

# Revitalizing the Legacy Cities of Upstate New York

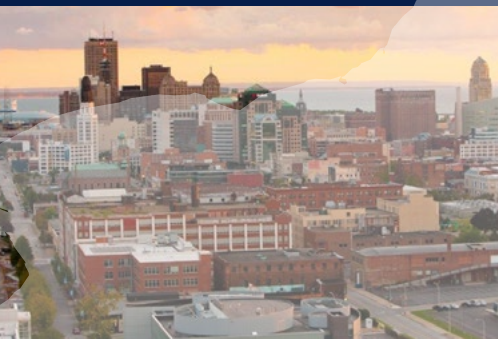
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December 11-12, 2012

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Syracuse, New York

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# PREFACE

# Preface

On December 11 and 12, 2012, a group of 100 thought leaders across academia, business and industry, and civic and nonprofit sectors gathered in Syracuse for a convening titled “Revitalizing the Legacy Cities of Upstate New York.” Sponsored by The American Assembly, CenterState Corporation for Economic Opportunity (CenterState CEO), Syracuse University (SU), and State University of New York at Buffalo’s School of Architecture and Planning, the gathering built on the momentum generated by national American Assemblies in Detroit, Michigan (2011) and in Hershey, Pennsylvania (2007), both of which focused on strategies for revitalizing America’s older industrial cities—“legacy cities”—in ways that reposition them to thrive in the 21st century economy. The goal of the Syracuse meeting was to develop an agenda to strengthen New York’s legacy cities.

As a regionally focused American Assembly, the meeting represented a significant step in coalescing a regional, cross-sector network to share expertise relating to the unique needs of Upstate New York cities and also to build further on momentum stimulated by the statewide Regional Economic Development Council (REDC) strategic planning processes initiated by Gov. Andrew Cuomo in 2011. The ten REDCs designated across the state were created to spur public-private partnerships and target state funding for development projects and initiatives tied to a regional strategic planning process developed by local business and civic leaders. Over the course of the meeting, in structured discussions, participants focused on the unique qualities and challenges facing the Upstate New York metro regions, from Buffalo to Troy.

At an introductory gathering December 11 at The Warehouse—Syracuse University’s downtown center for community engagement that is located on the Connective Corridor, a signature strip of cutting edge cultural development connecting the University Hill with Downtown Syracuse—participants heard about and saw some of the fruits of the SU-led Near West Side Initiative (NWSI). The NWSI is a cross-sector, multifaceted effort driving the revitalization of one of the city’s most impoverished and long neglected inner-city neighborhoods through the arts, technology, and green design initiatives. The session was introduced and moderated by Marilyn Higgins, vice president of economic development and community engagement at SU, and included presentations by Julia Czerniak, professor at SU’s

School of Architecture, and Maarten Jacobs, director of the Near West Side Initiative.

After a walking tour through part of downtown Syracuse, participants heard an impassioned keynote address by Robert Simpson, president and CEO of CenterState CEO, followed by a panel presentation and discussion by national specialists from outside Upstate New York. The American Assembly had invited nine authorities to augment the following day's discussions, to provide a broader perspective, and to learn from the participants. Paul Brophy, American Assembly Legacy Cities project director, gave an introductory presentation and moderated the panel of specialists, which included Lavea Brachman, Robert Weissbourd, Toni Griffin, and Hunter Morrison (their titles and institutional affiliations are listed in the report appendix).

In addition to the background material sent to the participants prior to the Assembly, these presentations set the context for the discussion sessions focusing on five critical themes that present significant challenges or opportunities for reinvigorating the fortunes of Upstate legacy cities. Discussants in each group, guided by a discussion leader and rapporteur, identified factors or circumstances contributing to common challenges facing Upstate cities and surrounding regions, reviewed promising initiatives at work in these cities or elsewhere, and brainstormed potential solutions for reinvigorating these once-vibrant urban centers. This is the report of their discussions.

On December 12, Lt. Gov. Robert J. Duffy addressed the participants. As the former mayor of Rochester and the chair of the REDCs, his knowledge and experience complemented the discussions, and in his speech to the participants, he challenged them to send him a specific list based on their discussions of the most critical priorities needed to be addressed by the Cuomo Administration. In response to the challenge, the Assembly co-sponsors compiled and sent to the lieutenant governor a list of overarching recommendations deemed to reflect the character of the day's discussions. A copy of this memo is in the appendix.

It should be understood that this report is a best effort to distill hours of discussion. Carol Boll, writer with SU's Division of Public Affairs, undertook the difficult task of compiling it with the assistance of the rapporteurs, discussion leaders, and cosponsors. Participants did not review this document prior to publication. No one was asked to sign it, and it should be assumed that not everyone agrees with all of it. Furthermore, it should be noted that participants took part in this

Assembly as individuals and spoke for themselves rather than for their affiliated organizations and institutions. It should also be noted that the co-sponsors take no positions on any subjects presented here for public discussion.

The co-sponsors would also like to express special appreciation to the members of the project steering committee and for the fine work of the discussion leaders and rapporteurs—Aaron Bartley, Stephen Chabot, Bradshaw Hovey, Bruce Kingma, Judith Mower, Seth Mulligan, Marc Norman, Mary Anne Schmitt-Carey, Robert Shibley, and Nora Spillane.

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Chancellor and President  
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Campus Architect and Dean  
University at Buffalo,  
State University of New York  
School of Architecture and Planning



Growth in the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus in Buffalo will create new neighborhood revitalization opportunities.

*Courtesy of Douglas Levere, University at Buffalo*



# I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# I. Executive Summary

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***“We’re all in this together. Our legacy cities are communities of memory, history, authenticity, and deep soul. We choose to be here. They are irreplaceable, and they are a key part of this nation.”***

Upstate legacy cities, once vibrant hubs for business and industry, education, culture, and community life, face daunting challenges as they strive to reposition themselves for an economy fueled not by the industrial manufacturing needs of past generations but increasingly by technological advancements, highly educated workers, global markets, and a spirit of innovation.

