

Keynote Address

Lieutenant Governor Mary O. Donohue, Conference Chair
Quality Communities Task Force Report Overview

As chair of the governor's task force on quality communities, I want to give you an overview of where we've gone with the recommendations and where we plan to go. First of all, the governor deserves the credit for forming the task force. As many of you know in this room who have been working with him over his terms in office, you recognize that he started laying the ground work for the task force in January of 1995. He's fought constantly for policies over the last six years that have put this state on the right path and it fostered new and improved working partnerships.

That's the key. That's our philosophy of government. We don't want to be a bureaucracy intent on enhancing itself. We want to reach out and enhance the groups and the private, as well as the public, sector who are working with the localities to advance and to implement the localities' visions of what they want to be, their quality community, not what myself or the governor sees as their vision, what they want their communities to be. They have chosen to live there. We have to respect that and work with them and provide the leadership needed to have those visions of their quality communities realized.

I also have a tremendous amount of appreciation for the people who serve with me on that task force and all the commissioners, many of whom are with us this morning, who served not only with me, but worked with the advisory committees. David Miller [Audubon New York's executive director] was pivotal in working with the task force and exerting the leadership that was needed, that we continue not only to offer ideas to our localities, but to listen, again, the predominant theme, on what the localities believe they are and to make sure that those visions are realistic; to work with them, to ensure that their visions are sustainable.

We have different members of the advisory committee who are with us this morning, as well as the task force members. The Smart Growth Working Group members, many of your members, like David [Miller], John Lincoln, Jerry Cosgrove, John Nolan, Patrick Duggan, Scott Heyl, Phil LaRocque, Paul Elston, Bruce Boncke and Brian McMahon; those are

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just a few of the individuals who not only have been working with you, but have been working with the governor and me through the task force indirectly to implement those visions that I talked about.

The quality communities initiative was truly a collaborative effort. It could not have been successful without complete collaboration. The first meeting we had as a group with the advisory committee was — I believe it was the occasion of the hearing at Albany Airport, and we had a delay early on in the day before the hearing was able to begin, a technical delay, and some of the people who were with us were concerned about the issues that the delay would cause, because it was the first day that the task force had met directly with the advisory committee, and not only on the task force, but across the advisory committee, we had representatives of different sectors of the community, different sectors that at times had been polarized in what they saw as the vision for that locality and that quality community, but what started that morning at Albany Airport continued to build and gain momentum throughout the work of the task force.

Everyone came to the table in that extra half an hour to an hour that we had and the initial reaction was, uh-oh, we haven't had time to really have a sense of how we can bring this group together. The good news was, we didn't need time. Around the table that morning, the participants said, this is the first time we've had an opportunity to come together and to sit together at the same table to have a direct exchange with government and with the private sector working in unison. We continue

to work in unison, and through the course of the task force, there were many remarks that we should have done this a long time ago. We should have gotten together and recognized that the only way for each of us to achieve our vision, whether it's an economic vision, an environmental vision, a health vision, a criminal justice vision. The only way we can truly achieve our goals is by listening, yes, compromising to some degree, and working together. So that launched us with the task force on a very positive note.

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The recommendations that we presented to the governor a few months ago are aimed at developing those measures to assist communities throughout our state in implementing not only effective land development measures, which are, of course, pivotal, but also preservation measures, rehabilitation strategies that promote both economic development as well as environmental protection.

The goal as well as the vision of the task force itself was to provide the localities with the tools they need to create those quality communities by using existing resources. Time and again, as we conducted the hearings around the state, we realized and saw day to day that communities were not aware of their internal resources. We wanted them to reach out and use models that were working well in other areas of the state, but in every instance they had local experts, local resources who were available to help them, and at the same time to build those local resources bases and to make them successful in their local communities.

So that is what these recommendations will accomplish as they focus on areas from economic growth to housing, transportation, downtown revitalization, agriculture, as well as open space conservation.

First and foremost, the task force believes we need to improve as a state the way we assist and collaborate with local governments. We can do that by adopting a uniform set of quality communities' principles that are implemented agency-wide across all agencies - statewide agencies - that our departments and agencies will also incorporate in their day to day dealings with localities.

