

RPA Blueprint

The Newsletter of Regional Plan Association

Summer 1999

"BRINGING SMART GROWTH TO THE TRI-STATE REGION"

RPA'S NINTH ANNUAL REGIONAL ASSEMBLY

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RPA's held its 9th Annual Regional Assembly, "Bringing Smart Growth to the Tri-State Region" on April 29th.

"The term 'Smart Growth,' which is gaining popularity now, describes a strategy RPA has been promoting for several decades—managing the development of our region in a manner that promotes economic growth for everyone, while protecting our quality of life and the environment," said H. Claude Shostal, RPA president.

"For example, we cannot continue the practices of encouraging sprawl, which is paving over open space, damaging our environment, creating massive traffic problems and weakening our cities. We must be making investments, such as RPA's *MetroLink* rail plan, that can help us to continue to grow, without negative side effects."

At the Assembly, the morning Keynote Address was delivered by Mayor William A. Johnson of Rochester, NY, who said, "Smart Growth has emerged as a pragmatic response to the growing weight of economic regions. Smart Growth seeks to create successful regional networks by discouraging the wasteful scattering of resources. There are many varieties of Smart Growth because no two regions are the same. Regionalism is not a cookie-cutter or an homogenizer. We have to translate regionalism to our own regions. Smart Growth is a tool to help us get there. Smart Growth can help us reach the next level of global competitiveness, because it pays attention to the spatial

implications of public policy, which we often don't think about in our economic development strategies."

Luncheon speaker Richard Moe, President of the National Trust for Historic Preservation stated that "We could buy all the open land in the country and still not solve the problem of sprawl. It's important to emphasize—as [RPA's] Third Regional Plan does very well—that greenspace conservation is just one component in a comprehensive plan to ensure smart growth. We also need to focus energies and resources on reclaiming the streets and neighborhoods where people live—the towns, inner cities and older suburbs that we've neglected so badly for the past half century. You can't have smart growth without reinvestment in existing counties.... [In other words] reinvestment in existing communities *is* smart growth."

Thirteen different workshops explored various aspects of Smart Growth, including the MTA's five-year capital program and plans for a Second Avenue Subway; Y2K preparedness in both the public and private sectors; and the impact of controlled growth on inner cities.

Panelists included: NY Assemblyman Thomas DiNapoli; Joseph Ripp, CFO of Time, Inc.; Patricia Salkin, Director, Government Law Center, Albany Law School; Robert Bzik, Director of Planning, Somerset County; Dennis Walcott, Executive Director New York Urban League; and Harriet Tregoning, Director of Urban & Economic Development Division, US Department

- continued on next page -



Keynote Speaker Mayor William A. Johnson, of Rochester, NY

of Environmental Protection.

WORKSHOPS:

The MTA Capital Program: A Year of Decision. This is the year when the next five-year MTA capital program must be formulated and passed by the New York State Legislature. The MTA program will need to address the continuation of investments on the existing network, especially in the areas where progress has been the slowest—mainly stations and signals. And the imperative of expansion will have to be met. This workshop discussed the choices needed to be made in order for the MTA capital program to remain effective. (*At the time of the Assembly, the MTA had not yet released its assessment. See RPA News on page 6 for an update on the MTA Capital Program.*)

Smart Corporate Location. As we move into the 21st century, traditional market boundaries continue to dissolve in a context of free trade, technological advances and the Internet. The continued robust economy and low unemployment provides unprecedented leverage to educate workers in gaining flexible work schedules, telecommuting alternatives, hoteling and other means to balance work and personal time. In a two-part workshop, Session I asked the question: Who Is Coming? Who Is Leaving?, while Session II asked: What Do We Have to Do to Compete More Effectively?