In spite of the challenges, these cities retain unique assets, including legions of dedicated citizens and leaders already collaborating in common purpose to help these once-dynamic metropolitan centers—and, by extension, their surrounding regions—achieve a prosperous and sustainable future. As Hunter Morrison, program director for the Northeast Ohio Sustainable Communities Consortium and one of nine out-of-region specialists who participated in the conference, stated at the Assembly’s welcoming dinner, “We’re all in this together. Our legacy cities are communities of memory, history, authenticity, and deep soul. We choose to be here. They are irreplaceable, and they are a key part of this nation.”

The challenges facing Upstate legacy cities—challenges decades in the making—are extraordinarily complex, multifaceted, and deeply interrelated. But it quickly became apparent during the Assembly that these cities and regional economies are both serious about and deeply committed to the goal of transforming toward the next economy. Participants, grouped according to their interest and area of expertise, embarked upon a dense schedule of five parallel discussion groups, in addition to the plenary sessions, that focused on five key challenges and opportunities: Export Economies, Innovation and Entrepreneurship, Vacant Properties and Land Use, Workforce Development and Urban Education, and Designing the Sustainable 21st Century City.

## Cross-cutting Themes

As anticipated, discussion and recommendations frequently converged, overlapped, and interlinked. It is important to note that not everybody agreed on every point. But over the course of deliberations, several cross-cutting themes emerged as crucial to driving and sustaining the collective progress of Upstate cities. These themes all revolve around a single overarching finding: the critical importance of developing and implementing regionally oriented strategies. Participants repeatedly noted the success of the REDC process and emphasized that, to the greatest extent possible, these strategies should be managed through the REDC structure or similar mechanisms that encourage a regional approach to reorienting toward a 21st century economy and community. Participants also noted the strengths of regional or metropolitan economic development strategies including those advanced with partners such as the Brookings Institution. These prioritized strategies (laid out in more complete detail in a memo addressed to Lt. Gov. Robert Duffy on page 40 of the appendix to this report) call for state policy actions to promote the following objectives:

- **Enhance Local Government Efficiency and Land-Use Coordination.** Pursue strategic communication strategies and policy refinements that advance the business case for smart growth and dissolve legal barriers that stymie “smart” regional land-use decisions.
- **Target Urban Education by Making Schools Neighborhood Magnets.** Invest in strategic initiatives that better align workforce needs with educational programming and fund interventions both within schools and in surrounding neighborhoods.
- **Build a World-Class Innovation and Entrepreneurship Ecosystem.** Cultivate a culture for creative ideas to flourish, and develop venture funding systems that tap both regional and downstate sources to support business innovation and spur growth.
- **Drive Competitiveness by Increasing Export Capacity.** Develop a coordinated and targeted state export program, including convening a statewide export council and promoting connectivity with downstate markets, to facilitate growth of Upstate export economies.
- **Empower Legacy Cities to Lead in Clean Energy Production and Energy Conservation.** Incentivize new forms of clean and sustainable energy to enhance Upstate energy independence,

spur job creation, and expand export capacity in renewable energy technology and power.

Following are key recommendations more specific to each of the five discussion areas:

- **Export Economies.** Implement informational and awareness-building strategies and mentorships, particularly for small and mid-sized businesses, to facilitate export market opportunities. Promote statewide coordination around common objectives and across disparate groups to better define market strengths and cultivate suitable global markets.
- **Innovation and Entrepreneurship.** Promote positive cultural change through mentorships and engaging with schools to advance entrepreneurial thinking. Advanced networks that pool talent across sectors and regions around common goals is essential, as is a unified cluster strategy that convenes similar industries and invests in cross-cutting opportunities.
- **Vacant Properties and Land Use.** Collaborate broadly—across city, county, and regional jurisdictions—to promote smart-growth principles both within cities and across regions. Regional land banks and engaged anchor institutions can serve as powerful facilitators and resources for advancing smart growth and spurring urban economic reinvestment.
- **Workforce Development and Urban Education.** Work across sectors to construct a “cradle-to-career” pipeline and more closely link educational curricula and programs with the demands of the private sector, such as what is being done with Say Yes to Education. Public and private sectors must collaborate to develop scholarship incentives, align civic infrastructure supports, and assure efficient delivery of services.
- **Designing the Sustainable 21st Century City.** Rein in sprawl and promote city density by strategically investing in urban education, enlisting anchor institutions in revitalization initiatives, and vigorously promoting both the business case for smart growth and the richly diverse quality-of-place assets of Upstate legacy cities.

Achieving such ambitious, multifaceted, and complex goals ultimately will require leaders and citizens to embrace a compelling and collaborative vision; anchor institutions deeply committed to city and regional well-being; and bold, dynamic, and visionary leadership capable of transcending defeatist attitudes and “business-as-usual” patterns that stifle innovation and impede progress.

## II. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

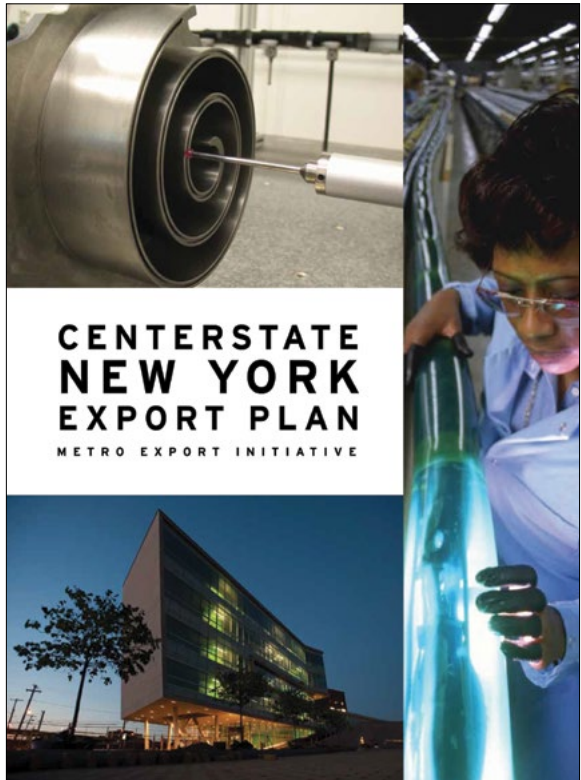
## II. Findings and Recommendations

Following are discussion highlights from the five breakout sessions and recommendations relating to each of the specific topic areas.