Localities face a huge burden in dealing with the bureaucracy, the paperwork, the red tape. Several of our recommendations address ways to alleviate those burdens; such as a review of current policies relating to the state grant process. Streamlining and consolidating that process by using a smart paperwork concept that will allow our communities to submit one application for a variety of grant programs, and very importantly, by creating a clearing house via the web to provide communities with instant access to data, to programs, and to state resources that are useful for their planning and their development.

You know, here in Albany and in other major cities around our state, we enjoy and all too often, take for granted technological advances like high speed internet access, telecommunication centers and our buildings that are wired with fiberoptics. Rural parts of our state as well as some suburban areas do not have these capabilities. It's time to take action and close that digital divide. The state and locality should identify and inventory the availability of broad band infrastructure. We started doing that through the task force and we're continuing to work on that.

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We're past the eleventh hour. A theme I mentioned before, the respect that we have and should have for people's choices of where they live in New York state. We have to give people from Buffalo to Brooklyn the access they need to reach their dreams, to keep their families in the localities they've chosen to live in by providing them access not only to the leisure time activities that they choose, but the economic and career opportunities that they're looking for.

In addition, the task force has also recommended determining where this fiberoptic accessibility is lacking. Leveraging our RFP process to make state highway right of ways available for fiberoptic cable, investigating opportunities for fiberoptic cable installation on other types of transportation corridors, conducting a demonstration project to bridge internet gaps using those transportation right-of-ways; and last, but far from least, by fostering public-private E-commerce initiatives all over the state, not just in our larger metropolitan areas.

To continue utilizing modern technology, we must also enhance the State Office of Technologies' hugely successful Geographic Information System (GIS). We must encourage use of that GIS as a sound and an efficient research and planning tool for local governments.

John McKeith



The loss of farm land was another theme that recurred and really was interwoven throughout whatever we discussed all over the state, as well as the maintenance of a successful and profitable farm industry in our state. Both are pivotal issues that we must continue to address. Agriculture is still one of the largest industries in New York state and in traveling the state in campaigning with the governor in '98, I became acutely aware of the business expertise that deserves our respect, of the farmers all over the state.

All too often we don't have that respect. We don't have that knowledge of the history, the families passing on the farming industry from generation to generation, many hugely successful farming industries around our state that we have to encourage, that we have to keep. It's a pivotal background, a backbone that made our state the Empire State that we must continue to respect and to foster in every way we can the success of that industry.

We are pleased that many of our recommendations in this area were recognized in the governor's Executive Budget for the years 2001 and 2002. In one of my many hats as lieutenant governor, I have the opportunity and the privilege of working directly with the governor as he develops that budget, and by the fall, the quality communities task force, we had at least a skeleton outline of what we wanted to recommend to the governor. So in sitting next to him and developing his budget, those initiatives would come up. Carol Stone, our director of the budget, was on the task force with us and we channeled through the DOB directly to the governor all of the initiatives that we believed were going

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Audubon New York



to need funding in order to be successful. There was no point in submitting recommendations to the governor at the end of January unless we knew that they had the teeth to be not only discussed in the coming year, but to be concrete and to be successful realities in the coming year. So as I sat next to him when those initiatives would come up, I'd be saying to him, quality communities, governor. Each time they came up the good news was, as time went on, I recognized I didn't need to say that to him because he was already on the same page with us, and you know, I was also concerned that the more I mentioned the QC words, the closer he'd get to having a quota to how much he could allocate just for that, but it didn't stop.

He supported us 300 percent with his budget proposals, and just a few of those specifically that are included in the budget we're now negotiating with the legislature. Our proposal to enact legislation to extend agricultural assessment eligibility to start up farming operations, to expand our Farm Viability Program, and to facilitate easier operation of farmer's markets and roadside stands; again, a very successful business contact for the farmers with the community. There are close to 300 of them now in the Empire State and thousands of them across the country. We have to do more to respect the choice of the farmers and the consumers to buy their goods in that manner.

