

Regional Priorities 2006

RPA Board and State Committees Meeting
January 10, 2006

The Harvard Club
27 West 44th Street
New York City

The Tri-State Metropolitan Region is in a period of political transition, which brings new opportunities for progress on regional investments and policies. Elections in New York City and New Jersey have brought us a second term for Mayor Michael Bloomberg and a new administration in Governor-elect Jon Corzine. Even as these two leaders lay out their agenda for the next four years, New York State and Connecticut are preparing for gubernatorial elections in just ten months.

This document presents RPA's priorities for the Greensward, Centers and Mobility campaigns and identifies specific goals that RPA will work to achieve with the newly-elected administrations or raise as issues to be addressed in the gubernatorial campaigns. The issues are often cross-cutting and transcend political boundaries. For the purposes of this document, we have categorized them by campaign and geography, and simplified the issues.

New York City

Greensward

- Adopt a plan for Governors Island that builds parks and preserves the Island first, including allocating sufficient capital dollars to begin design and site preparation.
- Establish the interim route of the Brooklyn Waterfront Greenway and begin construction of the specific segments of the permanent route.

Centers

- Develop Manhattan's Far West Side, including Moynihan Station and the Javits Expansion.
- Make major progress in rebuilding Lower Manhattan by renegotiating the Silverstein lease and diversifying the program for the World Trade Center Site, advancing a plan for cultural and memorial institutions and implementing off-site revitalization projects throughout Lower Manhattan.
- Promote affordable housing and commercial development in Outer Borough centers.

Mobility

- Begin construction and secure full funding for the Second Avenue Subway and East Side Access.
- Implement a congestion pricing strategy for the core of the metropolitan region.

New Jersey

Greensward

- Permanently protect the large, unfragmented forests and watersheds of the New Jersey Highlands through the adoption and implementation of a strong plan by the Highlands Regional Council.
- Reauthorize the Garden State Preservation Trust and ensure a stable source of funding to meet the goal of preserving a million acres of open space and farmland in New Jersey.

Centers

- Reform New Jersey's property tax system to promote better land use.
- Achieve the community development goals of the State Development and Redevelopment Plan by attracting increased development to existing communities and downtowns.

Mobility

- Restore the Transportation Trust Fund and a vision for transportation investments.
- Secure financing and complete planning for a new passenger rail tunnel under the Hudson River.

Connecticut

Greensward

- Establish a Long Island Sound Stewardship System and designate a pilot site for preservation.
- Protect the Connecticut Highlands from over-development.

Centers

- Adopt a state-wide Smart Growth Strategy.

Mobility

- Improve mobility on Connecticut's primary corridors to improve the ride to work and stimulate job growth.

New York State

Greensward

- Establish a Long Island Sound Stewardship System and designate a pilot site for preservation.
- Develop legislation to establish New York State's fourth Forest Preserve in the Highlands.

Centers

- Redevelop the Nassau Hub.
- Generate and implement a vision for focusing growth on Long Island and in the Hudson Valley.

Mobility

- Select a Tappan Zee Bridge expansion program that meets the mobility and land use goals for the Lower Hudson Valley.
- Develop a comprehensive freight and logistics strategy that builds on plans for a new Trans-Hudson Freight Tunnel.

New York City

Greensward

Adopt a plan for Governors Island that builds parks and preserves the Island first, including allocating sufficient capital dollars to begin design and site preparation.

In autumn 2006, the Governors Island Preservation and Education Corporation will adopt a draft general project plan that will set out a framework for the Island's redevelopment as well as memoranda of understanding with one or more private sector partners. This plan and any agreements should include specific commitments to preservation, park design, and funding. An expanded set of interim park programs should start immediately, with a goal of opening the permanent park by 2009 – the 400th anniversary of Henry Hudson's trip up the Hudson River.

Establish the interim route of the Brooklyn Waterfront Greenway and begin construction of the specific segments of the permanent route.

When it is complete, the Brooklyn Waterfront Greenway will run 14 miles from Greenpoint to Bay Ridge, stitching together a dozen distinct waterfront neighborhoods along Brooklyn's dynamic waterfront. The location of the interim greenway has been adopted by the Department of Transportation, and signage and on-street striping of this route should be completed this summer. Thanks to City DOT and federal transportation funding obtained by the office of Congresswoman Nydia Velazquez, design and construction of sections of the permanent, 30 foot wide off-street greenway will start this year.

Centers

Develop Manhattan's Far West Side, including Moynihan Station and the Javits Expansion.

