim our unused assets," one participant said.

TRANSPORTATION

Moving People

Dutch asked for suggestions on strategies and projects that would get people to their jobs.

Select bus service was suggested, and it was pointed out that some improvements, including the introduction of "smart cards" that speed the boarding process, already are in play.

Adding ferries also was suggested as a way to have a multi-region impact, especially if they are coordinated to connect to other means of transportation. Staten Island was mentioned as the borough that needs new ways of getting people off and on the island. It was pointed out that Metro-North and the subway system should work more closely, and the Metro-North Yankee Stadium stop was mentioned as one that needs to be rethought "because no one can access it unless going to a game; there has to be a better way to transfer from one to the other."

The discussion turned to the zoning density around transit hubs, and it was suggested that development at less-traveled stations where zoning is already in place should be encouraged with incentives.

WATERFRONT DEVELOPMENT

Increasing the number of ferries came up again, and the Rockaways was mentioned as one spot that is in dire need of such service.

Although some members said commercial enterprises should be encouraged for the waterfront, others supported greenscapes, like parks. It was suggested that the most viable option would be a project that included a mix of small businesses, open land and housing.

Others advocated using the waterfront “for technology options to address research” that could produce new things that could be shared with the rest of the country and even the world.

Duitch asked where the best places for development should be. Red Hook, Brooklyn, was suggested because the lack of much public transportation has isolated its population.

When it was mentioned that the city’s comprehensive plan includes some 300 waterfront projects, Duitch took suggestions on which of them the group should focus on. The answers were different for each borough. In Staten Island, for instance, it was noted that smaller projects or an aggregate of them would work best and that such projects lead to “corridor projects” that have a “multiplier effect.” Someone countered that as the regional council, the group should focus on projects that involve a cargo area or a pier whose development would affect the entire region. Jamaica Bay was brought up as a successful example of low-commercial development.

It was brought up that regulatory relief – from the city, state and even the federal government -- would go a long way toward encouraging development in the region.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY IN BUILDINGS AND CONSTRUCTION

When Duitch called for projects, the subject of private/public partnerships came up and Citibank, which is looking for investment tools for energy retrofitting, was mentioned. Another suggestion was that retrofitting schools would bring outside vendors to New York City to do business.

It was pointed out that because energy retrofitting is a new concept, many people in the trades do not have the skills to do it. In Jamaica, for instance, a 60,000-square-foot building did not get a retrofit because “we couldn’t find anyone to do it.” It was acknowledged that there’s a “gap between education and experience in this field” that could be rectified, in part, if the lines of communication were more open between the business and educational communities. And there was a call for New York City to relax its strict green codes to entice more businesses to locate here and work here.

Congestion relief on the energy grid for buildings and “demand charge” reductions were discussed in terms of creating jobs in the local area.

Duitch tabled the talk on jobs, saying that human capital would be discussed in another session.

A virtual center that connects large and small businesses was suggested for the long-term plan as were research and technology centers that would rival those of Silicon Valley. The energy-efficiency plans, it was noted, could be rolled out to the rest of the state, the nation and even the world.

Duitch opened the discussion to the topics of amenities like parks as well as stormwater management.

When the subject of private-public partnerships was brought up, it was pointed out that New York should follow the lead of Europe, where schools and housing, not large transit projects, are the best applications because they are replicable. The Goethals Bridge, bus shelters that carry private ads and the bike share program were cited as examples of private/public partnerships.

Upgrading the subways, recasting stormwater management in a green infrastructure, the use of recycled materials in concrete and asphalt and developing a new infrastructure to accommodate plug-ins for electric cars were discussed. It was pointed out that green roofs could be turned into money makers by opening them up for use by private entities.

One project that came up was reclaiming the Amtrak rails in the East Bronx, which already is under way but is not completely funded.

It was suggested that building owners should be given incentives to make space available for small businesses. With technology manufacturing jobs, it was suggested that there could be proposals where the heavy manufacturing work was done upstate and components like software could be created in New York City. There was a call to acknowledge that there's still heavy industry in New York City that should be protected.

A plan to sell the Javits Convention Center, which was mentioned at the Aug. 23 meeting of the regional council, was reiterated. The center would be split into a high-end conference center housed at the James Farley Post Office building in Manhattan and into a trade-show facility in Queens, which is close to the airports.

Dutch recapped the session's points and asked participants to think about whether the group should be looking to the Economic Development Corp. for projects that are under way and whether the projects should be sprinkled throughout the boroughs.

It was pointed out that to win the development competition, the New York City region "should not be focusing on what we need but how the city could be a magnet of development for other parts of the state."

Dutch said that the next time the group meets, participants will be responding to written documents. She urged participants to continue to send ideas and documents and to be ready to respond when she sends them documents for comment.

She adjourned the meeting at 12:30 p.m.