

DEVELOPMENT

Groups unite to revitalize area economy

By Harold McNeil
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Grass-roots community organizations from across the Buffalo Niagara region are pooling their resources in an ambitious bid to improve public transportation, create more jobs, secure funding for green jobs and green housing and, generally, assist in the revitalization of the region's economy.

Members of the recently formed Western New York Coalition for Regional Economic Revitalization met Thursday night in St. Martin de Porres Catholic Church, 555 Northampton St., to outline the challenges in Erie and Niagara counties and call for the creation of a bicounty regional development commission.

That would go a long way toward tackling some of the hurdles to improve public transportation and attract new businesses to the region, said Duane Diggs of PUSH Buffalo and a co-chairman of the coalition.

"What we're trying to do is to get people to understand that all these things are interconnected and that we need to work towards having some type of regional planning entity in place," said Diggs.

Cathy Lee of the Niagara Organizing Alliance for Hope said the region may be missing out on federal funding for regional planning because of a lack of such an entity. The coalition plans to deliver a letter to Erie County Executive Chris Collins, seeking his support for a bi-county regional development commission.

Diggs said the coalition is also pushing for a streamlining of the state's environmental quality review process.

"It's very time consuming. It's very expensive and, a lot of times, the same study is done over and over, depending on the business that is trying to come into the area, so we want to try and set up pre-approved sites that have gone through the [environmental quality review] process, because it has become a barrier to attracting new business," said Diggs.

Groups making up the coalition include PUSH, VOICE Buffalo, Western New York Jobs Alliance, Buffalo Niagara Builders Association, Partners for a Livable Western New York, Wheatfield Business Association, Healthcare Education Project and Buffalo Niagara Partnership.

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