

Upstate New York Roundtable – Linking Community Revitalization and Environmental Restoration in the Great Lakes Region

Executive Summary

On Sept. 18, 2007, nearly 60 participants – representing state agencies, local government associations, regional and local organizations and statewide interests groups involved in land use, development and protection – gathered at the *Upstate New York Roundtable – Linking Community Revitalization and Environmental Protection in the Great Lakes Region*. Facilitated by the Great Lakes Commission, with financial support from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the roundtable provided a unique opportunity to showcase past successes, discuss present challenges and identify a range of strategies for linking land conservation, development and redevelopment to improve the health and vitality of the Great Lakes region.



Lunch keynote - John Austin

A diverse array of speakers discussed past and current state initiatives that link community revitalization and environmental protection in upstate New York. Among these were the Open Space Program, Quality Communities, Local Waterfront Revitalization Program, canal system revitalization and the Upstate New York Regional Blueprints. Representatives of local and regional organizations – the Western New York Land Conservancy and city of Oswego -- shared their experiences of how some of these programs were implemented. In opening remarks, Mr. Paul Beyer, Special Assistant for the Environment in Governor Spitzer's Executive Office, emphasized that revitalizing upstate New York is a chief priority of the Governor's new administration, and he highlighted several recent senior officials appointed by the Governor for their extensive qualifications in developing and promoting smart growth programs.

The lunch keynote address was given by John Austin, a senior fellow with The Brookings Institution, who outlined Brookings' Great Lakes Economic Initiative, in which he is a leading collaborator. He shed light on the revitalization potential of not only upstate New York, but the entire Great Lakes region as well. Austin noted that the Great Lakes region:

- Is a highly integrated economy that, were it an independent country, would have the third largest GDP in the world;
- Is home to 30 percent of North America's corporate headquarters, and 11 percent of the world's; and
- Is a world center of talent generation, innovation and infrastructure for sustainable growth, conferring 41 percent of the nearly 3 million university and college degrees awarded each year in Canada and the United States.

The balance of the roundtable discussions focused on 18 strategies for addressing urban revitalization and space protection. These strategies were derived from a suite of recommendations from a 2001 Great Lakes Commission report, *Linking Brownfields Redevelopment and Greenfield Protection for Sustainable Development in the Great Lakes Basin*, as well as from other studies and reports generated by New York

State agencies and stakeholder groups. Of the 18 strategies, participants determined those highlighted below offered the best opportunity for the state to:

- a. Improve links among conservation, development and redevelopment issues in upstate New York; and
- b. Enhance collaboration between state agencies and municipalities. More than half of the participants indicated that they would carry the strategies in their future work activities.

The New York Roundtable was a success in meeting pre-set objectives to:

1. Brief roundtable participants on the variety of existing and recommended programs, resources and strategies related to land conservation and development and redevelopment, and related “smart growth” initiatives;
2. Provide a forum for participants to network;
3. Improve information sharing by employing various communication techniques and technologies; and
4. Identify opportunities to enhance the benefits of regional and statewide programs, resources and strategies as they may apply within the Great Lakes basin portion of New York State.

Strategies for Urban Revitalization and Open Space Protection in Upstate New York	
1.	Enhance state agency coordination for state-funded projects
2.	Encourage and fund the development of local comprehensive plans
3.	Integrate green- and blueways in community planning and growth strategies
4.	Investigate the expansion of user and impact fees
5.	Increase local capacity to inventory wildlife habitat, cultural and historic resources
6.	Improve accessibility to state information for business location decisions
7.	Increase local funding for farmland protection
8.	Make risk of development a priority eligibility criteria for acquisition programs
9.	Enable local authority to use real estate transfer fees to fund conservation
10.	Fund linkages between farms, farmers’ markets and restaurants
11.	Designate historic districts and expand historic tax credit
12.	Provide tax incentives for brownfields that are local redevelopment priority
13.	Capacity-building workshops for economically challenged neighborhoods
14.	Develop/disseminate community development guidebooks
15.	Promote small-scale infill development
16.	Adopt flexible, local zoning regulations and design guidelines
17.	Sponsor design competitions for redevelopment / smart growth
18.	Encourage green technology to reduce fossil fuel use