Development of Manhattan's Far West Side into a 24/7, mixed-use extension of the Central Business District remains a top priority of RPA and the Bloomberg administration. Despite adoption of a sweeping rezoning of the area, plans remain in limbo in the wake of the stadium defeat. In the coming years, RPA hopes to see construction of Moynihan Station act as a catalyst for development; a comprehensive plan put forward for mixed-use development on the Eastern and Western Rail Yards; construction of a Javits expansion; and a delay in construction of the #7 Subway extension to allow for the recovery of Lower Manhattan and to link to a constructed Second Avenue Subway. An outstanding question and opportunity surrounds the potential move of Madison Square Garden and the re-use of the Penn Station site, which could dramatically change the outlook for the area.

Make major progress in rebuilding Lower Manhattan by renegotiating the Silverstein lease and diversifying the program for the World Trade Center Site, advancing a plan for cultural and memorial institutions and implementing off-site revitalization projects throughout Lower Manhattan.

More than four years after the 9/11 attacks the future of Ground Zero and Lower Manhattan remain very much in doubt. The commercial program at Ground Zero is held hostage to an outdated lease arrangement and a lawsuit over insurance proceeds. Concerns about how the memorial and cultural program will be funded remain unanswered. In the coming years RPA hopes to see the creation and full-funding of a memorial and cultural program that honors the lives lost and also celebrates the continuation of life in Lower Manhattan; a revised development program for the WTC site that provides a greater mix of uses and allows development of viable commercial activities, such as retail and hotel, to begin even if the Freedom Tower is not ready to move ahead or remains unoccupied; the advancement of worthy off-site revitalization projects such as the East River Waterfront revitalization, Hudson River Park, Fulton Street Corridor improvements, and a comprehensive streetscape management plan which rationalizes Lower Manhattan's maze of streets and capitalizes on the neighborhood's excellent transit connections.

Promote affordable housing and commercial development in Outer Borough centers.

Through an intensive public process with broad community input, the city should develop a strategic plan that identifies where and how it will create the housing to accommodate a projected 1.3 million new residents over the next 25 years, using tools such as inclusionary zoning to provide housing at a range of income levels. Both housing and commercial development should be concentrated in underutilized areas around the transit system. Particular areas of opportunity include Downtown Brooklyn, Long Island City, Jamaica, and communities along the Long Island Rail Road in Queens that could receive new service as a result of East Side Access. To implement the city's plan for Downtown Brooklyn, including whatever final project emerges at the Atlantic Yards, a robust transportation program on a similar scale needs to be developed and implemented. In Long Island City, the new Long Island Rail Road service that will come with East Side Access needs to be developed into a genuinely intermodal station with a bold vision for development of Sunnyside Yards.

Mobility

Begin construction and secure full funding for the Second Avenue Subway and East Side Access.

With the passage of the Transportation Bond Act in November, the MTA has enough funding to begin construction of the first phase of Second Avenue Subway and East Side Access for LIRR. The completion of both projects – and the continued health of the overall transit system – is reliant on identifying new, long-term revenue sources for funding the operational and capital needs of the system. In the coming years we expect construction to begin on the Second Avenue Subway and East Side Access. The system will also require new revenue sources and short-term improvement projects (such as bus rapid transit) that upgrade weaker areas of the system while this generation of expansion projects is completed.

Implement a congestion pricing strategy for the core of the metropolitan region.

With the tremendous success of congestion pricing in London and elsewhere, hopes for implementing a similar system in New York have been raised over the past several years. The idea was a political nonstarter in the first Bloomberg term and City officials recently expressed a similar pessimism for the concept in the next four years. Still, a wide range of constituencies – from transit advocates like RPA, the Straphangers Campaign and Transportation Alternatives, to the business-focused Partnership for NYC – have done studies on pricing and are enthusiastic about its implementation. RPA hopes to see the issue seriously raised again soon and fully studied by the Bloomberg administration with the goal of initial implementation in the next four years.

New Jersey

Greensward

Permanently protect the large, unfragmented forests and watersheds of the New Jersey Highlands through the adoption and implementation of a strong plan by the Highlands Regional Council.

The plan, scheduled to be adopted by the Highlands Council in June 2006, should set out a specific land use, regulatory and investment framework for this geographic region, including a workable transfer of development rights program to ensure that this protection is permanent and economically feasible, and that sustainable development in more appropriate areas in towns in the Highlands is planned and built.

Reauthorize the Garden State Preservation Trust and ensure a stable source of funding to meet the goal of preserving a million acres of open space and farmland in New Jersey.

In less than two years, the GSPT will run out of money, much earlier than anticipated and significantly short of its goal to preserve another million acres of open space and farmland. RPA strongly supported the constitutional dedication of funds in 1999 as a means to advance the greensward goal of the Third Regional Plan. Rising land prices and development pressures, along with a higher-than-anticipated backlog of recreation and park stewardship needs, has caused the GSPT fund to be depleted, with dedicated revenues over the next 20 years to be allocated solely for bond payments. The Governor and Legislature must find a new financial solution to continue this critical work.

