

# Sustainable Economic Development

Moderator: **Patrick Duggan**, Executive Director, Sustainable Long Island;  
Panel Members: **Catherine Durand**, Chief Budget Examiner, New York State Div. of the Budget;  
**David Church**, Executive Director, New York Planning Federation;  
**Graham Cox**, Forest and Wetlands Program Coordinator, Audubon New York;  
**William Johnson**, Deputy Director, New York State Office for Technology's  
Center for Geographic Information

"The combination of a strong tradition of home rule in New York and the relative weakness of our current guidelines for comprehensive planning has created a myriad of planning and zoning laws across the state which can create impediments and delays to community and economic development."

- *Quality Communities Task Force Report*



Moderator

## **Patrick Duggan**

Executive Director,  
Sustainable Long Island

According to Mr. Duggan, Sustainable Long Island is working with civic groups, community-based organizations, and community economic development entities to develop specific smart growth projects on Long Island. Part of the process they advocate is community-based planning, where they work with various identified leaders to build relationships and look for ways to involve residents, leaders and the people who live and work in the communities in the planning process. According to Mr. Duggan, this is a very important piece of sustainable development. He said,



*As leaders, we have no choice but to figure out how to invite in everyone who is going to be affected by change. If the issue is meaningful to them, they will become enthusiastic and advocates. If we want people's intelligence and support, we must welcome them as co-creators. People only support what they create. -- Sustainable Long Island.*

“Engaging people, residents, is what makes a sustainable economic process happen.”

According to Mr. Duggan, the first step in the process is to create an entity that acts as an umbrella group and brings together all the local interests, especially ones that typically don't work together. Sustainable Long Island will then provide technical assistance, organize the community, make a bridge with government and business, identify funding sources, hold education workshops and through that process, will usually do a community-visioning process.

According to Mr. Duggan, the education workshops focus on teaching residents about smart growth principles such as walkable communities, transit oriented development, and sustainable economic development. Sustainable Long Island will bring in experts from around the country who have done smart growth projects or have implemented smart growth programs. Mr. Duggan gave as an example the Town of Huntington, where they sponsored a series of public education workshops over a year with their local partner Vision Huntington. Mr. Duggan said, “We believe in educating the public so that you're

“Engaging people, residents, is what makes a sustainable economic process happen...we believe in educating the public so that you're not just rehashing old issues, but you're really teaching people and raising consciousness around what this is about.”

not just rehashing old issues, but you're really teaching people and raising consciousness around what this is about.” The community visioning process is typically facilitated by architectural and design experts both locally

and from around the country, and will lead to a shared vision with projects, resources, and timetables that enable the project's implementation.

One initiative that Mr. Duggan pointed to was their brownfields redevelopment initiative, where they are working to “transform neighborhoods, empower stakeholders, [and] link families with neighborhoods and to one another.” Throughout all their initiatives, Mr. Duggan said that they have found it is very important to also spread the news about what works and what doesn't.

In terms of Quality Communities, Mr. Duggan felt that many states around the country have been working on smart growth issues for many years and that New York state is just now coming together around principles that will need to be implemented in the years to come. He emphasized the need to focus on specific regional needs as well as providing the necessary dollars and technical assistance.

**Catherine H. Durand**  
Chief Budget Examiner,  
New York State Division of the Budget

Ms. Durand began by giving an overview of the sustainable development subcommittee which was chaired by Carol Stone, the Budget Director, and the process it followed. According to Ms. Durand, the subcommittee members consisted of the task force members, as well as Advisory Committee members. The subcommittees worked over the summer of 2000 to develop recommendations for the full task force to consider for the final report, many of which were incorporated.

According to Ms. Durand, the first role of the subcommittee was to try to define what its mission was to avoid overlapping with the work of the other subcommittees. To do so they decided to focus on sustainable economic development, and defined that term to mean “policies and practices that encourage systematic participation in the integration of economic, community well-being, and environmental protection objectives in planning regulatory and incentive programs and processes governing communities and regional development.”