The governor unquestionably has become a national leader in providing

funding and implementing policies that protect and preserve our environment. In fact, since he took office in January of 1995, we have led the entire country in this effort. We protected more than 300,000 acres of land. Under his leadership, our state has funded the Environmental Protection Fund and proposed this year a record level of funding, \$150,000,000 in the same Executive Budget that we're working hard to get passed in substance not just in symbolism. We have to be firm in making sure that the budget that is passed represents and encompasses those quality community principles, not just for us, but to make sure that we're working hard on behalf of the individuals in the state who need those principles to maintain their life and to ensure that the generations that come after them in their localities enjoy an even better quality of life. In continuing the governor's commitment to environmental protection, the task force is recommending the state give the localities themselves the option to create open space districts. We also propose enhancement of state funding for purchase of development rights on undeveloped lands and to create a model program that streamlines the transfer of development rights process.

Last week, the governor submitted a comprehensive plan to refinance, reform and improve the state's Superfund Program. The proposal he made calls upon state lawmakers to immediately act upon it and to pass that legislation. This proposal includes extending the empire zone property. We want more of these tax benefits. They need to extend it to upstate brownfields of ten acres or more. That was a theme that we heard all over the state, particularly in central New York, western New York. The brownfields that need to be improved and can be used, those sites themselves, for productive manners to enhance the localities.

“For too long we've had disincentives for cleaning up brownfields.”

The new measure would save environmentally friendly businesses nearly \$30,000,000 when it's fully effective on January 1, 2003. It would also call for the creation of a new statewide Brownfield Renewal Tax Credit Program to encourage the voluntary clean up of brownfields in every part of our state by providing individuals, as well as businesses, a tax credit equal to the portion of the cost to clean up the contaminated sites. For too long we've had disincentives for cleaning up brownfields. I heard that repeatedly in my years of practicing law. We have to give incentives to have industry feel secure and to get the tax credits and to work even more on alleviating those liability issues that they incur by working with brownfields. The new credit would become effective this year and would provide \$41,000,000 in tax savings to environmentally friendly businesses alone.

The remaining recommendations of the task force are also important, they're all important elements, but particularly, the recommendations that I want to mention to you now are the ground work of a quality community -- transportation, infrastructure, housing and economic growth. Those recommendations include creation of an employer-based housing program that would provide incentives to the private sector to address those regional job and housing imbalances that we saw all over the state. The City of Newburgh, for an example, if the Hudson Valley were a separate state, it would be number one in the entire country for job creation, but there are pockets in the Hudson Valley that aren't enjoying that. In the City of Newburgh, we need better housing, we need better transportation opportunities for people in the lower income areas in Newburgh to be able to reach out, apply and travel to those jobs in the Hudson Valley and to have the housing available to help them stay where

they choose to live. The private sector has to be involved in that. Again, our philosophy of government is to give incentives to the private sector and help the people to flourish.

Hopefully, our goal is we want them to flourish independent of government. There is no question that government should be there when it's necessary, whether it's welfare, whether it's housing, all kinds of quality communities initiatives, but we don't want to strangle the individual spirit of the people in our state. For too many decades, the governor and I believe that was happening. Bureaucrats working to enhance themselves instead of working to enhance the private sector and the individuals.

So in addition to the housing initiatives that we want the private sector employers to be involved in, the task force is also recommending improving coordination among state and localities and the private sector again, on local highway construction projects. I've seen that wherever I travel in the state. We need to coordinate with the private sector in an effort to keep road closures and delays to a minimum regardless of what initiatives were undertaken, and last, but far from least, to encourage the use of shared services across municipal and school boundaries and improving the state guidelines for comprehensive planning. When I reviewed those guidelines, my first reaction was, no wonder localities aren't participating more in state-wide comprehensive planning with this gobbledy gook. They're too busy with their own initiatives to go through this labyrinth. So the task force started all of this off. We worked on all of these initiatives ourselves and we're going to continue those initiatives. We have been since we made those recommendations to the governor at the end of January.

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During the past few months alone, we've started to implement and continued working on the recommendations. In February, the state announced an agreement with SUNY, our College of Environmental Science and Forestry, which ironically, pursuant to statute, that's another job of the lieutenant governor. I serve on their Board of Directors and I became aware in that capacity of the many resources we had there that could work with the localities. They're based in Onondaga County and we started and created an initiative there that we hope, I hope, and plan, that that's going to go statewide.