### Export Economies

The successful cultivation of international trade markets is absolutely vital both for the fortunes for our Upstate cities and their surrounding regions, and for the long-term health of the U.S. economy. Currently, U.S. exports constitute an average of 10.7 percent of total economic output nationwide. Upstate cities are underperforming in this area, with an overall average output of about 10 percent and just 9.2 percent in the 12-county Central New York area.

The Upstate region enjoys significant assets that can help businesses expand their footprint in international markets. Among them: a strong services industry, particularly in health, education, and tourism; a robust network of colleges and universities, which raises Upstate's visibility among international students and creates a pipeline for highly trained workers; convenient logistical assets and transportation infrastructure, with close proximity to



large markets, including Canadian cities; potential to capitalize on the New York “brand”; and local expertise, such as the Central New York International Business Alliance and a number of world-class local companies that could mentor small- and medium-sized companies seeking a foothold in the export market.

Yet Upstate cities face two critical and broad challenges in cultivating a thriving export economy: 1) lack of basic information and awareness about export opportunities and 2) lack of coordination among export service providers and across regions.

## **Information and Awareness**

Informational initiatives, particularly for small- and medium-sized enterprises, must address basic education and marketing questions, including: What is exporting? Why is it beneficial? What products and services are exportable commodities? What resources are available to assist in growing exports? Marketing and education efforts to provide answers and break down knowledge barriers are key to any further efforts to expand the export economy.

Strategic, collaborative, and regional marketing efforts also must help Upstate businesses and industries overcome their “intimidation” of cultivating foreign markets and grappling with federal regulations governing exports. Small- and medium-sized enterprises, in particular, need assistance with identifying existing opportunities for exporting services and products and complying with regulations governing international business.

Marketing efforts must promote and encourage novice and aspiring exporters to take advantage of existing mentoring and coaching services provided through such programs as CenterState CEO’s Metropolitan Export Initiative. State policymakers also should create incentives, such as a state tax credit, to motivate and encourage existing Upstate companies with healthy international markets to mentor and coach small- to medium-sized companies.

## **Statewide Coordination**

A statewide “czar” specifically tasked with promoting an export agenda across Upstate New York would significantly enhance progress. Such a position would ensure broad collaboration around common objectives and across disparate groups to assure a seamless process for defining market strengths and service sectors with export potential, and cultivating suitable global markets for those goods and services. The REDCs should work collaboratively to identify common denominators and growth opportunities that could

serve as a starting point for a statewide export strategy. The REDCs could also individually develop regional export plans that could inform these commonalities. Additionally, economic development metrics should look beyond “number of jobs created” to acknowledge the significant benefits an export economy generates in terms of high-quality jobs, a higher per capita income, and long-term company commitments to the region, among other benefits.

Government at all levels must more intentionally market Upstate New York as a source of export goods and services and remove tax barriers and regulations that inhibit the region’s global competitiveness. For instance, one participant cited the circumstances of an Upstate multinational company whose tax rate at its Upstate New York facility is more than double the maximum rate at several of its other operating locations throughout the world.

Promotional efforts—including market data—also must focus more on service exports, which represent the fastest growing segment of the export economy today, and both government and private industries should establish a stronger on-the-ground presence in global markets to develop relationships and facilitate connections.

Finally, the number of allowable visas should be increased to better recruit and retain highly skilled workers trained in the United States.



Champlain Valley Specialty, in Oswego County, is investing \$4.5 million to expand and upgrade its facilities.

*Courtesy of Operation Oswego County, Inc.*



## Innovation and Entrepreneurship

Innovation and entrepreneurship are powerful engines of economic growth, yet one of the greatest barriers to developing a flourishing entrepreneurial spirit in Upstate cities is the negative attitude—a can't-do culture—of many long-time residents. This attitude and culture have translated into a general sentiment of risk aversion in the region, which has, in turn, impeded the proliferation of angel investment, entrepreneurship, and engagement in the region's successes.

Meanwhile, as stated earlier, Upstate metro areas possess significant assets, not the least of which is the wealth of higher education resources, from community colleges to four-year research universities. These anchor institutions provide valuable expertise and play a critical role in forging cross-sector partnerships that seed entrepreneurial growth and innovation, such as the Syracuse University-JPMorgan Chase partnerships in Global Enterprise Technology. Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, SUNY-Buffalo, SU, and others already have programs in place to nurture student entrepreneurship skills and provide seed funding and expertise for start-ups.

To better facilitate a spirit of innovation and entrepreneurship, business and civic leaders must pursue three over-arching strategies: promote positive culture change; construct innovation ecosystems by unifying networks and pooling talent; and identify and seize business opportunities.



The Tech Garden offers technology entrepreneurs from Syracuse and the larger CenterState region a comprehensive set up start up incubation support.

*Courtesy of CenterState CEO*

## Promote Positive Cultural Change

Young people can be powerful catalysts for change, and Upstate cities should facilitate connections with K-12 and university-age youth through curricula development, mentorships with veteran entrepreneurs, and other means to promote entrepreneurial thinking and a culture of innovation. Efforts to raise school retention and graduation rates and to generate opportunities focused on retaining entrepreneurial college graduates in Upstate communities are also vital.