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the ten round tables held around the state, Ms. Durand said that the subcommittee decided to focus on three issues: 1) local and regional economic development planning capacity; 2) the coordination of state and economic development efforts with local and regional plans; and 3) the impediments to achieving sustainable economic development and recommendations that would help overcome those impediments.

To do so, the subcommittee looked at current economic development policies and planning activities at both the state and local levels. Contributing to this effort were subcommittee members Noreen Reilly from Dutchess County and

Terri Martin from Cattaraugus County, as well as staff from the Budget Division of Empire State Development, the Department of State, and the Office of Real Property Services.

According to Ms. Durand, the subcommittee based their recommendations to the task force on four major areas of study, which included: 1) the economic and demographic factors that contribute to urban, rural, and suburban growth patterns; 2) how the political and jurisdictional realities of New York affect inter-municipal cooperation and coordinated regional development, with a focus on local property tax issues and overlapping jurisdictions; 3) existing programs in New York state that encourage and stimulate economic development and job creation; and 4) impediments to achieving sustainable economic development.

According to Ms. Durand, the major findings of the subcommittee were, “that it is important to try to achieve a balance between remaining competitive in the 21st century and preserving those aspects of our surroundings that are true indicators of quality communities.” In addition, she said, “In order to

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comments from



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achieve sustainable economic development, communities need to understand and build from their existing economic, environmental and community strength, and sustainable economic development plans often fail because a community fails to recognize, in the first instance, what its strengths are in those areas.”

Some of the impediments they identified were: 1) the difficulty of achieving inter-municipal cooperation and coordinated regional development due to the multiplicity of jurisdictions and taxing authorities that drive incentives and are sometimes contrary to sustainable economic development; and 2) that many economic development programs exist at the state level, but local guidelines and statutes and local planning practices are often inconsistent and inadequate.

Ms. Durand then proceeded to talk about the specific Quality Communities Task Force Report recommendations that addressed sustainable economic development and how they will be implemented:

- Recommendations 8, 9, and 10 pertain to the use of technology to create development tools and eliminate barriers to quality development. The Executive Budget for 2001-2002, provides \$20.6 million for the New York E-Net which, Ms. Durand said, “is going to consolidate a myriad of separate networks throughout the state and enhance communication across government levels assisting local governments in utilizing new technology.” In addition, \$4.2 million has been

Beverly A. Sanford, University at Buffalo



allocated to standardize and improve the quality of the geographic information system data, which, Ms. Durand said, “will serve as a valuable economic development tool.” Ms. Durand pointed to the new mapping site on the New York state website that has a lot of information to help local governments in their planning process and has also been slated for additional money to enhance it further. The report also recommended the creation of a centralized quality communities website which will ultimately enable anyone to type in quality communities and find all related information. According to Ms. Durand, the initial steps are underway to achieve that goal.

- Recommendations 4 and 5 pertain to improving access to state government and streamlining grant and permit application processes. According to Ms. Durand, the governor’s statewide E-Commerce Initiative has begun the process of reducing red tape and streamlining cumbersome application processes and giving people access to government information 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. In addition, the 2001-2002 Executive Budget provides funding to continue developing New York’s on-line permitting and licensing system which is called OPAL, that allows businesses and individuals to both identify permit requirements and apply on-line for business permits and state licenses. The Executive Budget also funds the permit assistance website, which is [www.NYS-permits.org](http://www.NYS-permits.org). According to Ms. Durand,

that enables new or expanding businesses to obtain on-line information regarding required permits and licenses.

- Recommendation 20 calls for enhancing incentives for brownfield redevelopment and hazardous waste site remediation. According to Ms. Durand, the governor's Superfund refinancing proposal includes legislation providing for enhancement incentives for brownfield redevelopment and hazardous waste site remediation. In addition, she said that the governor's 2001-2002 Upstate Economic Development Plan provides real property tax credits for brownfield use based on size and creates a new brownfield renewal tax credit to encourage voluntary clean up.
- Recommendations 39 and 40 in the Quality Communities Task Force Report pertain to local government planning and shared services. According to Ms. Durand, preliminary drafts for legislation to provide better guidelines for local planning and to encourage local governments to engage in shared services are underway.
- Recommendations 2 and 3 deal with establishing an interagency working group and providing training and technical assistance programs to local officials on quality community principles. According to Ms. Durand, the budget provides an additional \$425,000 in new funding to be used by the Department of State for additional staff and resources to continue the Quality Communities Interagency Task Force and to provide local governments with enhanced technical assistance to advance quality community principles.