Centers

Reform New Jersey's property tax system to promote better land use.

The year 2005 may be remembered as the year that property taxes became the most imperative public policy issue in New Jersey. As a result, 2006 should see some significant reform measures. RPA believes that the end result of any successful property tax effort should go beyond tax relief, to actually ensure that fundamental change occurs that will promote smart growth rather than fuel suburban sprawl. A constitutional convention and/or legislative debate should focus attention on the pernicious effects of the current property tax system on land use, as well as its impacts on education equity and local services, and adopt a fiscal strategy that promotes revitalization while eliminating the need for the ratables chase.

Achieve the community development goals of the State Development and Redevelopment Plan by attracting increased development to existing communities and downtowns.

Building on the work of previous administrations, Governor-Elect Corzine has a golden opportunity to launch a new round of State-level planning, regulatory and investment policies that promote development in New Jersey's cities, towns and villages. Establishing a strong public commitment to smart growth, with a cabinet-level appointment and a public face within the Governor's Office, is an important first step. The State will also need to find continued funding to create and implement plans for transit-oriented development and brownfields redevelopment consistent with the goals of the State Plan.

Mobility

Restore Transportation Trust Fund and a vision for transportation investments.

In less than six months, without substantial gubernatorial and legislative action, New Jersey's Transportation Trust Fund will go bankrupt. A short-term fix that lacks significant reforms and revenues will ensure that we will be in this same situation in a just a few years. The State must find a way to address the institutional problems facing the transportation finance system, including a lack of sustainable revenues and the capital-to-operating transfers that have used bonded revenues to pay for day-to-day operations. And, NJDOT and NJ Transit must be clear about a long-term vision for transportation investments that will build public trust for an eventual revenue increase.

Secure financing and complete planning for a new passenger rail tunnel under the Hudson River.

Over the last quarter century, 90% of new commuters entering Manhattan have come from west of the Hudson River, through a single tunnel with little room for any growth. Consequently, construction of a new passenger rail tunnel into Manhattan may be the single most important infrastructure investment for the region. Development of New York's Far West Side, as well as potential benefits to New Jersey's older cities and towns will hinge on transit access that Access to the Region's Core (ARC) will bring. RPA hopes to see funding commitments from New Jersey, the Port Authority and federal sources to ensure this project is built on schedule and expanded to include direct access to Manhattan's East Side.

Connecticut

Greensward

Establish a Long Island Sound Stewardship System and designate a pilot site for preservation.

Although Long Island Sound has the largest population of any major estuary in United States (nearly 10% of the nation's population lives within 50 miles of its shores), it also has very limited public access to its waterfront. Last year the Congress nearly passed legislation to establish a Long Island Sound Stewardship System, and passage in 2006 is hopeful. The legislation would provide \$40 million annually to expand and enhance public access to the Sound, as well as developing a list of priority sites, including the designation of a pilot stewardship site in Connecticut.

Protect the Connecticut Highlands from over-development.

The Connecticut Highlands are at extreme risk of being lost to rampant development. Similar to the New York and New Jersey Highlands, where the rate of development is an overwhelming 5,000 acres per year, the Connecticut Highlands face constant development pressure encroaching upon its borders. This stretch of land across the northwest corner of the state supplies a large percentage of the population with water, and also contains some of our best and most valued recreational, biological, agricultural and forestry resources. Although these lands are a valuable asset in their natural state, the region is increasingly threatened by sprawl. The federal government has begun assessing key resources in the Highlands. Connecticut should follow up through a comprehensive program of administrative and legislative actions for preserving land and ensuring better development practices in this critical region. To strengthen the process of land acquisition and regional planning, Connecticut should also follow New Jersey's lead in creating a regional Highlands Commission.

Centers

Adopt a state-wide Smart Growth Strategy.

Many of the cities and towns of Connecticut have historically enjoyed the distinctive characteristics of New England communities: compact, historic town centers surrounded by verdant open space. Now these unique qualities have fallen prey to the negative effects of sprawling development. Not only has commercial development begun to eat away at our treasured landscapes, but low density housing has also begun to seek any undeveloped land in sight. At the same time, some of Connecticut's urban areas have become among the poorest in the nation and are losing both their human and commercial populations. A state-wide smart growth strategy would promote redevelopment and enhance the identities of each town and city. Critical elements of this strategy must include coordinated regional planning through consolidating the Metropolitan Planning Organizations, linkages between transportation investments and land use by way of transit-oriented development, and promotion of viable new housing opportunities in mixed-use downtown centers.