They're working with the lake side communities on Lake Ontario to develop community visions on all the issues I've mentioned to you and anything else that will go into making those lake side, lake front communities the best that they can be. We're using that as a model, and we're expecting that that model will be used again, that SUNY college can branch out. It's great for the students to have that training, the professors with their expertise are directly involved. A town and gown initiative that the goal is not enhancement of the town or the gown, enhancement of the individuals, their initiatives, and enhancement of the communities to serve the people in the best way possible. That recommendation fulfilled, that implementation of the recommendation 11 of our 41 recommendations that we made to the governor; it was an important one because it encourages the use of our professional public expertise in developing and implementing those community visions.

Recommendation 2 was fulfilled when the governor recently created an interagency working group which is considered by many who have read the report to be perhaps the most important implementation to get going

as soon as possible. When I made the recommendations to the governor, I said to him that I wanted to stay with those recommendations because they had to be more than just a paper report. He responded by making me head of the interagency working group which I'm pleased to be head of. The commissioners and I have developed, I believe, a very strong rapport in working together through the task force and we want to continue that rapport to make sure that all of the recommendations are implemented, number one, but also to continue the open communication that we've developed across our statewide agencies. Coming to the table together and talking not only helps us recognize when there's duplication or when there's a shortage of effort, but just our knowing each other better as professionals can enhance the trust level, the ability to just pick up the phone, and for the commissioners to be calling me, calling the governor, working together. Communication is the key.

So I'll be holding the first meeting of that working group in the next couple of weeks and it will be productive. Working with the

commissioners, I have no doubt that we'll be having concrete ideas on how to better implement those recommendations. Each of you here can be a key to the success of that also. So I welcome your calls, your input. David [Miller], I know you'll be there, because you have been every step of the way, but we want an open door to make sure that we're representing your ideas.

The working group is going to be the vehicle to implement all the remaining task force recommendations. Initially, it will be focusing on assisting agencies with adoption of those quality communities principles that I described to you. We'll also help each of the agencies develop strategies to coordinate that agency's program and to ensure that it is consistent with those quality communities principles.

A number of the agencies, though, have already begun. They've shown their independent leadership in taking wings from the task force and shouldn't that be the goal of any task force? I think there was a sense and a few of them called me and said, do you mind if we start this and then when the working group is formed, we'll have something to bring to the table? That's ideal to know that the spirit of the task force took hold to the degree that it has a life of its own beyond the task force and that should be the goal of any governmental initiative. For example, the Department of Transportation under the able leadership of Commissioner Boardman has already made a series of presentations of a final report and recommendations that it's making to its regional offices to help us implement those recommendations we made to the governor and to other key DOT staff. The Department of State is adapting its local training — Governmental Training and Technical Assistance Programs to include quality communities initiatives.

The working group will also provide an organizational structure to discuss other programs, other issues. When we discussed



what the name of the task force would be, we tossed around all kinds of different names, and really, for lack of a better description, the governor and I settled on, well, we'll call it quality communities and we agreed that in a few weeks we'd come back and talk and get input from other people because we were determined that we could think of a better description of the task force. Well, after three or four weeks in chairing the task force I came back to him, and said, you know, I'd like to leave the title just the way it is.

And he said to me, well, are you sure, it's a really broad responsibility. It encompasses everything that could become a community initiative. But as I said to him then, if we limit it to the term "smart growth" or if we limit it to one component, we're really not going to be doing our job. It did become an awesome responsibility and a concern to the task force. How are we going to come up with recommendations to cover the issues? To date, we have, and I welcome your input this morning, but we've received positive reaction that the recommendations do go the extra mile to ensure that we're covering all of the themes the communities need for us to exert the leadership and for them to implement their individual visions.

So other examples, though, on how the agencies are implementing the quality communities, that broad theme. The departments of Health, Transportation, State, the Office for the Aging and the governor's Traffic Safety Committee, there's a broad spectrum of themes right there, have already begun planning a state pedestrian conference. Sounds like a simple issue. It is a simple issue, but it's an issue that hasn't been dealt with enough. Haven't we learned over the last few decades on how government can compli-

cate issues to the degree where it just becomes a philosophy, another paper report.