Cutting Edge in Somerville: From Edge City to Suburban Center. Teams of landscape architects and urban designers presented the results of an intensive four-day workshop that demonstrates how regional highways, which are typically magnets for dislocated, automobile-oriented environments, can become corridors of sustainable growth. Panelists also tried to answer the fundamental question: What is sprawl, and conversely—what is a “suburban center?” (See related article on page 4.)

The Costs of Sprawl: What are its Fiscal, Transportation and

Land Use impacts? An understanding of what we know about the costs of sprawl is critical to shaping an effective Smart Growth agenda. Assumptions about costs will help determine what specific measures need to be taken, how investments and incentives should be paid for, and how much support a comprehensive initiative will receive. This workshop addressed questions including: How does sprawl affect the costs of infrastructure, housing, transportation and public services? How does it affect our consumption of land, energy and other natural resources? How can we more effectively quantify these costs and savings?

Strengthening New Jersey's State Plan. New Jersey is one of 13 states that have adopted a comprehensive state “smart growth” plan, but is alone among the region that has such a plan. In March, the State Planning Commission adopted a new interim plan, which is now the subject of a thorough economic analysis. This workshop examined the content and intended outcomes of New Jersey's new State Plan.

Advancing Smart Growth Initiatives in New York and Connecticut. This workshop explored ways that New York and Connecticut can improve their state growth strategies and learn from the successes of New Jersey and 12 other states that have adopted state “Smart Growth” initiatives. Panelists also examined how legislation pending or proposed in Albany and Hartford could advance Smart Growth in each state.

Will Smart Growth Benefit Low-Income Communities and a Diverse Population? To develop a multi-racial constituency that includes poor and moderate-income citizens as the region considers Smart Growth legislation and policies, this workshop explored the following: What issues need to be central to the agenda in order to attract diverse support? How will particular policies affect the housing choices, job opportunities and incomes of low-income residents?

Regional Downtown Success Stories. In this workshop, mayors and business and civic leaders—representing four “Regional Towns:” Newark, Brooklyn, Stam-



Luncheon Speaker Richard Moe, of the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

ford and Bridgeport—outlined new strategies that are producing positive change in each of these centers.

Creating Parks and Public Spaces in the New York-New Jersey Harbor. Thanks to billions of dollars invested in sewage treatment plants, the Harbor's water is now the cleanest it has been in the 90 years since systemic surveys began. This workshop presented some of the specific projects now underway in addition to a panel discussion on elevating the Harbor's profile as an amenity for the region.

Regional Compacts for Smart Growth. A component of RPA's Greensward Plan is the protection of 11 region-shaping landscapes and coastal waterways. Together, these areas provide the region's cities, suburbs and rural towns with fresh drinking water, and local produce area-wide growth management and land conservation initiatives are taking shape. This panel explored the successes (and failures) of these efforts and how they are taking root in the communities.

Y2K: The Regional Picture. In a dual session, the first session was an overview of the region's preparedness for Y2K; and the second session explored contingency planning issues facing local governments in the region. A special Y2K session followed, in which preliminary findings of three Y2K research papers will be discussed in public for the first time. The papers included a survey of water, waste water, and solid waste systems. The final report was released in June. •

For more information about the Assembly, visit our website at www.rpa.org. The Y2K research papers are available in downloadable pdf format on our website.

RPA'S COMMUNITY PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM WITH SENIOR FELLOW MAXINE GRIFFITH

The Tri-state region has some of the poorest as well as some of the wealthiest communities in the United States. In spite of the region's recent prosperity, many inner-city neighborhoods, older suburban towns and impoverished rural areas remain isolated from sources of jobs and business opportunities. RPA's newest program initiative, the Community Planning and Development Program, will focus and expand RPA's efforts to link communities to the economic life of the Tri-state region. By providing technical assistance to community based organizations, educational services that link the community with the region, and policy research that informs regional and national decision makers, the program will reach both practitioners and policy makers.