Other budget initiatives that Ms. Durand pointed to outside of the sustainable economic development framework were: 1) proposed tax credits to facilitate the preservation of open space and farmland; 2) continuation of the dedicated funding source for purchase of development rights on undeveloped land; and

3) the provision for \$150 million in additional funding through the Environmental Protection Fund for critical environmental initiatives.

Ms. Durand said, "The Executive Budget, recognizing that it came out ahead of the Task Force Report, goes a long way nevertheless in implementing a lot of these major recommendations." She concluded by saying, "My experience thus far has been that you really do overcome a lot of obstacles if you just pull the key agencies together, and in a clear direction from the governor, which certainly this task force has had, it's remarkable how much you can get done."

## David Church

Executive Director,  
New York Planning Federation

Mr. Church directed his comments to the Quality Communities Task Force Report's recommendations 39 and 40, which are the comprehensive planning and the shared services issues. In defining sustainable development within the framework of these two recommendations, he said that there seems to be two different view points. The one preferred by Mr. Church is the United Nations' definition which talks about learning from our past and translating our current experiences into something that preserves the ability of future generations to make the same decisions. The other definition he pointed to is that of economic development professionals, who consider keeping "the business a business" as sustainable, and not so much a business' impact on the community.

Mr. Church used his own community as an example and said, "Where I live in the eastern Catskills, it seems we're going to solve our economy in three ways, warehouses, casinos, and big box retail and not much else in between." However, he pointed to "a slow sort of rediscovery. I think that in many ways, we're very much economically anchored in our

“We all face that notion that every little jurisdiction is in a rateables chase. Their only source of revenue is essentially the property tax, and everybody’s now learned that houses are a loser, commercial and industrial is a winner, and everything else is maybe a wash or a toss up.”



main streets and our agricultural base ... to even the forest base as well.”

Addressing recommendation 39 on comprehensive planning, Mr. Church said that New York state was way ahead of many other states in terms of defining the process. He emphasized the process works best when it includes a step to analyze a community’s assets and liabilities and a step to build community wide consensus. According to Mr. Church, consensus should involve a variety of interest groups, including the private sector, to engage in the economic development strategy. He also said, “analysis and consensus building in a comprehensive plan empowers leadership, ... so they can deliver an economic development strategy.”

According to Mr. Church, the two key things that government can provide by carrying out a good planning process are: 1) a sense of predictability for the business community and other governmental entities; and 2) concurrency or consistency in terms of working with different jurisdictions or agencies. As an example, Mr. Church said that the key focus of New Jersey’s State Plan is “to try to get local government [consensus] building in the various interest groups in support of a local plan, but also getting that consistency

between levels of government and interagency as well, so everybody [is] sort of working from the same perspective.” In New York, Mr. Church explained by way of example, that often one agency might be pursuing land for acquisition to preserve, while another agency might be planning a highway interchange on the same land, potentially putting infrastructure in place that will elevate the price for economic development.

In addition, Mr. Church felt that the concurrency issue also applied to recommendation 4, which covered shared services or inter-municipal cooperation. Currently, what one municipality can do, they can do shared with another in an inter-municipal agreement. According to Mr. Church, this was made possible through legislation supported by the Pataki administration and that New York is seeing this happen in many ways. According to Mr. Church, inter-municipal cooperation started simply with just some villages and towns informally working on a plan together, to a more formally structured collaborative process.

According to Mr. Church, the issue missing from the discussion in the Quality Communities Task Force Report is the property tax issue. He said, “We all face the notion that every little jurisdiction is in a rateables

chase. Their only source of revenue is essentially the property tax, and everybody's now learned that houses are a loser, commercial and industrial is a winner, and everything else is maybe a wash or a toss up." Most elected officials are, therefore, working to keep the tax rate stable, which means, "chasing after rateables." Mr. Church believes that until we address that dilemma through a planning process that encourages inter-municipal cooperation, which gets to the idea of supporting revenue sharing, "we're really not going to get anywhere with some of these issues."