The Southside Community Coalition in Syracuse received a REDC grant to build a new food cooperative developed by community residents working in partnership with programs in business, law, public health and architecture at Syracuse University.

*Courtesy of Syracuse University*

City and regional leaders must vigorously work to promote “quality of place” and livability—the amenities, cultural elements, quality land-use planning, diversity, knowledge spillovers from clustered, urban-form development, and branding. This will foster and sustain a culture of entrepreneurship and help attract and retain entrepreneurs who increasingly value community quality-of-life, livable communities, and a creative atmosphere. Quality place-making may not be the leading element of attracting and retaining entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship, but in this competitive environment, it should be a piece of the “pie.” As Paul Brophy noted in his convening presentation (and as the group discussed), cities and regions must create an environment that is welcoming to “outsiders”—in particular, immigrants, artists, and others who add to the area’s diversity.

In addition, promotion of social entrepreneurship—innovations that add value and quality to people’s lives—can serve as a powerful means of inspiring and engaging young entrepreneurial thinkers seeking to make a positive difference in their communities and world.

Finally, citizens and leaders throughout Upstate must adjust their attitudes and outlook. From abolition and women’s rights to the Erie Canal, the Upstate region has a long legacy of innovation and advancing positive change. While our cities’ days as hubs of industrial manufacturing may have waned, we can—and must—draw inspiration and motivation from the victories they are achieving in reinventing and repositioning themselves for a robust and sustainable future in the new economy.

## **Build an Innovation Ecosystem**

Constructing advanced networks that pool talent across sectors and regions around common goals is essential to building and sustaining an Upstate innovation ecosystem. Such an ecosystem requires that we break down traditional silos that too often suppress innovation, and instead encourage partnerships, networks, and collaboration around issues and common goals to promote innovation—for instance, technology start-ups or student entrepreneurship. Upstate cities should initiate events that showcase and celebrate innovation across all sectors, as Chicago does with its annual Innovation Awards and the Syracuse Tech Garden does with its Innovation Roundtable, a one-stop portal for regional entrepreneurial support. The state’s REDCs can assist in identifying cross-regional points for entrepreneurial collaboration and support.

Government entities must modernize to better support and encourage advanced networking. As one participant noted, “We’re running a 21st century state with an 18th century model of

government.” Existing government taxes, regulations, and mandates too often prohibit business opportunities, new venture formation, and company investment and growth, driving many technology entrepreneurs to incorporate out of state. State government must cease its practice of issuing top-down mandates and instead engage local constituencies in ways that assure policies are more responsive to and supportive of local business innovation and growth.

***“We’re running a 21st century state with an 18th century model of government.”***

The network of services and programs to assist the growth of new businesses in a region is one of the most critical components of a 21st century regional development strategy. While participants indicated a number of challenges remaining in Legacy Cities for establishing each part of an entrepreneurship ecosystem, businesses in Upstate New York face particular limitations in accessing early stage venture capital. This could be addressed by spurring the creation of regionally based venture funds offering angel and early stage investment to the region’s most promising entrepreneurial opportunities. State funding for REDC initiatives, typically reserved for capital expenditures, should also designate monies for programs that more directly advance innovation and entrepreneurship interests—for instance, the employment of entrepreneurs-in-residence for business incubators; student business plan competitions; and commercialization grants.

### **Cluster-based Opportunities**

The Upstate cities and region must better identify and seize business opportunities based on existing clustered strengths. Cities must pursue a unified cluster strategy that convenes similar industries and identifies and invests in cross-cutting opportunities encompassing market systems, supply chain, talent, and technologies. These clusters may be different for each Upstate metropolitan region, but together they can provide regional economic strengths.

Finally, barriers to university commercialization must be dismantled and supplanted with the resources and qualities needed—talent, mentorships, and motivation among them—to get new products to markets. Universities and commercial interests must work together to find ways of more efficiently exploiting university research assets for regional economic development. Collaboration among universities, businesses, and venture capital firms is critical.

## Vacant Properties and Land Use

The effects of suburban flight and decline in industrial manufacturing continue to take a profound toll on Upstate legacy cities. Neighborhood degradation generated by vacant and abandoned properties has a particularly corrosive effect on the spirit and prospects of already struggling neighborhoods. It denies cities urgently needed tax revenue; depresses real estate values; generates safety issues; compounds regional disparities; exacerbates challenges facing low-income communities and persons of color; and erodes a neighborhood's sense of connectedness, cohesiveness, and community. These effects, in turn, generate more vacancies, perpetuating a downward spiral of neighborhood fortunes and city assets.

The effects of vacant properties transcend city borders as well, generating increasingly higher regional tax burdens for maintaining sprawling infrastructure into outer suburbs and producing growing numbers of vacant properties in inner-ring suburbs.

Among the challenges Upstate cities face in rectifying the problem of vacant properties: government fragmentation, and lack of collaboration between city and county entities; cumbersome and lengthy foreclosure processes; and an existing tax system that taxes vacant land favorably compared to occupied land and penalizes improvements. Upstate New York's harsh winters exacerbate problems of abandonment by hastening deterioration and increasing heating and maintenance costs.

Strategies that advance and promote smart-growth principles both within cities and across jurisdictional borders are key to reducing the number of vacant and abandoned properties. In particular, land banks and anchor institutions can be powerful agents for advancing principles of smart growth and enhancing struggling neighborhoods.

***“People are on notice, and they’re coming in to make deals.”***

### Support Land Banks

The state's 2011 land bank legislation represents an important step toward empowering local governments to address the problem of vacancies. Among other benefits, land banks streamline and expedite the costly and cumbersome foreclosure process, and

they afford local officials a degree of strategic control in creating stronger neighborhood linkages and attractive green spaces. Land banks also send a powerful message to property owners that their tax-delinquent status will no longer be tolerated. Noting that Syracuse got an immediate response after issuing notices of pending acquisitions for 1,900 tax delinquents, one Assembly participant said, “People are on notice, and they’re coming in to make deals.”

