



JUNE 2009 *Local Government Council*

What's Next for Upstate New York?

Guest speakers at this month's Local Government Council (LGC) meeting included Stephen Acquario, Executive Director of the New York State Association of Counties; Peter Baynes, Executive Director of the New York State Conference of Mayors; and Jeff Haber, Executive Director of the New York State Association of Towns. The panelists, in a presentation entitled "What's Next for Upstate New York? Sustaining the Tech Valley Initiative and New Directions," discussed issues facing upstate New York and opportunities for transformational change. Topics included unemployment rates, workforce development, property taxes, and business attraction and retention.

The panel began with sobering news about the unemployment rate in New York State. According to the NYS Association of Counties Business Barometer, a total of 22 counties in New York currently exceed the national unemployment rate of 8.6%, and an additional 18 counties equal or exceed the state unemployment rate of 7.5%. In a typical economy, State

unemployment hovers around 4%. Reflecting on the significance of these numbers, Stephen Acquario explained that we have hit a perfect storm that will continue into the foreseeable future – in conjunction with the recession, high unemployment rates, and skyrocketing property taxes, the census is due in 2010. Flat growth in the state's population means New York could lose up to two more seats in the House of Representatives when the seats are reapportioned. This also means the amount of federal funds received by the state would decrease drastically.

In addressing how to ease unemployment, the panel emphasized that Tech Valley should position itself to foster job growth in emerging fields such as "green" jobs. They pointed to The Southern Tier of New York, a consortium of local Workforce Investment Boards, as an example of a region's success in improving its competitive advantage by improving the supply and quality of the region's talent pipeline through transformation strategies built around a sector-based approach focused on the region's Talent Attraction, Talent Development, and Talent Retention strategies. A summary of the program is available at:

The Local Government Council (LGC) was founded in 1997 to give local government leaders a forum to identify issues of importance to municipalities, to discuss opportunities for regional cooperation and to foster working relationships among local leaders.



Co-Chair
Gerald D. Jennings
Mayor of Albany



Co-Chair
Kathleen M. Jimino
Rensselaer
County Executive

Paterson Unveils Bold Steps to the New Economy

Governor Paterson unveiled Bold Steps to the New Economy: A Jobs Plan for the People of New York in New York City on Monday. The Governor highlighted the emergence of a New Economy based on knowledge, technology and innovation - and outlined his vision for how New York will lead this New Economy. The plan capitalizes on federal stimulus dollars to drive economic recovery in the fields of energy, environmental protection, technology and health care. The Governor announced the creation of an Innovation Economy Matching Grants program that will provide a 10 percent match for every stimulus dollar the federal government awards through competitive grants to research facilities in New York State. www.state.ny.us/governor

Call to Members

Members are encouraged to contact the region's state legislative delegation to express their views on critical issues including Empire Zone amendments, Civic Facility and IDA reforms and Pension Reform issues. Below is a link to a list of NYS Legislators: www.nysedc.org/legislativenews/committee.shtml

“WHAT’S NEXT” CONT’D

www.labor.state.ny.us/workforcenypartners/sectoral/csssummary.htm

Peter Baynes outlined two approaches to address the monumental property taxes faced by our region. First, Mr. Baynes recommended reducing tax shifting and the number of state mandates, as they hinder the capacity of local officials to manage government costs. For more information, he directed members to www.stopthetaxshift.org, a website created by the New York Conference of Mayors to address these issues. The second approach involves the “New N.Y. Government Reorganization and Citizen Empowerment Act,” recently proposed by Attorney General Andrew Cuomo to give communities the power to reform local governments. Although Mr. Baynes believes consolidation is an important and effective step for the sustainability of many communities, he believes the process needs adjustments. Jeff Haber added that the implications of the Act for smaller towns are dramatic due to the percentage of population required for a vote. He recommended that municipalities complete a feasibility study before proceeding with municipal consolidation projects, as the

savings may not materialize at the level anticipated.

Mr. Haber also stated that state government should revisit its business attraction and retention policies and revise programs that make it challenging for businesses to survive. While we live in a region with outstanding educational, cultural and recreational resources, with the myriad of programs, fees, and laws applicable to businesses, it is sometimes difficult to enhance the area’s current economic growth.

The panel’s message was clear: in paraphrasing an article from the *Times Union*, Mr. Acquario stated that our day of reckoning has arrived. With communities facing the largest fiscal challenge in the last 50 years, it is time to rewrite the social contract between New York State and its citizens and to rethink the role of government.

The panel also addressed issues such as regional approaches to economic development, shared services, the state’s management of the Empire Zone program, pension tiers, and IDA reform.

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LGC Action Platform

Mayor Matt Driscoll from Syracuse hosted a conference call on May 21 on upstate high-speed rail projects and the funding track from the Federal Railroad Administration through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (Recovery Act). There are three funding tracks and applications are due in late summer/early fall. Projects will be identified from the State rail plan that was updated last year and will be

prioritized after the FRA holds a guidance session on June 17. Local support of these initiatives is a critical part of the application process and a Community Impact Study will need to be completed for each application. Affected communities will be asked to assist in compiling the Community Impact Statement information and Mayor Driscoll’s team will be coordinating this effort.



Upcoming LGC Meetings

2018 Olympics
June 24 | 11:30 am – 1:00 pm
United Way of the Greater Capital Region

David Catafamo, Executive Director of The Lake Placid Regional Winter Sports Commission, will discuss a regional approach to future Olympic bids.

Upcoming CEG Events

CEG Member Breakfast
June 30 | 7:30 am – 9am

College of St. Rose
Congressman Paul Tonko

Upstate Regional Blueprint Fund

June 15th is the deadline to submit applications to access the \$120 million Upstate Regional Blueprint Fund to finance business investment, infrastructure upgrades and downtown redevelopment. The Fund will support projects that help provide a framework for future growth in regions with stymied development. The Blueprint Fund, which will be administered by Empire State Development (ESD), will help to attract businesses, improve commerce and revitalize local economies.
www.empire.state.ny.us/UpstateDownstateFund