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Upstate “Legacy Cities” Gain the Most from Regional Approaches to Economic Development

*The American Assembly and Partners Recommend Regional Strategies for
Entrepreneurship, Land Use, International Business, Workforce Transition, Clean Energy
Development, and Government Efficiencies to Drive Economic Development*

Full report available at www.LegacyCities.AmericanAssembly.org

SYRACUSE, NY – The American Assembly (a think tank affiliated with Columbia University), CenterState CEO, Syracuse University, and University at Buffalo School of Architecture and Planning today released a report calling upon elected, business, and civic leaders to double down on innovative and regionally-focused approaches to economic development for Upstate New York’s “legacy cities.” The report summarizes input from over one hundred public, private, and nonprofit sector leaders recently assembled from across New York State to prioritize economic development strategies.

Lieutenant Governor Duffy, during a keynote address, charged the group at a two-day, working, policy meeting in December to identify key upstate legacy city revitalization priorities for practitioners and policy makers. The resulting recommendations provide critical tools to encourage and inform a growing national dialogue on the future of legacy cities – a term used to describe America’s older industrial cities that have experienced significant population loss and are critical in 21st century economic prosperity and quality of life.

“This report challenges us to accelerate the transformation of our economy by supporting entrepreneurship, aligning workforce with growing industries, expanding connections to overseas markets, and reversing antiquated laws and practices that have driven unsustainable land use and an inefficient system of governance,” said Robert M. Simpson, president of CenterState CEO and co-chair of the Central New York Regional Economic Development Council (CNY REDC). “The good news is that we are well underway with bold initiatives, reaffirmed in this report, that are having an impact on our legacy cities and can serve as a model for other regions and states across the country.”

The report concludes that regional planning and decision-making, as well as partnerships with major institutional anchors, are two of the most important approaches for implementing innovative economic development strategies. Recent efforts, such as Governor Cuomo’s Regional Economic Development Councils, are praised for taking an integrated approach and crafting economic development strategies at the regional scale, where investments are most likely to have positive and sustainable impact.



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“This report powerfully affirms the centrality of anchor institutions in catalyzing cross-sector collaboration to revitalize legacy cities,” said Syracuse University Chancellor and President Nancy Cantor, who co-chairs the CNY REDC. “Assembly participants highlighted the theme that the challenges we face are inextricably interconnected—not just in Upstate New York, but everywhere—and that we have to roll up our sleeves together to tackle them, which is exactly what New York State’s REDC process is all about.”

The report applauds the ambitious “metropolitan business planning” methodology being developed in Western and Central New York in conjunction with partners such as the Brookings Institution.

“If the United States is to successfully adapt and compete in the more globally oriented 21st century economy, we must better align federal, state, and local efforts on the ground in our metro regions,” said Brad McDearman, director of the Metropolitan Export Initiative at the Brookings Institution. “These local markets have unique clusters, assets, and strengths that are best leveraged through creation of cohesive regional economic development strategies.”

The report also recommends reversing dated laws and practices that drive unsustainable land use and encumbered governance, calls for cultivating innovation and entrepreneurship, and encourages investment in strategic workforce alignment and education programs.

“These conversations helped us understand ever more clearly that legacy cities will thrive and grow in the 21st century because urban cores are the heart of sustainable regions,” said Robert G. Shibley, dean of the School of Architecture and Planning at the University at Buffalo. “To do that we need to connect the dots between economic development policy, technology transfer, land use management, urban design, energy conservation and production, education, and much more.”

“Ensuring sustained economic development requires the kinds of approaches we are pioneering in Western and Central New York to ensure that young people stay in the region to fill the high-wage, high-skill jobs we want to attract,” said Mary Anne Schmitt-Carey, president of Say Yes to Education. “By working collaboratively across sectors, lines of government, and metropolitan regions, we have leveraged \$6 for every \$1 we have invested to make tuition scholarships and comprehensive health, academic, social and emotional supports available to help every child in Buffalo and Syracuse succeed in school and postsecondary education.”

Specific recommendations for tying funding and planning decisions to already successful regional economic development efforts include:

1. **Enhancing 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. Strategies include aligning local government operations with the governance model and strategic vision embodied in the REDCs, and encouraging anchor institution involvement in neighborhood



development. Innovators in this area include the Syracuse Connective Corridor and Near West Side Initiative, and University of Buffalo's downtown investments.

2. **Targeting 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.
3. **Building 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.
4. **Driving 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.
5. **Empowering 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.

The report will be sent to the ten Regional Councils across the state to enhance and inform their strategic plans and efforts to revitalize legacy cities. It will also be disseminated to local officials to help them develop a framework for upstate legacy city revitalization. It will be delivered to universities to further advance efforts by this group to strengthen the role of anchor institutions in urban and regional economic transformation.

More information and the full report are available at www.LegacyCities.AmericanAssembly.org.

About The American Assembly

The American Assembly, founded by Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1950, is a national, non-partisan public affairs institute that illuminates issues of public policy through research, publications, and convenings. Its programs bring together leading authorities representing a broad spectrum of views and interests for use by government, community, and business leaders. The American Assembly, an affiliate of Columbia University, is actively working with groups from across the country to advance America's legacy cities.

www.americanassembly.org

About CenterState CEO

CenterState CEO is 2,000 companies, large and small, working together to increase business competitiveness, community prosperity, and regional growth. CenterState CEO delivers 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. www.centerstateceo.com



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About Syracuse University

Syracuse University is driven by its vision, Scholarship in Action—a commitment to forging bold, imaginative, reciprocal, and sustained engagements with our many constituent communities, local as well as global. SU is a public good, an anchor institution positioned to play an integral role in today's knowledge-based, global society by leveraging a precious commodity—intellectual capital—with partners from all sectors of the economy: public, private, and non-profit.

<http://syr.edu/>

About The University at Buffalo School of Architecture and Planning

The School of Architecture and Planning at the University at Buffalo is the only accredited school of architecture and planning in the State University of New York System, granting graduate and undergraduate degrees in architecture, urban and regional planning, and environmental design. The school is dedicated to teaching the next generation of place-making professionals, advancing the knowledge of our fields through research, and serving our city, region, and world through engaged practice. The Buffalo School is deeply engaged in the regeneration of Buffalo Niagara, its primary site of investigation and experimentation for global issues in architecture and planning.

<http://www.ap.buffalo.edu/>

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