The law needs further refinement, however, to reduce the regulatory burden and reporting requirements and to address the need for a funding structure to support and sustain land banks. One potential funding structure currently under consideration in Syracuse would draw from the revenue collected by the city in delinquent taxes. As Syracuse takes a more aggressive posture toward collecting delinquent taxes, the amount recovered in back taxes is expected to surpass historic levels; under the proposed system, the city would allocate some portion of that additional revenue to sustain its land bank.

## Engage Anchor Institutions

Colleges, hospitals, and other major local employers can play an important role in promoting city residency and strengthening neighborhoods by sponsoring programs that encourage employee home ownership in strategic neighborhoods. University of Rochester, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (Troy), Union College (Albany), St. Joseph’s Hospital Health Center (Syracuse), and SU, among others, offer guaranteed mortgages or other incentive funding, and in some instances directly purchase properties for rehabilitation.



Students on South Campus of The University at Buffalo for Medical School Orientation. As the School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences moves to the downtown, the South Campus will become home to most of UB’s professional schools anchoring the surrounding University Heights neighborhood.

*Courtesy of Douglas Levere, University at Buffalo*



Anchor institutions also have the power and resources to catalyze broad cross-sector partnerships, such as SU's Near West Side Initiative, an urban revitalization initiative that also builds on proximities and promotes connectivity to both SU and to another nearby revitalized downtown neighborhood. In Buffalo, city leaders and Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus collaborated to create Four Neighborhoods-One Community, a coordinated planning and development initiative designed to retain city residents and respond more nimbly to their needs.

Other recommendations for alleviating the problem of vacant and abandoned properties:

- **Institute a staggered fee schedule for abandoned properties** that are still paying taxes, with fees rising the longer the vacancy persists.
- **Rethink zoning regulations** that thwart new uses for older neighborhoods and structures; and promote mixed-use (live-work) neighborhoods.
- **Engage residents in development plans**, as Washington, DC, and other cities do through Popularise.com, an online crowdsourcing program in which residents initiate and can give feedback on building and development proposals for their neighborhoods.



The photo depicts a desolate parking lot and poor streetscape on Buffalo's east side prior to the creation of Larkin Square. All the buildings in this image are repurposed or in the process of being repurposed and the streetscape has also been fully upgraded.

*Courtesy of the Larkin Development Group*

- **Track Cost of Land use Decisions.** Create a New York state version of a new Internet-based tool ([costofsprawl.org](http://costofsprawl.org)) that New Hampshire town planners and concerned citizens can use to map vacant land and calculate the tax revenue vs. municipal expense impact of certain land-use patterns on municipalities and model key sustainability indicators.
- **Encourage Neighborhood Investment.** Call on state leaders to revise the tax system to stop incentivizing vacant parcels over occupied and deferred maintenance over ongoing improvements; create a state tax credit for companies that invest in their neighborhoods, as Pennsylvania does with its Neighborhood Assistance Program; reduce legal barriers to regionalized land-use planning; and tie land-use plans to the REDC, with greater funding awarded to those regions that collaborate across jurisdictional boundaries. Western New York, for instance, has adopted a set of smart growth criteria to guide investment of all state monies as part of its REDC strategic plan.

## Rethinking Workforce Development and Urban Education

Along with so many other challenges driven by the restructuring of the labor market of the past several decades, Upstate legacy cities today are grappling with a need for specialized talent at the top of the skills spectrum and calls for “upskilling” at the low end of the spectrum. Further compounding the challenges, graduation rates among city schools lag significantly behind suburban counterparts, a pattern which, in turn, threatens to perpetuate continued high rates of unemployment and poverty. It’s a vicious cycle that leaves one of our cities’ greatest potential assets in the knowledge economy—human capital—underutilized or untapped altogether. Further, it significantly stifles legacy cities’ capacity to attract and retain the highly skilled innovators and other creative professionals who are so crucial to urban transformation and economic renewal.

### Promote Cross-sector Linkages

Communities, schools, and workplaces all have a significant stake in, and responsibility for, reversing this pattern. In order to do so, all sectors must collaborate in constructing a seamless pipeline from earliest levels of education to college or other post-high school program to career. Education, economic development, and workforce strategies must coalesce to create this “cradle-to-career” pipeline, and



supports—with braided funding from a range of sources—must be in place to assure the seamless and smooth transition at every point along the continuum.

The education and business communities must work together to facilitate linkages to more closely align educational curricula and goals with workplace needs and opportunities. This can be achieved by:

- **Conduct Manufacturing Facility Tours.** Arranging visits to advanced manufacturing facilities for students, parents, teachers, and guidance counselors to dispel outdated notions of what manufacturing means in today's high-tech world.
- **Promote Mentorship.** Recruiting company employees to serve as tutors, mentors, and role models for students.
- **Encourage Internships.** Providing internships and part-time employment opportunities for students.



Employee training programs at Marquardt Switches, in Madison County, have helped the company remain competitive.

*Courtesy of CenterState CEO*

- **Provide Services to Remove Barriers to Education Attainment.** Recognizing and addressing the cultural realities and limitations faced by many living in poverty, including limited transportation and child care needs.
- **Work on soft skills.** Helping job candidates develop “employer-friendly” job skills, such as punctuality, reliability, and ability to collaborate.

## Collaborate Strategically

Government, public, and private sectors should collaborate to facilitate development of:

- **Incentives** such as matching funds for local scholarship programs.
- **Civic infrastructure**, representing all component groups along the cradle-to-career pipeline, to develop and conduct audits and systems for transparency and a shared strategic plan; engage anchor institutions as catalysts in driving the process locally; and develop career and technical education programs.
- **Coordinated funding sources and delivery of services** to support the academic, social, health, and family needs at public school sites. New accountability mechanisms should be instituted to encompass education, social services, health, prevention, and workforce readiness and economic development programs.