Mr. Church also addressed Industrial Development Agencies (IDAs), which he believes are "consistently out of sync with other levels of local government." He held that IDAs run into difficulties when their jurisdictions don't match up with town lines and, therefore, they are not talking to the local

planning boards or legislative bodies. This he believes leads, again, to inconsistency, in terms of tax breaks and incentives and the chasing of tax rateables and needs to be addressed more formally.

In closing he encouraged communities to look at their economy more locally and to "get away from the let's solve our problem by bringing in the next IBM or big bucks retail, or a casino." He suggests looking at the work of the Rocky Mountain Institute for ideas on how to do this. The four principles advocated by the Rocky Mountain Institute are: 1) the notion of plugging the leaks so that you keep local money in the local economy; 2) supporting existing businesses first; 3) encouraging new enterprises from local people; and 4) in recruiting new enterprises, emphasize compatibility with current businesses and the character of your community.

## Monitoring Shoreline Change



*Above is a GIS map created by the New York State Office for Technology's Center for Geographic Information. William Johnson, the Center's Deputy Director pointed out, "It's a technology that links information to maps, so that you can use that to inventory your assets and make smart decisions."*

## Graham Cox

Forest/Wetlands Program Coordinator,  
Audubon New York

Mr. Cox talked about recommendation number 41 in the Quality Communities Task Force Report, which addressed the need to coordinate existing State Agency and University resources to help create “regional inventories and indicators” and to make this information available for local leaders in developing local plans. According to Mr. Cox, the challenge in implementing this recommendation is figuring out how to help local leaders access and interpret all the information that is currently available. For example, Mr. Cox said, “There is a lot of information on economic and ecological land use issues in this state. The problem we have is making the connections between the economy and land use.”

In addition, Mr. Cox felt it was important to define what we meant by sustainable. By way of example, Mr. Cox said that the forestry industry used to think as long as you didn’t cut down the trees faster than they were growing back, you were producing a sustainable yield. However, now they know that sustainable forestry practices need to cover much more, and, in the same way, communities need to get beyond the notion that getting businesses at any cost and praying that they will stay is not sustainable. According to Mr. Cox, they need to look “at the context in which they’re

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operating and how do you make it a lot easier for them to stay in business and be an integral part of the whole community.”

He also pointed to the need to tie together the three value systems, ecological, economic, and social, which for too long have been seen as independent entities to accomplish sustainable development. One example he offered was a project by the Economics Department of Rennselaer Polytechnic Institute (RPI), which is working on an economic model for Dutchess County, that ties together economic issues with watershed issues, and is linking it to others with a Geographic Information System (GIS). By doing so, he said that they will be able to determine how certain kinds of economic decisions will impact land use.

He concluded by asking, “if you don’t know where you are right now, and you don’t have measures of how sustainable your community is, then how do you know you’ve made any progress towards sustainable?” According to Mr. Cox, there is a wealth of information to produce quality of life indices, and by putting those indices together, models can be made to “link the pieces that have to be linked together.” He encouraged communities to start doing that for themselves and putting it into a GIS database and not waiting for somebody else to make it happen.



## William Johnson

Deputy Director,  
New York State Office for Technology's  
Center for Geographic Information

Mr. Johnson gave an overview of Geographic Information Systems (GIS), which was supported in recommendation 9 of the Quality Communities Task Force Report.

He began by explaining that GIS is a technology and a tool, which he called a "smart map." He said, "It's a technology that links information to maps, so that you can use that to inventory your assets and make smart decisions."

"It's [GIS] a technology that links information to maps, so that you can use that to inventory your assets and make smart decisions."

Using visuals he showed that underneath the GIS there are maps, which for example could show individual tax parcels or an image layer. These two types of maps can be combined to determine what kinds of structure and what kinds of infrastructure exists around those parcels. According to Mr. Johnson, that is just the visual side of GIS, but that the power in GIS begins when you start linking database information to it. Therefore, with a tax parcel database linked to the tax parcel map you could point to a parcel on the map and retrieve detailed information about that parcel out of the database.