The importance of connecting communities to metropolitan economies is receiving increased attention from planners, government and foundations. However, there are few models of how to do this effectively, and even fewer institutions that are in a position to bridge the divide between regional and community planners. With RPA's history, interdisciplinary staff and proven research capability, there is no other organization in the region—perhaps even in the nation—that is better suited to this task.

Substantively, the Community Development Program will focus on the configuration of jobs, housing, transportation and education that determines economic opportunity for the residents of low-income communities. Specifically, it will develop models for community development that link communities to a wider network of jobs, training and support services via public transit, technology and institutional networks.

On the regional level, it will produce research and policy recommendations that will improve these connections on a large scale. RPA's Community Development Program will link community and regional planning efforts, giving community leaders a regional context, and giving re-

gional leaders a greater understanding of community issues and the impact of their decisions.

The program will create forums for leaders in community development to exchange ideas with leaders on regional development issues. It will also give community leaders an opportunity to learn about best practices in the field, particularly those that have a regional dimension. Finally, the program will explore ways of broadly disseminating information on the community impacts of major regional issues.

Although traditional community development efforts have often been successful in stabilizing deteriorating physical conditions or attracting a potential employer to a given neighborhood, a comprehensive follow-on strategy must permanently knit neighborhoods into the regional matrix. This period of strong economic growth coupled with impressive technological advances gives us, what might be, a unique window of opportunity to develop new models and lay the structure for future progress.

Maxine Griffith, RPA's newly appointed Senior Fellow for Community Planning and Development, is designing RPA's program and helping to integrate existing projects into a comprehensive mix. "Community planning is a highly collaborative enterprise," says Griffith, "and RPA has the best people in the fields of transportation, environmental technology, economic development and so on...it is tremendously exciting to think of this talent and depth of expertise being brought to bear to solve problems at the community level."

• • •

In addition to being Senior Fellow at RPA, Maxine Griffith also teaches Urban Planning in the Graduate program at Columbia University in New York, and still maintains a professional practice in urban design and urban policy development. She serves on the Board of Directors of both the American Planning Association and the Architectural League of

New York. Ms. Griffith is also a member of the Board of SEEDS, a project that builds schools and libraries in West Africa. She is a fellow of the Institute for Urban Design.

Maxine received a BA, cum laude, from Hunter College in New York; a Master of Architecture Degree from UC Berkeley; and has completed coursework in Urban Planning, Zoning, Housing and Real Property Development at Harvard University.

From 1988 to 1996, Maxine was principal of Griffith Planning & Design, a firm that provided planning, design and development services to a diverse list of clients. This included work as varied as an urban design plan for the West Harlem Waterfront, a residential reuse program for public school buildings in Yonkers, NY and a Master Plan for a 126-acre site in rural Tennessee.

In 1990, Maxine was appointed to the New York City Planning Commission where she served until her resignation in 1996. From there, she took a position with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development as the Secretary's (Regional) Representative for New York and New Jersey, where she coordinated programs and policy for the two states.

Maxine has worked and traveled extensively in West Africa and the Caribbean and has led workshops in politics and policy in the African nations of Namibia and Benin. She served as a member of a fact-finding mission to Haiti following the reinstatement of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide and represented the City of New York at the Encontro Internacional de Cidades in Sao Paulo Brazil. •



THE SOMERSET COUNTY REGIONAL CENTER VISION INITIATIVE

The Somerset County Regional Center in New Jersey, which comprises downtown Raritan, Downtown Somerville and the Bridgewater Commons Mall, is a fascinating landscape that encompasses the full range of pedestrian and automobile environments. It is a suburban “kit of parts,” from traditional 19th century downtowns to highway strip shopping centers. Throughout the center there are successful environments. The problem is the lack of connection between them.