In addition, economic development strategies across the Upstate regions should include funding to build human capital within cities and regions aligned with core industry clusters and strengths via the REDCs.

Participants cited Say Yes to Education, a national model of urban school reform currently active in Syracuse and Buffalo city public schools, as a highly effective model for incentivizing collaboration, removing barriers to academic and personal achievement by providing a complete range of holistic individual and family supports, approaching students and families where they are physically and psychologically comfortable, and maintaining a system of transparency and accountability.

Just as Say Yes uses the promise of free college tuition to encourage city students to complete high school, cities also could use the incentive of job attainment to promote a communitywide goal, such as post-secondary attainment for all citizens.

Finally, nuanced programs must be developed at the local level to address the unique challenges faced by high-need subgroups, including refugees, immigrants, the chronically unemployed, and adults with skill gaps, understanding that capacities even within those subgroups may vary greatly in terms of skill sets, education/training, language barriers, and other variables.

It is of paramount importance to ensure that groups who will be affected by such programs and initiatives be consulted, and their representatives included, in all aspects of planning.



Say Yes to Education continues to make strides in providing youth support services, creating a pathway to college enrollment and completion, and contributing to Pre-K-12 student success.

*Courtesy of Stephen Sartori, Syracuse University*

## Designing the Sustainable 21st Century City

Perhaps no area of discussion more thoroughly captured the multifaceted and vastly complex challenges facing Upstate cities more clearly than that of sustainability—a term which, in and of itself, embodies a complex range of distinct yet overlapping objectives. Recurring themes reflected a consensus that designing a sustainable city involves much more than bricks-and-mortar and roads; it calls for a collaborative and comprehensive vision dedicated to enhancing quality of place in ways that meet the economic, environmental, and social needs of both current and future generations. Reflecting the broad, interrelated nature of sustainability issues, recommendations from this group frequently intersected with those of other groups.

### Smart Growth

Responsible land use, both in general and in terms of the critical need to rein in suburban and exurban sprawl, is essential to enhancing sustainability of Upstate metro areas, with no single—or simple—solution. It challenges city leaders and planners to build on, enhance, and more vigorously promote the quality of city life, assets, and services; and collaborate in common purpose across jurisdictional boundaries to promote smart-growth strategies that stem the encroachment of development ever further into rural country sides, eating up green spaces and starving cities of vital revenue. Key recommendations for achieving these objectives:

- **Reform urban public education** as the most effective way of promoting reinvestment in the cores of our legacy city regions. Quality educational experiences in public schools are not only vital to promoting workforce development and attracting innovators, as noted earlier; they are crucial to promoting patterns of sustainable living in our cities and regions.
- **Engage and support anchor institutions** in driving community and economic redevelopment. These institutions not only serve as powerful magnets for attracting outside talent; as collaborators with a stake in the wellbeing of their communities, they also can bring significant and diverse resources—human, intellectual, financial, and programmatic—to bear on issues relating to urban development and revitalization, stability, and growth.
- **Seek top-level community leaders** who are willing to articulate the business case for smart growth and sustainable development in the legacy city regions. Bold, visionary leaders play a crucial role in both educating the public on the benefits of smart growth and in rallying grassroots support for advancing the agenda.

## “Quality of Place”

The vital importance of marketing “quality of place”—by promoting city assets such as arts and cultural amenities, walkable and richly diverse neighborhoods, historic architecture, and easy access to services and workplaces—cannot be overemphasized. Businesses follow the flow of residents, and cities must put as much emphasis on attracting residents as they do on wooing companies.

Other key goals essential to building a thriving, sustainable 21st century city:

- **Energy conservation**, particularly retrofitting historic and other existing buildings—which is preferable even to new construction that meets Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification standards. Broad-based programs promoting home energy efficiency also are important.
- **Green energy production**, including adding renewable technology to existing buildings and incorporating it into new construction. A fundamental restructuring of existing energy markets, referred to as a Feed-In Tariff, will support growth in renewable generation by setting a reliable price for the distributed production of electricity.



Syracuse’s Connective Corridor is using green infrastructure and encouraging alternative methods of transportation to connect the University Hill with Downtown Syracuse.

*Courtesy of Stephen Sartori, Syracuse University*



- **Alternative transit**, including public systems, biking, and walking, which will require adjustment to existing transportation infrastructure, land use patterns, and building designs. In tandem with this, state legislation must better empower cities to adopt zoning policies that support sustainability-focused land-use development patterns.
- **Protection of farm land**, green spaces, and watersheds and promoting efficient use of urban land. This measure, in particular, demands both visionary and collaborative governance structures and local support for regional planning entities.
- **Food accessibility** by developing pipelines to local food supplies and extending the growing season through innovation in greenhouse or other technologies for urban sites.
- **Promotion of a 21st century economy**, focusing on green production processes and products, and promoting research, development, and production in such crucial areas as energy conservation and generation technologies.
- **Strategic neighborhood investments**, with explicit strategies for targeting and timing investments in utilities, street infrastructure, schools, and other public facilities in neighborhoods that hold promise and are currently functional.



Live at Larkin Square, Buffalo.

*Courtesy of the Larkin Development Group*

## III. CONCLUSION

# III. Conclusion

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Upstate legacy cities today face significant challenges—decades in the making—as they struggle to find their footing and reposition themselves to thrive in today’s 21st century economy. But these cities—once vibrant hubs for business and industry, arts and culture, and community life—still retain extraordinary assets, including walkable neighborhoods; easy access to businesses and services; a rich diversity of people, historic architecture, and urban fabric; and world-class arts and cultural venues.

