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Dianne Brake on Last Week's Poll

By Brianne Harrison

WHICH PART OF NEW JERSEY WILL SEE THE MOST GROWTH?

New Jersey has its problems, but it also has a lot of advantages that make it a popular place for businesses to be. So, despite the sagging economy, some growth is expected. The question is, which part of the state will attract the most growth? This week's poll respondents were split almost evenly. Equal numbers (36%) anticipate growth in the Northern and Central parts of the state. Slightly fewer (27%) think South Jersey will see the most growth. Dianne Brake, president of PlanSmart New Jersey, expects to see growth all over the state, but she has high hopes for the north. Here are her thoughts:

"There's the most growth and then there's important growth. In Northern New Jersey, which already holds about 70% of New Jersey's population, growth would be driven by the strength of New York City's economy and the desire to be near the financial hub of the western world. So, as long as New York stays strong, North Jersey will be attractive.

"Central New Jersey attracts a great deal of interest because of the cluster of educated workforce around the pharmaceuticals industry. That creates a buzz around the technology center of New Jersey, which also houses Princeton University and the Northeast corridor rail line. Those are all drivers in Central New Jersey.

"And in South Jersey there is the opportunity that comes with open land. A lot of attention has gone there because it has the land and drivers such as the airport, the tourism industry, the shore, the quality of life. Constraining that growth on the other hand is infrastructure, attitudes, government regulation and critical habitats that need to be protected.

"So, all of the areas of New Jersey have the potential for growth, although it might not be explosive growth. For instance, I spoke recently with a woman from Einstein's Alley [a forum aimed at creating jobs and stimulating innovation and economic development in Central New Jersey]. She said they're not aiming for big companies, they're dealing with small companies with a lot to offer that could make this a more desirable place to locate. That's very important growth, but it's not exponential growth.

"Major growth could come in North Jersey, and when we say North Jersey, we're thinking of the economic engines in Newark and Hoboken. What you don't want to see in North Jersey is decline. You have to think of how to add growth to an already built-up, congested area, and build up and add growth in such a way that you're filling in spaces and making spaces more functional. In other words, adding to the transit potential and so forth. Those would be positive steps to take as North Jersey grows.

"Jersey City has had a lot of success recently, and in Newark there's a lot of expectation on the mayor to drive interest and drive growth. Up north, you have the financial institutions,

telecommunications and the port. The port is the number one economic driver in New Jersey. In the North, sprawl is contained by the Highlands, which are protected, and that makes redevelopment of older buildings and spaces more attractive.

“Each region has its own strengths and benefits. We’ve been looking at regions for all kinds of growth potential, their constraints, their need for infrastructure investment. And how you sustain growth and balance it with other needs is what quality of life is all about.”

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