



American Planning Association
New Jersey Chapter

Making Great Communities Happen

February 3, 2010

The Honorable Chris Christie
Office of the Governor
PO Box 001
Trenton, NJ 08625

Dear Governor Christie:

As the leadership of the New Jersey Chapter of the American Planning Association (APA-NJ), representing over 1,000 professional planners in New Jersey, we are writing to express our support for the State Development and Redevelopment Plan (State Plan), its custodians the State Planning Commission (SPC), as well as their professional staff at the Office of Smart Growth.

Given the state of the economy, the time to assess how the State of New Jersey does business is now. How we work to prepare ourselves during these times will surely influence the long-term stability of both the New Jersey economy and the quality of life we provide our residents. To that end, we enthusiastically support your Economic Development and Job Growth Subcommittee's report to the Transition Team that states:

“reconstitute and elevate the State Planning Commission and to appoint a cabinet-level Executive Director with the charge directly from the Governor to support the Lt. Governor in working with the Commissioners to update the State Plan in a manner that breaks down the “silos” between their respective and often contradictory capital investment priorities and regulatory regimes.”

In essence, work to make the State Plan a truly regulatory document that aligns the plethora of regulations and streamlines budgeting based on statewide interest rather than reactionary responses to “home rule” decision-making. We are not attacking home rule, but we believe that a strong State Plan will incentivize sound planning decisions at the local level.

In order to properly streamline permitting, be able to pay for the preservation of land we must hold in public trust, or truly support sustainable growth of jobs and industry, we need a coordinated approach that breaks down State Agency “silos”. In order to stymie crime, improve community health, and maximize our investments in transportation and schools, we need to break from the one size fits all approach and unify statewide investments based on what is best for the entire State. To accomplish this, the State Plan, the SPC and the Office of State Planning require your attention so that they can become the vehicles they were meant to be, and therefore APA-NJ is in support of any effort that accomplishes this and takes it out of control of a single Commissioner. Clearly, no one agency's goals can supersede the others, and while this will take some effort to accomplish; we are encouraged that taking this path will set the stage for a truly sustainable New Jersey. We also believe that such an approach will also work to eliminate corruption in the process through its transparency.

With this single recommendation, your Economic Development and Job Growth Subcommittee articulated what APA-NJ, and others such as NJ Future, feel must occur for New Jersey to perform at its highest level. Staffing such an effort with experienced planning leadership will be important so that you and your Cabinet are provided quality information and recommendations from qualified, experienced experts. We believe that this will not only streamline development processes, but will also work to leverage statewide investments and meet all your Agencies' needs. The SPC should be provided the capacity to help you develop the methodologies that will ensure that all initiatives and regulations are coordinated based upon criteria that will advance the entire State. Without coordinating investment based on a State Plan, investment will remain diffused. Without proper leadership from the top to coordinate implementation of such an effort, New Jersey will be at a global and national disadvantage with many of its fantastic assets not being utilized to their maximum potential. There are also many opportunities to include the existing framework of County and Metropolitan Planning Organizations to help implement such a strategic effort so the State does not have to bear all of the burden. However, in order to truly achieve effective public-private partnerships, we need a coordinated strategy and leadership through a State Plan.

We look forward to working with your Administration during this challenging economic period to plan for a better New Jersey. As always, we are poised to discuss these matters with you as a partner interested in advancing our great State and solidifying its future. Our membership has a wide array of expertise in state, county and municipal planning from both public and private entities and as such, we have much to offer you in the days and years ahead.

Sincerely,



Courtenay D. Mercer, PP, AICP
President



Charles L. Latini, PP, AICP
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