But perhaps the most powerful asset our Upstate cities have going for them today is the large number of individuals and leaders—at all levels and across all sectors—who envision a brighter future for these legacy centers and are collaborating to formulate far-reaching, sustainable solutions to make that vision a reality. The passion and dedication they bring to that task was clearly evident among Assembly attendees, and the intellectual energy, pooled expertise, and diverse perspectives that informed the wide-ranging discussions spoke to the power of cross-sector collaboration in common purpose toward achieving a shared goal. With bold leadership to advance thoughtful and innovative strategies, and rally skeptics around a vision of positive change, we are confident that goal can and will be achieved.

The Assembly’s co-sponsors hope that the ideas and recommendations put forth in this report will further energize, inspire, and guide these dedicated efforts to reposition our Upstate cities for the vibrant, sustainable future they so richly deserve.



One Hundred leaders from the nonprofit, public and private sectors gathered in Syracuse to articulate a strategy to revitalize Upstate New York’s Legacy Cities.  
*Courtesy of Syracuse University*



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One Hundred leaders from the nonprofit, public and private sectors gathered in Syracuse to articulate a strategy to revitalize Upstate New York's Legacy Cities.

*Courtesy of Syracuse University*

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National Trust for Historic Preservation Conference Tour Buffalo Grain Elevators. Hosted by The School of Architecture and Planning at the University at Buffalo.

*Courtesy of Douglas Levere, University at Buffalo*



**MEMO TO LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR  
ROBERT DUFFY**

# Memo to Lieutenant Governor Robert Duffy

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January 8, 2013

Lieutenant Governor Robert Duffy  
New York State  
NYS State Capitol Building  
Albany, NY 12224

Dear Lieutenant Governor Duffy,

On behalf of The American Assembly, Syracuse University, the CenterState Corporation for Economic Opportunity, the University at Buffalo School of Architecture and Planning, and the more than 100 participants in our Revitalizing the Legacy Cities of Upstate New York Assembly, we thank you for providing your stirring keynote luncheon address in Syracuse. Our detailed discussions on the successes, challenges, and opportunities for Upstate Legacy Cities helped us to prioritize collective strategies that may be used by all Upstate cities to address our common challenges and opportunities. In response to your request, the conference co-sponsors have developed a list of overarching recommendations that we hope represent the character of the discussions. We feel that successful implementation of these recommendations, done in partnership with Governor Cuomo's Regional Economic Development Councils, can set us along the path of making our region competitive and sustainable in the 21st century:

## **Enhance Local Government Efficiency and Land Use Coordination**

Improving local government efficiency and land use coordination has been consistently mentioned as a critical barrier facing Legacy Cities in Upstate New York. With outdated approaches to local government structure and the land use decision making process, Legacy Cities have been previously unable to implement wide scale solutions to these challenges. A potential first step could include:

### **1. Recalibrate the Local Government Efficiency/Shared Services Program**

Incorporate the Local Government Efficiency/Shared Services (LGE) grant program at DOS into the CFA process in order to

align local government operations with the governance model and strategic vision embodied in the REDCs. And since smart, sustainable growth and downtown revitalization have emerged as key economic development strategies in both the REDC Strategic Plans and the Regional Sustainable Plans (under Cleaner, Greener NY), re-calibrate the LGE RFP to align with the REDCs and Regional Sustainability Plans, and to place a greater emphasis in the scoring criteria and bonus points on smart, sustainable growth and downtown revitalization.

## **2. Develop and Communicate the Business Case for Smart Growth in New York State**

Establish grass roots outreach and education mechanisms and materials through the REDCs that more effectively communicate the economic and fiscal benefits of smart, sustainable growth and urban revitalization to the business/development community, lending institutions and local governments—using the WNY REDC’s Smart Growth Regional Coordinating Council as a prototype.

## **3. Remove Legal Barriers That Prevent “Smart” Regional Land Use Decisions**

Consider making or adding incentives for regional land use planning to include making compliance with regional plans a prerequisite for Combined Funding Application considerations through the REDC process. Such an action would further empower regional plan bodies to prepare such plans and assure they are employed in ways that complement the economic development planning done in the REDCs.

## **Target Urban Education by Making Schools Neighborhood Magnets**

With stagnant job growth, alarming school dropout rates and pockets of severe joblessness, addressing urban education is possibly the greatest challenge for New York State’s Legacy Cities. In order to build off of emerging successful programs that offer innovations to these issues include:

### **1. Encourage the Investment in Strategic Workforce Alignment and Education Programs**

Matching funds should be provided to leverage private and philanthropic investments in strategic workforce alignment and education programs, such as Say Yes to Education.

### **2. Institute Programs that Support Urban Placemaking**

Improving on the former Restore New York efforts, programs would catalyze projects that support often small but strategic interventions in and around the schools making good walkable neighborhoods and a supportive, sustainable and safe context for education. Enhanced procedures for historic tax credits for

significant projects in these areas also provide the neighborhood and economic development investments that are badly needed.

### **Build a World Class Innovation and Entrepreneurship Ecosystem**

The network of services and programs to assist the growth of new businesses in a region is one of the most critical components of a 21st century economic development strategy. While challenges remain in Legacy Cities for establishing each part of an entrepreneurship ecosystem, businesses in Upstate New York face particular limitations in accessing early stage venture capital. This could be addressed by:

#### **1. Spur the Creation of Regionally Based Venture Funds**

Addressing this challenge will require establishing an angel investor tax credit (2012 bill number S.6837/A.9939) and the creation of matching investments, possibly from the Common Retirement Fund, to encourage the development of regional venture and early stage capital funds.

#### **2. Connect Upstate Firms to Downstate Venture Opportunities**

Additional assistance could be provided through the development of a pilot program to connect downstate venture firms to innovative upstate companies.

### **Drive Competitiveness in the Global Export and Commerce Marketplace by Increasing Export Capacity**

Increasing connections to global markets is also a key regional economic development strategy for legacy cities. Enhancing exports for regional manufacturers and service providers has the potential to create new jobs, increase wages in existing jobs, and drive new innovations and advancements that will strengthen the competitive position of local firms. Regional groups in Western NY and Central NY have already prioritized and integrated export growth strategies into their strategic plans but they lack the support of a coordinated and targeted state export program. The recent reorganization of Empire State Development to include a VP of International is a welcome first step but more could be done:

#### **1. Develop Regional Export Plans**

Make the growth of international business a priority by encouraging and funding the development and implementation of export plans within each regional economic development council.

