

## Office of the Governor

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### NEWS RELEASE

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#### **GOVERNOR HIGHLIGHTS GOALS FOR OPEN SPACE PRESERVATION, SMART PLANNING DURING ADDRESS TO THE REGIONAL PLAN ASSOCIATION**

Gov. Christie Whitman today discussed her aggressive goals for open space preservation and intelligent planning in the Garden State during an address before the Regional Plan Association (RPA) Assembly in New York City.

The Governor discussed her continued commitment to the protection of open space, including her plan to preserve 300,000 acres during her second term, and the critical role that the State Plan must play in future development in New Jersey.

The RPA is an independent regional association that develops and promotes long-term planning strategies for the New Jersey, New York and Connecticut area.

A copy of the Governor's remarks is attached.

#### **REMARKS OF GOVERNOR CHRISTINE TODD WHITMAN REGIONAL PLAN ASSOCIATION ANNUAL REGIONAL ASSEMBLY NEW YORK CITY TUESDAY, MAY 5, 1998**

Thank you, Chris (Daggett), for that introduction.

I am honored to speak before a group that has done so much good for our three states. For nearly seven decades, you have remained the nation's pre-eminent regional planning organization. Your accomplishments have enriched and improved the quality of life in the region, from acquisition of key park lands to the formation of the Port Authority and New Jersey Transit to the preservation of Sterling Forest.

Just during my term, I know, you have supported New Jersey's efforts on the State Plan, brownfields development legislation, and saving open space.

RPA also holds a place in my heart. My mother, Eleanor Schley Todd, was deeply committed to her work as a director of the RPA. I remember going with her to the opening of Gateway Recreation Area, which she helped to preserve. And my parents and I enjoyed many lively dinner discussions about the growing need for planning. So this organization – and the work you do – will always mean a lot to me.

Throughout the years, RPA has set the tone for sound planning and in the process has set an example for other regions across the nation. In producing the Third Regional Plan, you once again offered a blueprint for keeping our states on the path to progress. That document strikes a proper balance among diverse goals for the region, and I know I speak for my counterparts in Albany and Hartford in applauding you.

Perhaps the greatest compliment I could pay you happened a few months ago in Newark. As I took the oath of office for my second and final term as Governor, I devoted my inaugural address to many of the issues RPA has identified as crucial for the region's future.

These include improving the transportation infrastructure, promoting the arts and culture in our urban centers, redeveloping and revitalizing our cities, reshaping our state planning system, and preserving precious open space and farmland. As I summed it up, I want to devote my second term to improving the quality of life for all New Jerseyans.

I want to tell you about my hopes for planning New Jersey's future, and how that future ties in with the future of this region.

And if you'll allow me, I want to begin by taking you on a mental journey to the Jersey Shore – and, more specifically, to the City of Long Branch.

A century ago, Long Branch was one of America's most glamorous ocean resorts, and over time grew into a thriving city. Many U.S. presidents spent time in Long Branch, as did the Astors, the Fisks, and Diamond Jim Brady. But hard times fell on the community during the 20th century, businesses moved out, and it became a distressed city.

Today, Long Branch is gaining new life, and we in state government are trying to help. Over the past couple of years, our Department of Environmental Protection and the State Planning Commission formed an innovative partnership with Long Branch.

We worked with the city as it created a sound land use plan based on our State Plan. With that plan in place, we dramatically simplified the permit approval

process. Now good development projects can get the green light in weeks instead of years.

I start with this example – and, by the way, we are now going to expand this partnership to other towns – because it illustrates the kind of approach we must take to planning our future. Government must go beyond regulation and offer the vision, create the incentives, provide the tools, and support those who embrace the vision.

When New Jersey forged its State Plan, state government made it clear that it wanted cities and towns and counties to buy into the plan, not to impose it on them. Our state is going through the second round of an extensive cross-acceptance process with the hope of giving local governments a greater stake in the success of the plan. And here I want to acknowledge the commitment to the State Plan made by my predecessor, Jim Florio, who is now a member of your board.

Of course, now we have a solid State Plan that addresses some of New Jersey's greatest challenges, such as strengthening our cities, controlling sprawl, and relieving traffic congestion.

What's more, there is a fundamental connection between New Jersey's State Plan and the urgent need for effective regional planning. The more we can do to achieve these goals for New Jersey, the more attractive, more livable, more sustainable we make the metropolitan region.

But because, to date, our State Plan has been more guideline than rule, our cities are improving more slowly than we would like, our roads are jammed, and strip malls and housing developments continue to sprout like kudzu across New Jersey's landscape.

So we have had to take a fresh look at how to achieve the kind of smart, sensible planning that RPA has championed and that New Jersey's State Plan recommends.

One way to do that, as I have mentioned in the case of Long Branch, is to provide incentives for following the State Plan. And as you know, there is no greater incentive than for government to get out of the way of a good project.

