

**Executive Director's Remarks  
2011 PlanSmart NJ Annual Dinner  
November 9, 2011**

Welcome to PlanSmart NJ's Annual Dinner! Thank you so much for joining us tonight.

This is my inaugural year at PlanSmart NJ. I have the honor to succeed Dianne Brake, who is well-known to almost all of you in this room. Dianne was a visionary leader for the organization for 25 years before semi-retiring late last year. She continues to serve us in an advisory capacity and we value her wisdom and many contributions to the land use planning field. Prior to Dianne, PlanSmart NJ's fine leaders included Sam Hammill, Jr, Golda Gottlieb, and William Kwalick.

One of the first things I discovered upon joining PlanSmart NJ is what a dedicated Board and staff we have. During this transition year, our Board and staff really stepped up to the plate and provided continuity and support to the organization.

I also discovered early on in my tenure how many loyal supporters we have, including those who have been members since the days when we were MSM Regional Council to the present day, in our metamorphized form, as PlanSmart NJ.

Our support comes from companies large and small, professional firms, higher education institutions, counties, and towns, and allied non-profit organizations, to name a few. But behind it all are the people, including each one of you in this room tonight, and more, who are committed to this organization, to the ideals we stand for, and to the vision that we embrace.

PlanSmart NJ has long recognized that land use planning is the key to solving much of what ails us as a society and within our communities. With proper planning and implementation, we can have a state-of-the-art, efficient transportation system that provides multiple viable transportation options – car, train, bike, walking.

We can have communities that incorporate housing for families and individuals at all income levels within commuting – even walking – distance to places of work.

We can have new businesses that want to form here and established businesses that want to stay and grow here, because of our high quality of life and affordability.

We can protect and even enhance our natural ecosystems. We can have it all.

We are now seeing that these fundamental principles of land use planning will also help solve some of the newer problems that present challenges for our future and for the generation that will come after us – climate change, childhood obesity, and overpopulation, to name a few. Through innovative land use planning and implementation, we can solve these problems and more.

When you think of PlanSmart NJ, we hope that words like “balanced”, “innovative”, and “thorough” come to mind. We take a holistic, fact-based approach to land use decisions. We balance the environment, economy, equity and resource efficiency. We recognize that if any one of these interests dominates the other, our systems will be out of whack.

Too often in public policy making, competing interests duke it out and one set of interests ends up trumping the others. When that happens, we all lose. Balanced land use planning is about considering all interests and developing solutions that build consensus. It is also about leadership.

PlanSmart NJ has long been a leader in the debate about how to foster sustainable economic growth in New Jersey, a pressing concern when we have an unemployment rate that hovers over 9% and a prolonged recovery from a recession that has been longer and deeper than any in recent memory.

In 2006, back before the recession hit, we launched our Smart Growth Economy Project, recognizing early on that more attention needs to be paid to the strength of our economy here in New Jersey. Earlier this year, we held a timely and well-regarded conference of business leaders, planners and other professionals which profiled New Jersey business leaders and examined the challenges and opportunities that confront them here in New Jersey as they seek to maintain or expand their businesses.

We were pleased by how many business leaders in NJ “get it.” They recognize the linkages between livable communities, transportation infrastructure, housing availability, and the success of their businesses. They recognize the convoluted and costly land use decision-making structures we have here in NJ that impede our ability to offer predictability and transparency to businesses as they seek to move or expand here.

At our spring conference, and in our follow-up report, “What’s Land Use Got to Do with It? Examining the Connections Between New Jersey’s Economic Prosperity and its Land Use Patterns,”, we promoted the idea of regional industry growth clusters – geographic regions are defined more by economic relationships than by jurisdictional boundaries.

Industries within these regions benefit from proximate location to complementary businesses in the sector (for instance, life sciences or technology). To thrive, these industries need infrastructure investment, livable, mixed-use communities with housing opportunities in close commuting distance to employers, and a synergistic relationship with higher education institutions.

