

**Letter to Gov. Corzine re  
State Development and Redevelopment Plan****June 11, 2009**

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Dear Governor Corzine:

For the past 22 years, through six gubernatorial administrations, the State Development and Redevelopment Plan has served as a beacon of hope for responsible and sustainable economic growth, environmental quality, resource conservation, needed housing and social equity that would redirect development patterns in New Jersey, coordinate government policies and make more efficient use of public investments. Given the current economic challenges facing the state, it is particularly important to note that the plan is an important fiscal policy tool. The State Plan Impact Assessment has calculated that implementation of the plan will save billions of dollars of capital and maintenance infrastructure expenses.

There is widespread agreement across the state, and across political and partisan lines, that the vision outlined in the 1986 State Planning Act reflects the values and preferences of New Jersey residents. After two decades of intensive work carried out by the State Planning Commission, its staff in the Office of State Planning (now called the Office of Smart Growth), and many state, county and local officials, this same vision is beginning to take hold in municipal and state decision-making.

Standing in the way of continuing this effort, however, are two imposing obstacles:

- The Office of Smart Growth is functioning with a skeleton staff and has recently lost its executive director. Although a temporary director is on loan from the DCA Commissioner's staff, continued funding for the office is not assured for the fiscal year beginning in July.
- The State Planning Commission itself is suffering from a lack of appointments. Five of the 10 seats for public/local government members are vacant; of the remainder, only two will have unexpired terms as of July.

If the commission and the office are allowed to atrophy beyond their already compromised condition, the entire state planning process — and everything it has stood for over the past 22 years — will be at risk. In addition, the State will lose an important asset that could ensure that New Jersey will emerge from this economic crisis stronger than before.

**Critical Functions for 2009**

The Corzine administration must act immediately to ensure the State Planning Commission and Office of Smart Growth can continue essential functions through this calendar year. With

leadership and funding, the commission and its staff can accomplish four critical tasks:

- Finalize and adopt a new, updated State Plan — five years in the making — which is now before the commission for consideration. Adopting this plan will support the hard work of hundreds of towns and counties and their investment of hundreds of thousands of dollars in innovative planning, not to mention the hundreds of citizens who have joined their planners and governing bodies in the process. The plan will allow the commission to guide growth and development decisions in ways that not only shorten this recession, but help ensure long-term prosperity.
- Leverage infrastructure investments being made as part of the stimulus funding in support of sustainable growth, as the commission and its staff did in endorsing the smart growth alignment of the PATCO rail extension South Jersey.
- Provide a framework for strategic coordination of state initiatives ranging from energy conservation and greenhouse gas reduction to economic development initiatives like port development. The Office of Smart Growth can bring state agencies together to negotiate differences in planning approaches, especially as they affect local governments seeking to fill state mandates for affordable housing, wastewater planning, etc.
- Support a critical planning tool for preserving land and land equity, Transfer of Development Rights (TDR). A flagship TDR program is ready to proceed in Woolwich Township, but is being held back by lack of state agency support for planned infrastructure. State Planning Commission leadership is needed to ensure that Woolwich's \$300,000+ investment in planning results in a successful TDR program and the state infrastructure investments to support it. If this program is not successful in Woolwich, the entire promise of TDR as a cost-effective growth and preservation tool will be undermined.

### **Recasting the Commission as a More Effective Tool Going Forward**

Going forward, the Governor must recast the State Planning Commission to play a central role in coordinating the land-use changes needed to realize the state's goals for economic growth, greenhouse gas reduction and open-space preservation, among other priorities. This can be accomplished through a combination of gubernatorial leadership and simple organizational changes, including but not limited to:

- Reconstituting the Office of Smart Growth as the Office of State Planning;
- Placing the office back in a neutral location (in but not of the Treasury Department) as called for by the State Planning Act;
- Making the office's chief administrator a member of the Governor's cabinet, as well as a non-voting member of the commission.

These changes will allow the Governor to effectively direct state agencies to use the State Plan to guide their land use-related activities, including program development, capital investments and regulations. Such coordination can ensure that state agency efforts reinforce — rather than undermine — each other in carrying out such complex initiatives as increasing affordable housing, protecting environmental resources and promoting redevelopment and business expansion.

## **Immediate Action Steps**

We call on the Corzine administration to take the following steps in the next few weeks:

1. Fill vacancies on the State Planning Commission with dedicated, experienced professionals;
2. Commit support for the mission of the State Planning Commission and maintain adequate staffing; and
3. To the extent that the admittedly tight state budget allows, give the office the resources it needs to move the updated State Plan from introduction through adoption.

Failure to take these actions would not only threaten to waste 22 years' worth of investment in state planning; it would also leave New Jersey without a guide for navigating its way through a very uncertain economic future.

Sincerely,

Dianne Brake, PlanSmart NJ (former State Planning Commission member)  
Michael Egenton, New Jersey State Chamber of Commerce  
Ron Emrich, Preservation New Jersey  
David Fisher, Matzel & Mumford (former State Planning Commission member)  
Helen Heinrich, PP, ASLA  
Peter Kasabach, New Jersey Future  
Alan Mallach, National Housing Institute  
Joseph J. Maraziti, Maraziti Falcon & Healey (former State Planning Commission chair)  
Michael McGuinness, NAIOP New Jersey  
Stuart Meck, Faculty Fellow, Bloustein School, Rutgers University  
Courtenay Mercer, American Planning Association/NJ Chapter  
Richard Nieuwenhuis, New Jersey Farm Bureau  
Carlos Rodrigues, Regional Plan Association/NJ Chapter  
Kamal Saleh, County Planners Association  
Tim Touhey, New Jersey Builders Association (former State Planning Commission chair)  
Ted Zangari, International Council of Shopping Centers

cc:

The Honorable Joseph Doria, Department of Community Affairs  
Ed McBride, Office of the Governor  
James Souder, Office of Smart Growth  
The New Jersey State Planning Commission  
The Honorable Richard Codey, New Jersey Senate  
The Honorable Tom Kean, Jr., New Jersey Senate  
The Honorable Joseph Roberts, New Jersey Assembly  
The Honorable Alex DeCroce, New Jersey Assembly