Last April, RPA convened the *Somerset County Regional Center Vision Initiative* in Somerville, New Jersey. The success was made possible by the active participation of the County Planning Board, the Regional Center Partnership, the Somerset Alliance for the Future and the Board of Freeholders. This intensive five-day design workshop brought together nationally renowned architects, landscape architects and urban designers. Their goal: “Can we retrofit suburbia?” Three design teams approached this problem from different perspectives: the “points team,” which looked at

means to connect the three major sub-centers in the area; the “lines team,” which looked at the highway corridors; and the “planes team,” which explored the role that natural resources play in shaping development.

The design teams outlined compelling visions: new in-fill development connecting the existing concentrations of activity; strip highways turned into suburban boulevards; and an integrated system of greenways coursing through the neighborhoods. The workshop also revealed that even if the most aggressive assumptions are made about the amount of new development that could be directed to these places, it is difficult to imagine a comprehensive buildout that makes the entire place feel like one single center. This suggested that a successful strategy for retrofitting places the scale of the Somerset County Regional Center would rely on the following:

- A need to accept some level of discontinuity in the suburban landscape. It is important to identify a series of sub-centers—each which can become nodes that support

higher density development and mass transit connections. These should have their own identity, with the Regional Center accommodating a wide variety of conditions, including the most pedestrian-oriented to environments that are still dominated by the automobile.

- The importance of understanding and exploiting the formal realities of the suburban “kit of parts,” i.e. office buildings, shopping centers and subdivisions—that are an essential part of the edge city landscape.
- Acknowledge the reduced role of small-scale, incremental development while promoting design strategies that reduce the apparent scale of the large developments.
- Exploit the potential of “green infrastructure” (the ground cover and watercourses) that can knit the landscape together at a variety of scales.
- Create concentrations of uses that can support transportation connections—those that do not create physical links but contribute to the economic and social connectivity of the center. •

For more information about the Somerset County Regional Center Vision Initiative, contact Rob Lane at 212.253.2727 x326, or send

RPA has received the following new grants:

Surdna Foundation, \$100,000 for the Empire State Transportation Alliance . . . **The New York Community Trust**, \$75,000, **Milbank Memorial Fund**, \$50,000, **The Nathan Cummings Foundation**, \$50,000 and the **Long Island Community Foundation**, \$5,000 for the Regional Y2K Initiative . . . **Altman Foundation**, \$50,000 for Civic Leadership . . . **Frances & Edwin Cummings Foundation**, \$50,000 for the Regional Technology Careers Initiative . . . **The MacArthur Foundation**, \$50,000 toward *The Art of the Region*, a new book . . . **Prudential Foundation**, \$50,000 for the Newark Arts project . . . **Charles Revson Foundation**, \$50,000 for Third Plan Implementation . . . **Regional Center Partnership of Somerset County**, \$31,000 and **Lincoln Institute of Land Policy**, \$30,000 for Somerville planning and design workshop . . . **CSX Corporation**, \$25,000 for a study of the High Line in Lower Manhattan . . . **Jackson Hole Preserve**, \$7,500 for preliminary work on a new Hudson Valley initiative

The following companies continued their support by making Leadership grants:

Bell Atlantic, \$35,000 . . . **Merck & Co.**, \$30,000 . . . **Pitney Bowes**, \$30,000 . . . **PSE&G**, \$27,500 . . . **Xerox Corporation**, \$25,000

Thank you!

COMMUNITY DESIGN WORKSHOP IN NEWARK

Though New Jersey has some of the most comprehensive brownfields legislation in the nation, community involvement provisions tend to be lacking. In view of the fundamental importance of community involvement in brownfields reclamation projects, RPA has set out to identify the most effective mechanisms for achieving citizen and business input into such projects.

RPA believes that holding community design workshops in distressed neighborhoods would be an excellent mechanism to bring community leaders to the table along with urban planners and experts in economic and environmental policy. By so doing, we hope to identify the most effective approaches to redevelopment in neighborhoods where access to capital is not readily available.