The mission in this conference is to fulfill an important recommendation to the task force; namely, to begin making our communi-

ties more walkable. Time and again, we heard that simple theme all over the state, enough had not been done about it. So we are going to continue working on that. To revive our cities and to improve the quality of life within communi-

ties has to be a collective effort, not just the residents, not just the businesses, not just the community leaders, statewide leaders, local leaders, but everyone who has an interest or a concern. And that cooperative effort must reach an agreement on the vision and the potential of the community. That has to be done and then that potential must become a plan of action which harnesses available resources.

And as I close, just an anecdote, I know some of you here have been lifelong residents of Rensselaer County as I have been. I recall 30 years ago urban renewal. That theme without having a specific cooperative community vision razed, r-a-z-e, no "i" involved the downtown area that my parents had loved, my grandparents had loved. It was gone. We had a hole for too many years. We're still trying to recover from that and now looking back, when you think of the jewel in historic preservation, the brownstones in my hometown community, there wasn't a unified set of quality communities principles or a collaborative effort. We know better now, and we know because of issues like that. I can't — we can't be too critical. That was 30 years ago, but we have learned

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from experiences like that, and we learned — I learned that what would work in Troy is not what would work in Buffalo, is not what would work in Elmira. You have to reach deep into the community and find what the jewels are in that community that makes people want to stay there and bring those jewels out. Individualize it to the locality.

So that's why the task force report that we presented is a plan. We don't believe it's a plan, we know it's a plan, that will improve and already is improving upon existing state resources that will and already is facilitating cooperation between and among state government and its agencies, and that does create a series of new viable initiatives to help the communities better reach their goals.

The title of our report, *State and Local Government Partnering for a Better New York*, is also telling, not only of what we hoped to happen optimally in New York, but it's also indicative of what already is happening in many of our communities. Again, I've seen it all over the state. We have quality communities now. We have outstanding examples of collaboration working together that can be used in other areas of the state that are not so advanced in developing their vision. It was encouraging to hear and to see firsthand that many of those communities around our state are already engaged in those types of efforts. The restoration of downtown Corning's Market Street is a fantastic example. That was an area of the state that I didn't have an opportunity to visit before I was lieutenant governor. Now I recognize so much. The Finger Lakes area, from the Adirondacks, that whole quarter, there's so much there to bring tourists. There's so much there to make people want to live there that we have to bring out. To bring out not only that region of the state, but to bring out in New York, in New York City to make people there

aware of how much more there is to New York that's beautiful not only for visiting, but for liveability.

The floods that devastated Corning in 1972 helped create a coalition to rebuild Market Street and its historic buildings. Those of you who haven't been there, I recommend you visit for vacation, for work, whatever. It's a fantastic place to be and it's a thriving downtown area.

Michael Marvin, speaking of Rensselaer County, how about that for a fantastic success story, Map Info. I recall when that started in the early 80's, phenomenal success right in Rensselaer County. The tools were there, and when I became lieutenant governor, I thought, this is my chance to go to bat for Rensselaer County, for the Capital Region. I soon found out that the governor was already in tune with the high-tech advances, the high-tech potential that we have here in the Capital Region is unequal of anywhere and we are, pun intended, capitalizing on that.

There's so much not only here in the Albany area, but around the state. As Michael Marvin mentioned, he's been a rainmaker right here in the area in building



Map Info, and he stated at our Albany round table that quality communities take more than 50 years to create and only decades to destroy. That's a thought, that we all have to remember and recognize our responsibilities and our mission.

While the task force report builds upon six years of the governor's programs, we have to ensure that what we build is not just a phenomenon of the 1990's. That would make it all be a tragedy if we can't look beyond us, to look beyond us and build those quality communities for our children and for future generations. The report is, I believe, a solid

foundation on which to build and support the state in its priorities long into the future.

I encourage all of you to continue working with us. It's the only way we will be successful. Thinking not just of our individual power base, our individual expertise, but looking beyond ourselves for the individuals that have made New York state the melting pot that it is and it made it the Empire State. We want that to continue long beyond us, and I'm confident that if we continue the solid partnership we built, that it will. Thank you so much for giving me the opportunity to join you this morning and good luck.

Olivia Arditi, University at Buffalo



Clarence Center, a second-ring suburb of Buffalo.