

Recommendations to the Economic Development Transition Team
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Integrate issues/Integrate government
A summary of PlanSmart NJ's 12/18/09 comments

New Jersey's primary assets that have been driving our economy over the last century have been our **location, our labor force, our infrastructure**. New Jersey has foolishly taken these assets for granted.

These assets and many of the state's most critical problems are affected by New Jersey's land use decision-making system. This system includes not only local master plans and zoning, but state agency policies, programs, regulations and infrastructure investments.

The system is so fragmented and without overall direction. The system gives pieces of the issues to different levels and agencies of government – and, without coordination, the issues cannot be effectively addressed. **Integrate the system, integrate the issues, and allow issues to be effectively addressed.**

Toward that end, PlanSmart NJ has identified many land use system reforms. But since many of them will take some time to get into place and a long time before their benefits will be felt, we are also prepared to suggest some effective actions that can be undertaken right away.

1. ***DEP***: DEP continues to write regulations based on the concept that less development is the way to protect the environment. Change the culture of DEP by ***embracing the goals*** established by the Clean Water, etc. but ***discouraging tactics*** that will impede other state goals to be achieved, e.g., redevelopment of urban and suburban areas.

Besides a moratorium on new rules, **establish a task force that will look at the application of existing rules**, such as sewer service plans and the impact of 300' buffer rules on redevelopment:

- a. The **2008 Water Quality Management Planning regulations** have set counties to work on new wastewater management plans that are already past due. DEP has been unclear

how they will handle county requests to alter their maps to include lands that had previously been in growth areas – such as corporate lawns! The new administration can make it clear that these lands, if there are no extraordinary environmental reasons to prevent growth, will be allowed to be kept within sewer service areas.

- b. The **300' buffer** imposed on any section of a stream that is in part Category One (the cleanest water) must be made more flexible. This does not mean reducing the buffer to 75' or 150'. It means allowing strategies to IMPROVE water quality within a HUC 14 watershed by means other than preventing development.
 - c. Ensure that the **anti-degradation** rules are not interpreted to mean zero degradation. It was originally intended to prevent degradation **below standards**. Now it means no change from the current condition – even if it is already above standards. This is almost impossible to meet, particularly for redevelopment projects.
2. **DOT**: DOT has been changing in the right direction for many years. They are trying hard to integrate land use and transportation planning, although still feeling too much at the mercy of local government. If we don't turn the system on its head – with transit over driving – we will never solve congestion and the cost of sprawl.
- a. **Replenish the Transportation Trust Fund**. Follow the 2003 Blue Ribbon Commission on the Trust Fund.
 - b. **Leverage the ARC Tunnel investment**, which will double transit capacity accessible to almost $\frac{3}{4}$ of the population. Begin projects through the MPOs that will analyze the land use patterns that will be needed to support a 2-way use of the system (peak and “off” peak), build a Jersey-centric transit system, lifting Newark and other cities as multi-modal hubs and job centers.
 - c. **Implement the Liberty Corridor Plan**: The shipping industry the #1 driver of NJ's economy, has developed a plan for what they need to thrive in New Jersey – infrastructure investments and land use.
 - d. Using the EO put into place last May to strengthen **CRDA's transportation plan** by connecting it to economic development and housing strategies.
 - e. DOT's **Highway Access Management Code**, although recently improved in many ways (ensure that the recent recommendations were, in fact, adopted) still **obstructs growth in growth areas** because of a fear of congestion. Remove this, or it will promote

sprawl, dis-incentivize redevelopment, and prevent the density of development that will help transit services.

3. **DCA: Move the State Planning Commission to “in but not of” the Treasury**, as it was established in the State Planning Act, abolishing the Office of Smart Growth and re-instating the Office of State Planning.
 - a. Recommend that the DCA Commissioner should not be a Mayor. The functions of DCA should be to help the state achieve state and regional goals, and to have the incentive programs – carrots and sticks – to get municipalities on board.
 - b. **Strengthen the role of the State Plan and the State Planning Commission** to integrate the actions of all state agencies and those of county and local government to adopt some cross-cutting strategies (center-based development, reducing auto-dependency, protecting watersheds, etc.) that will achieve state and regional goals (reducing GHG emissions, for example).
 - c. **Recognize that housing is an economic issue** – to the extent that our labor force (key economic asset) moves out of state, so will our jobs.
4. **EDA**: EDA has done a good job of following Smart Growth principles in their programs over the last 10 years. **Ensure that economic development programs recognize the need for a resilient economic base for every region of the state – even rural areas.** Make sure that no region feels it has to suburbanize, stealing development from other areas, in order to make ends meet. Agriculture, tourism and other aspects should become viable as a base in these regions.
5. **Tax Reform**: Implement **regional tax-base sharing** (<http://www.plansmartnj.org/positions/governance/NJTaxReformPosition.pdf>) as a means to stop the ratable chase, encourage affordable housing and revitalization.
6. **Don't forget Labor and education**: These have vital programs that can support Smart Growth outcomes.

Many say, “it is too big”, “the system is too broken”, or “it is too late”. But we can't allow that to be the answer to future generations. PlanSmart NJ has applied its 40+ year history and developed a new planning and government framework to overcome the fragmentation of government and to give the system an overall direction to improve jobs, housing, transportation, water and the patterns of racial and economic integration. (See <http://www.plansmartnj.org/projects/past/sgp/2008conf.pdf>).

For those who feel that something simple is better, I would leave you with two thoughts:

H.L. Mencken: "There is a solution to every problem that is simple, clean and wrong."

Albert Einstein: "The solution to a problem should be as simple as possible – and no simpler!"