



NJ Alliance Program

Reveals Citizen Education is Key in Moving Redevelopment Forward

By Anthony Birritteri, Editor-in-Chief

When overcoming hurdles to municipal redevelopment, the immediate education of township residents regarding a planned project's economic and quality-of-life benefits is crucial. Developers must also understand the culture and past history of the town where they want to build, and get support from various officials, not just the mayor whose dreams of development may end when his or her term in office expires.

Approximately 30 real estate developers and representatives from public agencies throughout New Jersey expressed these and other thoughts at the recent New Jersey Alliance Program. The all-day event, held at the Berkeley Carteret Oceanfront Hotel in Asbury Park, was sponsored by the International Council of Shopping Centers (ICSC), in cooperation with the International Economic Development Council.

"New Jersey is fast becoming one big re-use zone, where redevelopment projects require significant government involvement, from condemnation powers for land assemblage, remediation of

contamination, and tax increment financing for funding of infrastructure improvements such as parking decks," said Ted Zangari, ICSC 2005 New Jersey Alliance Program planning committee co-chair and partner at the Newark-based law firm of Sills Cummis Epstein & Gross. "If we are to fulfill the promise of smart growth, it is important that we get the redevelopment process correct in its infancy."

If the local community isn't engaged at the planning stages of a redevelopment process, the omission can cost developers or municipalities hundreds of thousands of dollars down the road," said Marge Della Vecchia of the NJ Housing & Mortgage Finance Agency (NJHMFA).

Joel Schwartz of Landmark Properties commented that there needs to be more development projects in place where people say "Wow." Redevelopment projects normally have negative connotations, such as creating more traffic and tax problems. A model must be developed that shows the general benefits of projects to all people, he said.

According to Morris County Freeholder John Inglesino, redevelopment can only work with a shared vision of developers,

local government officials and the community. "You must get leaders to buy into the vision, such as local chambers of commerce and other groups. It's also important for town officials and developers to meet with newspaper editors to discuss the benefits of a project. This will all inoculate developers and the municipal leaders from objectors," he said, adding that towns should try to avoid condemning properties for redevelopment purposes.

"More people will go with a friendly deal than with a condemnation," added Rahway Mayor Jim Kennedy, who also said that municipalities should create their own redevelopment agencies to take the "pressure" off the mayor and show that the project is not a "one-person idea."

When Barbara Kaufman of the Regional Business Partnership spoke from the audience, asking about planning from a regional perspective versus the issue of home rule, Maura McManimon of the NJ Office of Smart Growth said intermunicipal planning has been attempted, but "to be brutally hon-

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est, not much is advancing on that part. When you conduct regional planning, you must hang your egos at the door.”

Congressman Bob Menendez delivered the breakfast keynote presentation at the event. He discussed the importance of transportation to the state, calling it “the engine that will power economic growth in the 21st century.”

U.S. Attorney Christopher Christie, addressing the audience during the luncheon session, discussed not only the fight against terrorism, but the fight against the “backdoor threat”: political corruption. Since he took office four years ago, Christie has convicted 82 public officials and successfully prosecuted 2 percent of New Jersey’s mayors. Turning to the developers in the audience, he said, “I need your help. You can be part of the solution. I need to know when you are shaken down (by municipal officials),” he said.

Adam J. Zellner, executive director of the New Jersey Highlands Commission and moderator of the event, kept panelists on their toes by hand picking them to answer both his and the audience’s questions. ❧