

Building One NJ
State Planning for Inclusion, Sustainability and Economic Growth
What do these words mean to real people?

Welcome to all of you! We have a great lineup of inspiring speakers – from the federal government to local government, from congregations to corporations – all of whom represent significant power and influence. I look forward to hearing them as much as you do.

But I hope that at the end of the day, you will have paid equal attention to those who are sitting around you. For all of us together represent significant **new** power and inspiration.

And we **need** such focus and power because **One** New Jersey is a tall order. It means an end to the status quo in which we pit the economy vs. the environment; cities vs. suburbs; an end to us against them. As they say, them is us!

Today we bring together hundreds of people from congregations and community organizations who are part of the **New Jersey Regional Coalition** – our partners today; with the hundreds of people represented in the **Smart Growth Economic Development Coalition**, our Title Sponsor today; and with the hundreds of people and organizations working with **PlanSmart NJ**. What a power base!

Each group has demonstrated considerable power and success on its own. It makes me think that – together – there would be nothing that we could not do!

We are here today because we all want a single vision of the future of New Jersey: one in which cities and downtowns are revitalized and made back into the employment and transit hubs they were built to be; in which inner ring suburbs are stabilized and strengthened and recognized for the centers of diversity they are; in which the new suburbs are retrofitted and diversified to become the vibrant mixed-income destinations they must become, and in which open land and natural resources are improved and protected.

PlanSmart NJ has been working on these goals for more than 40 years, and we have had considerable success. We are known as a well-researched, balanced leadership organization. But each of our successes was eroded by the those who wanted to reinstate the status quo.

A few years ago we said enough. PlanSmart NJ made two decisions to make us more powerful so that we could fight the forces of the status quo and **win**.

First, following the initiative of Marty Johnson of Isles, we joined with others in 2003 to establish the New Jersey Regional Coalition, which uses community

organizing to build power in numbers, people of faith and people of values, to stand up against the status quo and say, “**This** is the right thing to do!” They said it was **right** that state money should follow poor children to the suburbs. They said it was **right** to end the practice of allowing rich towns to pay poor towns to take half of their affordable housing obligation. And they succeeded when pundits said it couldn’t be done.

Second, following the initiative of Ted Zangari of Sills Cummis and others, PlanSmart NJ joined the Smart Growth Economic Development Coalition in 2008. This coalition brings together some of the most powerful stakeholders in redevelopment in New Jersey.

Like the New Jersey Regional Coalition, the Smart Growth Economic Development Coalition has also organized their members into a single voice that could effectively demand an end to old policies that will not pull New Jersey out of the economic crisis. And **they** succeeded when the pundits said it couldn’t be done.

And they bring this power to our event today as our Title Sponsor. Thank you to Smart Growth Economic Development Coalition members and all our sponsors who helped to make this event possible. And thank you to Princeton University, our host.

And that brings us to the title of this summit. Everyone knows that New Jersey’s economy is in decline. But why does economic growth share top billing with inclusion and sustainability? What do these terms mean, anyway? And what does state planning have to do with any of them?

The answer to the first question is easy: inclusion, sustainability and economic growth are goals that are equally important to New Jersey’s future quality of life.

And each term has deep meaning. Inclusion means having a “seat at the table” when decisions are made about your future. This empowerment is expected to provide disenfranchised people with equal access to good jobs, safe neighborhoods and performing schools within a region. Inclusion leads to regional equity.

Sustainability, as many of you know, originally meant that each generation should manage their resources in such a way as to sustain future generations. Sustainability used to appear as three overlapping circles, reflecting society’s need to integrate economic, environmental and regional equity goals.

Today, however, people tend to use the term sustainability to mean only *environmental* sustainability, with little or no reference to economic or equity goals. This conference was titled to remind everyone of the original meaning of sustainability, specifying its connection to inclusion and economic growth.

These are all goals of a good society, and should be the goals of good government. But New Jersey's government is too fragmented to pursue these goals in a balanced and integrated way. There are literally thousands of agents of government that work separately or even in contradiction to each other.

This inefficiency and ineffectiveness has been tolerated for years because New Jersey has been, for the most part, too big and too wealthy to care. If problems got tough in one place, another green field was available to start over someplace else.

Well, for New Jersey those days are over. The Garden State has not only run out of money, but it has run out of green fields. We will run out of developable land before any other state.

Hence the need for economic growth.

And this is where state planning comes in. Or rather, a *new* approach to state planning. We need a new, replacement State Plan that is far more ambitious and more strategic than the one we currently have.

The current plan *says* we want redevelopment and yet does nothing to prevent almost every agency having rules that obstruct it; it *says* we want to protect the environment, but allows local zoning and agency rules to promote sprawl; it *says* we want a strong economy and social and economic integration, but it has nothing in it to guide us in that direction.

The time for **acting** on what we need is now. Our assets are eroding and – with no change in direction – we face a Rust-belt like obsolescence in our future.

We *know* what needs to be done. PlanSmart NJ has a four-step guide to do this through a more effective State Plan:

Step 1: Pursue an aggressive economic development strategy that targets jobs that will strengthen the economic base of each region of New Jersey.

Step 2: Connect a commensurate housing program to meet the affordability requirements of the workforce and special needs populations.

Step 3: Locate the jobs and housing in places that will:

- **Shift travel to public transit**
- **Improve natural resources**
- **Reduce the concentration of poverty and segregation**

Step 4: Make regional compact agreements among all agents of government to implement the plan in each county and hold decision-makers accountable for results.

The result? A single vision of the future of New Jersey – One New Jersey – that will specify what needs to be done in different places to address their different conditions.

The famous environmentalist, Aldo Leopold, expressed our hopes best when he said: “We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect.”

The good news is we have the **power** to do this. With the help of One New Jersey, this Administration and this Legislature can unite to make the structural and programmatic changes that we need. And further good news is we have the **knowledge** to do it – we can assemble the data, harness the expertise and use computerized mapping tools to understand what kind and how much growth should go where.

All we need now is the political **will** to use the power and the knowledge to get the job done. And get it done in a short enough timeframe to make a difference to everyone in New Jersey today. And for generations to come.

It is my hope that sometime in the future, each of you will look back on today’s event and think – “Wow! I was there! I was there when we decided – enough! I was there to have my voice counted in building One New Jersey.”

Thank you. I would now like to turn the podium to my friend and co-convenor of this event, Rev. Lenton R. Buffalo, Pastor of the Union Baptist Church and President of the Board of Trustees of the NJ Regional Coalition.