Therefore, in July, RPA in con-

junction with the Broadway Community Revitalization Collaborative: A Joint Venture of La Casa De Don Pedro, Inc., and St. James Community Development Corporation, hosted a two-day workshop which explored ways to revitalize a 38-block area of the North Ward in Newark. This neighborhood has many of the same problems plaguing urban centers throughout the state and nation: overcrowding of school facilities, lack of open space, insufficient and inferior low- and middle-income housing stock and the co-existence of residential and industrial land uses. A prime example is the Broadway Elementary School, which is directly across the street from a manufacturing and trucking depot.

At the end of the two-day process, the participants identified the most pressing community needs,

and the government and policy experts began to identify existing mechanisms to institute these recommendations. Some of the proposals included:

- alternatives for the location of the public housing project that would create 400 one- and two-family homes in an isolated area;
- taking advantage of the several companies in the area and creating a job training and community center;
- increasing the open space surrounding the elementary and secondary schools;
- creating a bike path that would connect the Newark downtown waterfront with Branch Brook Park. This "rails-to-trails" bike path would run along the seldom used rail road tracks;
- construction of in-fill housing in the neighborhood. This will encourage community development and help alleviate an existing housing shortage;
- encourage a grocery store chain to open a "bodega-size" store in the area; and
- re-route streets to separate industrial trucks and activities from residential areas.

By bringing the community together with government, business, and urban planning professionals, the participants were able to envision an enhanced quality of life for the North Ward. By working together, RPA, La Casa and St. James have begun to identify the most pressing projects and to begin the implementation process. •

For more information regarding Brownfields issues, contact Ann Davlin, Director, Brownfields Programs at 212.253.2727 or send an e-mail to ann@rpa.org.



Public Policy Land View GIS Map of 38-block study area of the North Ward in Newark. Produced by the GIS Lab, The Wharton School of Business, University of Pennsylvania

SAVE THE DATE!!!

RPA's

10th Regional Assembly

May 3, 2000

at the

Grand Hyatt New York

MORE INFORMATION TO FOLLOW

Blueprint

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Martin Brody, Former CEO of Restaurant Associates, **M. Michael Francese**, Senior Vice President, Parsons Brinckerhoff, Quade & Douglas, Inc., **Marilyn G. Gelber**, Executive Director of the Independence Community Foundation, and **Ellen Quinn**, Director of Environmental Programs, United Technologies Corporation, have been elected to RPA's **Board of Directors**. Also, **Matthew S. Kissner** and **Ms. Quinn** have been elected as co-chairs of **RPA's Connecticut Committee**. Mr. Kissner is President, Small Business & Financial Solutions at Pitney Bowes Financial Solutions.

...
RPA is continuing to work with the Empire State Transportation Alliance (ESTA) to develop a sound highway and transit investment program for the Region. ESTA recently released a **Capital Needs Assessment for the MTA** that recommended \$18 billion in investment over the next five years and \$68 billion over the next 20 years. The highlights of the program include a call for the MTA to construct *MetroLink* in tandem with the LIRR-GCT Connection and conversion of the diesel bus fleet to clean-burning Compressed Natural Gas buses. The program also calls for continuing the State of Good Repair Program that has brought the regions subways, buses and trains back from the brink of collapse; adoption of a modern signal system to increase train frequency and speed; adoption of new passenger information systems; and improvements to the subway station rehabilitation program. The assessment is available on RPA's website.

...
RPA is participating in the formulation of the **NYS Action Plan to Reduce Greenhouse Gas Emissions** to prevent, mitigate or adapt to climate changes, and is helping to arrange the New York City hearings later this fall on this plan. RPA is also on the Advisory Group to New Jersey's Open Market Emissions Trading program for which hearings were held in Trenton in August. New York City Mayor Giuliani, Newark Mayor Sharpe James, and other locally elected officials in the Tri-State Region have expressed support for the Mayor and Local Official Statement on **global warming** which has been signed by mayors all over the US and was presented to President Clinton in September.

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