Mobility

Improve mobility on Connecticut's primary corridors to improve the ride to work and stimulate job growth.

The State of Connecticut is at a critical juncture of transportation planning. With gas prices and congestion at an all time high, commuter frustration continues to increase. In 2005 Governor Rell and the state legislature adopted a \$1.3 billion improvement plan which will improve rail service through capital expenditures, and do work on its highway infrastructure. While that is a good first step, the Transportation Strategy Board (TSB) calls for the expenditure of an additional \$5 billion over the next decade to improve the transit and transportation network and choices in Connecticut. It is obvious that the need to fund these additional projects is paramount, and finding the source of funding will be a challenge for the Governor and the legislature. The important steps include finding specific funding opportunities for Transit Oriented Development along with the continued upgrading of Metro-North's main-line and branch services, study and implementation of a viable Hartford-New Haven-Springfield rail service; completion of the New Britain-Hartford busway; and the expanded use of our seaports for container freight service.

New York State

Greensward

Establish a Long Island Sound Stewardship System and designate a pilot site for preservation.

Although Long Island Sound has the largest population of any major estuary in United States (nearly 10% of the nation's population lives within 50 miles of its shores), it also has very limited public access to its waterfront. Last year the Congress nearly passed legislation to establish a Long Island Sound Stewardship System, and passage in 2006 is hopeful. The legislation would provide \$40 million annually to expand and enhance public access to the Sound, as well as developing a list of priority sites, including the designation of a pilot stewardship site in Connecticut.

Develop legislation to establish New York State's fourth Forest Preserve in the Highlands.

The New York Highlands, about 800,000 acres spanning both sides of the Hudson River, includes some of New York's most storied landscapes, including Bear Mountain, Break Neck Ridge, and the Hudson River Gorge. But for the most part, these rugged hills and valleys are not protected, including over 30,000 acres in the Croton watershed that feeds New York City's and Westchester County's drinking water supply. The most critical watersheds in this area should join the Adirondack Park, Catskill Mountains, and Long Island Pine Barrens as New York's fourth Forest Preserve, permanently

protecting historic recreation areas and critical water supplies.

Centers

Redevelop the Nassau Hub.

Nearly 40 years after RPA first proposed developing the area of central Nassau near Roosevelt and Mitchell Fields as Long Island's downtown, plans are on the verge of moving forward. The developer chosen for the Coliseum site early in 2006 must be able to implement a plan that meets the criteria that RPA has identified for the Hub: that it has enough density to support new transit and reduce pressures for sprawl in other parts of the Island, gives the Hub an image that will establish it as a distinctive Downtown center, connects the Hub to its surrounding communities, and involves the County, Town of Hempstead and surrounding communities in a collaborative process to meet these goals.

Generate and implement a vision for focusing growth on Long Island and in the Hudson Valley.

Long Island's affordable housing crisis and approaching depletion of its last remaining unprotected open space are increasingly recognized as priorities by the public as well as political, business and civic leaders, but there is no consensus on where and how to accommodate new growth. The Hudson Valley has a similar affordable housing crisis, but has more rapidly growing areas, such as Orange County, and a larger arc of environmental sensitive land at its outer edge. Both places should undertake broad-based efforts to create a consensus vision for where and how growth should occur using a process that has been successful in places as diverse as southern California, Chicago and Utah. The most important milestones in 2006 would include the formation of leadership teams in both Long Island and the Hudson Valley, and the development of an initial framework that would be adopted by the county executives, the New York Metropolitan Transportation Council, and a broad base of business and civic organizations and leaders.

Mobility

Select a Tappan Zee Bridge expansion program that meets the mobility and land use goals for the Lower Hudson Valley.

The next Governor of New York State will face a major decision in determining what to do to replace the aging and crumbling Tappan Zee Bridge and what sort of transit should be built in the I-287 corridor through Rockland and Westchester counties. NYSDOT, the MTA, and the NYS Thruway Authority must find a cost-effective solution that includes the replacement of the bridge and a feasible and effective transit connection. Any transit alternative will require new land use plans in the region to concentrate development in ways that will justify the investment.

Develop a comprehensive freight and logistics strategy that builds on plans for a new Trans-Hudson Freight Tunnel.

Freight movements for the whole region have been increasing at 3% per year in recent years and are expected to increase by nearly 50% over the next 25 years. Completion of the Trans-Hudson rail freight tunnel is the most important action needed to keep the region from choking on truck traffic, but other actions are needed as well. The I-278 corridor is a critical freight corridor that needs a coordinated strategy, with no less than six transportation agencies are responsible for one or more of its facilities and at least six projects in the pipeline along the corridor. At the same time, the growth of the freight industry provides a unique opportunity to create new blue-collar jobs, economic activity and tax revenues.