He gave several examples of how GIS is being used in government:

- He showed an overlay of an 1880s shoreline pre-development map of the City of Long Beach on the south shore of Long Island with a 1994 aerial photograph that's been co-registered, which showed an enormous amount of change.
- He showed how the New York State Department of Health is using GIS to track the outbreak of West Nile Virus. Mr. Johnson said, "Locating dead birds with

geographic information is something they never taught me in graduate school when I was studying this stuff, but it's an interesting application."

- He showed how the New York Power Authority was using GIS to manage their infrastructure by mapping power line corridors. They were able to do buffer analysis to figure out what pieces of land were not required to meet their safety buffers and could therefore be sold as surplus.
  - He showed how the Town of Deerfield was using GIS to show different land use classifications, like agricultural and vacant lands and by putting underneath it a digital ortho image and a parcel boundary map with sold parcels highlighted in red, they could start to do some analysis of land transactions, and comparable sales, and figure out where the clusters of comparable land values were.
- He showed how a community was able to in one hour's time draw a buffer around a site being proposed for economic development to automatically identify all the adjoining parcel holders and thereby generate a list of the landowners to notify about the proposal for that parcel.

Mr. Johnson then explained what the Office for Technology was doing to implement the Quality Communities Task Force Report's recommendations. According to Mr. Johnson, since 1996 through their GIS Coordination Program they have been working to use a collaborative process to bring in stake holders with a particular emphasis on local government to figure out ways to make it easier for them to use GIS. Organizationally, they have a 15-member coordinating body that is composed of five local government representatives, five state agency representatives and the remaining five from a combination of academia and the private sector. In addition they have a series of

working and advisory groups. They operate a GIS Clearing House, which is on the web and has a wealth of information. Mr. Johnson pointed out that this could be found by looking on the banner of the state's website and clicking on "Map New York."

Mr. Johnson also explained the GIS Data Sharing Cooperative, which he explained is a mechanism they created to make it easy for government agencies and not-for-profit organizations to share their GIS resources, so nobody has to reinvent data layers. They have also found that in doing so these data layers improve through use. He said, "If you make your data available to others, they use it, they improve it, they update it, and you feed some energy on to that thing and it gets better for everybody." In order to have access from a local government they have a data sharing agreement. According to Mr. Johnson, there are currently 5,000 GIS data sets available to members of the Clearinghouse and they offer to host them at no cost to members. There is also a full time staff managing the Clearinghouse. He pointed to steady growth in membership with 330 current members, representing a combination of state agencies, local governments, federal agencies,

**"If you make your data available to others, they use it, they improve it, they update it, and you feed some energy on to that thing and it gets better for everybody."**

and non-profits. They are also working to include adjoining neighbor states. In terms of data sharing, last year they tracked the exchange of 275,000 data sets, which he said, "would probably not be going on without our cooperative." The value of these data sets has also increased from an estimated \$2 million worth of data to \$12.7 million in the value of data exchange since the program's inception.

Mr. Johnson also explained how on their clearinghouse, they have an inactive portion where you can browse and search for a digital ortho photo, which is a corrected aerial photo. Their current imagery is from the mid-90's and they are in the process of upgrading to a new high resolution digital ortho imagery program using current aerial photos. They expect to cover all of the state in four years and then recycle back again from there. According to Mr. Johnson, this improved imagery will be "a very valuable base layer if you're in local government and you're trying to do things like manage your infrastructure, if you're trying to look at where are the changes in open space, where is growth occurring."

At their recently opened Center for Geographic Information they have hired a staff for the Coordinating Body to work on improving and managing framework data layers. In addition they are doing a series of training and workshop activities targeted at local governments. They are developing a GIS starter kit, with some information data and sample applications on a CD ROM to distribute to local governments. And he said they have developed a "who's who inventory" so that neighboring communities or agencies or other folks doing things in GIS can share efforts. In addition they are developing a pilot program to establish some incentives to get feedback on data updates, so that they can do a better job of maintaining things like street addresses.