#### **2. Convene a Statewide Export Council**

Further, convene a statewide export council to examine and assist in the creation of a New York State Export Plan that would focus on leading overseas trade missions, establishing a new presence in targeted foreign markets, and aligning efforts with federal and metro-level partners.

### **3. Connect Upstate Products and Services with Downstate Markets**

New York City, and its surrounding Metropolitan area, is a key gateway to national and global markets. While initial efforts have begun to focus on connecting upstate agricultural products to downstate markets, these efforts could be enhanced and expanded if other high growth upstate products and services were connected with buyers and markets in the New York City area. A pilot program could be initiated to build off the agricultural efforts into related markets and products. Further, a condition of the use of Sandy relief aid could be a requirement to use products and services from New York businesses if possible.

### **Enable Legacy Cities to Lead in the Production of Clean, Sustainable Sources of Energy and in Approaches to Energy Conservation.**

Legacy cities in our regions of New York were some of the first to produce electric power and transport it over the grid. The demands of both our aspirations for export economy and self-sufficiency suggest that replacing the 20th century infrastructure as it ages out with in-kind systems is bad business and defeats our aspiration for continued innovation. However, incentivizing new forms of clean energy consistent with the demands of the 21st century economy increase our resilience; offer the promise of a balanced and sustainable set of sources, and in so doing creates new jobs, a restored leadership position in the energy sector of our economy, and new export capacity in renewable energy technology as well as power. This could be achieved by:

#### **1. Establish a Statewide Commission to Investigate Energy Conservation and Production**

Appoint a small commission through the New York State Power Authority and the New York State Energy Research and Development Agency to investigate approaches to energy conservation and production that have a large return on investment and that add no burden to the tax payers. Such programs of incentives and policy have proven to bring jobs tied to both exports and to the resilience of cities in other regions. For example, multiple forms of feed-in tariff programs have been very successful policy initiatives globally and have already proven their relevance in NYS.

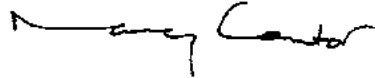
The findings and recommendations of the Legacy Cities Assembly will also be published in a full report outlining priority strategies for Legacy Cities to be used by participants, community leaders, academics, and other law and policy makers as they help their communities transition toward 21st century economies. We will send a copy of this report to you once it is completed.

Their recommendations are geared towards ensuring that upstate NY has the compelling vision, bold leadership, and engagement of our anchor institutions to make the necessary investments and policy reforms that will bring prosperity to our collective regions. These are key items that were identified through rigorous discussion, analysis, and debate and we urge you to consider ways in which we may help you to implement them in 2013.

Sincerely,



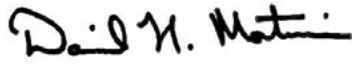
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**CO-SPONSORING INSTITUTIONS**

# Co-sponsoring Institutions

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## THE AMERICAN ASSEMBLY

The American Assembly, founded by Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1950, is a national, non-partisan public affairs forum that illuminates issues of public policy through commissioning research and publications, sponsoring meetings, and issuing reports, books, and other literature. Its projects bring together leading authorities representing a broad spectrum of views and interests. Assembly reports and other publications are used by government, community, and civic leaders, and public officials. The American Assembly is affiliated with Columbia University and serves a broad range of domestic and international policy topics.



## CENTERSTATE CORPORATION FOR ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

CenterState CEO is 2,000 companies, large and small, working together to increase business competitiveness, community prosperity, and regional growth. We deliver results-driven programs including New York's most modern Chamber of Commerce and nationally recognized economic and community development planning. Based in Syracuse, convening members and partners across twelve counties, CenterState CEO advances the region with member-focused solutions for success.





## SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY

As an anchor institution in the city of Syracuse, Syracuse University is building on its historical strengths and pursuing collaborations that simultaneously enrich scholarship and research and change the face of this older industrial city. Through extensive partnerships with the public, private and non-profit sectors, we create meaningful opportunities for students and faculty to learn and discover, while tackling pressing issues in our city that resonate in our nation and world. The collaborations are focused in five key interlocking areas: arts, design, and technology; environmental sustainability; global collaboratories; inclusive urban education; and neighborhood and cultural entrepreneurship.



## SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE AND PLANNING AT THE SUNY AT BUFFALO

The University at Buffalo is the largest institution within the State University of New York system. Within the School of Architecture and Planning, two research centers are specifically focused on issues relevant to legacy cities. The UB Regional Institute has been the go-to source for practical policy research for more than a decade, and our Urban Design Project has been closely involved in many of the most important planning initiatives in Buffalo Niagara since 1990. A recently formed alliance between these research centers will target new research on investigating sustainable cities, economic development, public policy, and use its research as local and global decision support.



SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE AND PLANNING

### Front Cover Photos

Top Left:  
Larkin Square in the Larkin District in Buffalo brings new life to what was an industrial neighborhood in decline.

*Courtesy of The Larkin Development Group*

Top Right:  
The Art and Wine Festival in Cortland.

*Courtesy of Cortland County Tourism*

Bottom Left:  
Buffalo from the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus looking west to Lake Erie.

*Courtesy of Douglas Levere, University at Buffalo*

Top Right:  
Rochester Skyline and Genesee River Bridge.

*Courtesy of CenterState CEO*

### Back Cover Photo

Connective Corridor, Syracuse.

*Courtesy of Stephen Sartori, Syracuse University*





THE AMERICAN ASSEMBLY  
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY



CENTERSTATE  
CORPORATION FOR  
ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY



**University at Buffalo**  
*The State University of New York*

SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE AND PLANNING