PlanSmart NJ has long been a leader in the State Planning arena. Late last month, the State of New Jersey Office for Planning Advocacy (formerly the Office of Smart Growth), released its draft State Strategic Job Growth Plan, a replacement for the State Plan that was last adopted in 2001. We were pleased to see the concept of priority industry clusters feature prominently in the newly released Plan. This concept has the potential

to spur sustained economic growth here in New Jersey and to create synergies between businesses, local communities, and higher education institutions within identified regions.

Of equal importance, we were happy to see the new State Strategic Plan include another PlanSmart NJ priority: alignment of state agency decision-making underneath the broad umbrella of the State Plan. With the release of the draft State Plan last month, Governor Christie signed an Executive Order creating a new State Strategic Plan Steering Committee, to be chaired by Lieutenant Governor Guadagno. The Steering Committee will include all the major departments with responsibility for land use and will serve as a venue for resolving land use conflicts.

For years, PlanSmart NJ has said that we can no longer afford to have state agencies and various arms of government operating in silos. The new State Strategic Plan seems to take our advice to heart.

This year, our Board developed a new Strategic Business Plan to guide our work over the next three years. Our priorities should be no surprise to those of you in this room. We will...

- Work to reform New Jersey's State and Regional Planning Systems,
- Facilitate redevelopment and compact development,
- Strengthen our state's transportation infrastructure; and
- Foster regional equity

We will do this through education and outreach, training and technical assistance, research, and advocacy. We will continue to publish groundbreaking guides and research reports, such as our guide published earlier this year: "Out and About: A Guide to Sustainable Local Circulation Planning," Just last week PlanSmart NJ won the New Jersey Chapter of the American Planning Association's Achievement in Advocacy and Education award for this publication.

In addition to advocating with other smart growth partners for a strong State Plan, PlanSmart NJ is a leader in public policy advocacy around issues of water quality, housing, transportation, and property tax reform. Many of these land use issues remain unresolved. PlanSmart NJ's leadership is needed. Our ideas can make a difference. We encourage the Christie Administration to step up to the plate on these issues as they have on the State Plan.

Take DEP's 2008 Water Quality Management rules, for instance. In our view, these rules encourage sprawl and prevent compact development in places where the State has said growth should happen. We said when the rules were adopted that they were flawed and that the State should start anew. A fresh perspective is needed.

Affordable housing is another example. NJ's affordable housing rules remain mired in litigation and the legislature has yet to take this issue up again. As a result, little is

happening in the way of providing affordable housing for New Jersey's residents. A fresh perspective is needed.

Then there is the issue of transportation. The Transportation Trust Fund is broke. The State is issuing bonds to keep emergency repair projects going, but this is no long term solution. In the meantime, the northeast region's rail infrastructure is at capacity and new infrastructure investment, such as the Gateway Tunnel project from Secaucus to NY Penn Station, needs support. A fresh perspective is needed.

And lastly there is the challenge of property tax reform. Until we tackle our system of funding public education through local property taxes, we will continue to place an undue burden on our municipalities. We will continue to see land use decisions about housing and mixed-use development, in particular, driven by fears about property tax increases. A fresh perspective is needed.

To begin to tackle the the issue property tax reform, PlanSmart NJ will be co-hosting a forum with the Council of New Jersey Grantmakers and Princeton University on Friday, December 9<sup>th</sup> at Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School, entitled Facing Our Future. We encourage you to join us for this discussion.

With over 40 years of experience and a reputation for a balanced approach, PlanSmart NJ is uniquely positioned to take on these issues and more.

With your commitment of time, talent and financial support, we can work together to shape our future to benefit us all. Through the abandonment of outmoded practices and the embrace of innovation, we can create a strong, sustainable, prosperous future for ourselves and future generations.

Together, we can achieve our vision. Thank you.

*Lucy Vandenberg is the Executive Director of PlanSmart NJ. PlanSmartNJ is a statewide non-profit research and advocacy organization that advances the quality of community of life through sound land use planning and regional cooperation. PlanSmart NJ aims to advance economic growth through a balanced land use approach that includes consideration of the economy, environment, resource efficiency, and equity. Email Lucy at [lvandenberg@plansmartnj.org](mailto:lvandenberg@plansmartnj.org) or call 609-393-9434.*