Another way is to provide leadership through state government. Within the next few weeks, I will announce a major new transportation strategy for New Jersey that will be closely tied to our State Plan objectives. As an example, our strategy will include creating 2,000 miles of bike paths so people can enjoy New Jersey without increasing traffic.

I've also directed the Commissioner of Transportation to encourage the three Metropolitan Planning Organizations, such as the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority, to revise their criteria for funding transportation improvements to be consistent with the State Plan.

Just as important, I've directed my Cabinet to use the State Plan in decision making and to give permit and funding priority to applications that meet the State Plan's goal of developing where infrastructure is already in place.

State government is also recognizing that while some municipalities get caught up in the ratables chase and end up with less open space, more congestion, and higher property taxes, most towns try hard to manage growth. So we're reaching out to give them the tools they need to carry out sensible planning.

One town in central New Jersey, in fact, passed a timed-growth ordinance, only to have the State Supreme Court say that they didn't have the statutory power to control their own pace of development. I've called on our Legislature to change the law so we can give towns this very necessary tool and encourage local implementation of the State Plan.

Of course, one of the reasons we are so concerned about containing sprawl in the Garden State is that, like the rest of the region, we are seeing precious open space dwindle every year.

I'm told that 10 governors spoke about preserving open space during their major state addresses this year. Three of those 10 governors call this region home.

In his State of the State address, Governor Rowland proposed increasing Connecticut's stock of open space to twenty one percent, preserving more than a half-million acres of open land.

And in Governor Pataki's State of the State, he recalled 1997 as "the most important year for land preservation in over a century," citing the acquisition of the 15,000 acre Whitney Estate and another 15,000 acres in Sterling Forest.

The preservation of Sterling Forest was certainly also a great moment for New Jersey. I want to applaud RPA's advocacy for this historic and critical purchase. As I said when we closed on the property, in saving a forest we also safeguard a high quality of life for all the people who live, work, or travel in this region.

Here's a case in which we have heeded author E.B. White's advice that we spend "less time proving that (we) can outwit Nature and more time tasting her sweetness and respecting her seniority."

As I said earlier, open space preservation was a centerpiece of my second Inaugural Address. I made a commitment to triple our state's pace of preservation. I set a

goal of preserving 300,000 more acres of open space and farmland before I leave office.

And by the end of the month I will propose a new, stable source of State funding to make sure we continue to preserve land long beyond my tenure. This open land, which includes what you at RPA call the Greensward, will be our gift to future generations.

In my speech, I made a direct connection between preserving open space and strengthening our cities. For states in the metropolitan region, that's crucial. Both are essential for our quality of life. In order to maintain the public will for open space, we must commit ourselves to making our urban centers better places in which to live.

In New Jersey, we've begun providing the tools for stronger cities. For example, we established rigorous new academic standards for every public school – and supplied record increases in school funding, particularly to urban districts.

We increased the affordable housing stock by 20,000 units with an emphasis on urban home ownership. We also targeted neighborhoods in cities around the state and worked directly with the residents to shape their own revitalization, backed by \$600 million in State investments.

To bring businesses back, we enacted legislation making it more economically feasible to turn brownfields into productive enterprises.

To take advantage of the infrastructure already there, we're pooling resources to create mixed-use redevelopment around key railroad stations in older cities. And to spark a rebirth of culture, we helped fund anchor projects such as the Performing Arts Center in Newark and Waterfront Park in Trenton.

We can't stop there, and we won't. We've seen how effective urban churches and other faith-based groups have been in keeping communities together, with programs that run the gamut from child care to job training and housing. We're launching an initiative to help them do even more.

And we will also remove one of the worst impediments to revitalizing our cities. I'm talking about long-abandoned buildings that pock-mark urban streets and can crush the spirit of a neighborhood.

I have proposed legislation that enables cities to acquire and redevelop these properties. And I've promised to dedicate \$400 million in State financing and redevelopment funds to help get the job done.

Why is this so important? Because every time we convert a city crack house into a decent home, or reinvigorate an urban community, or redevelop an abandoned factory site, we create opportunities for economic stability in that neighborhood. In the process, we also provide a realistic alternative to more sprawl, more roads, and less open space.

And in so doing, we provide the means for sustainable development – development which ensures that the resources we enjoy today will still be available for the generations to follow us. Forging that kind of sustainable state – that kind of thriving New Jersey – will generate the higher quality of life I want for every resident.

In painting the vision of New Jersey's – and our region's – future, I'm reminded of the words of Mark Twain: "For the majority of us, the past is a regret, the future an experiment."

While I certainly don't regret most of this region's proud heritage, I believe we should seize the opportunity to apply some hard lessons from the past few decades as we build our future.

We've learned that you can't simply throw money at our urban problems. So instead let's make targeted investments that capitalize on the energy of the people and resources already there.

We've learned that you can't slow sprawl without providing a compelling reason to build elsewhere. So instead, let's make it realistic, feasible, and attractive to develop in urban and suburban centers.

And we've learned that even the most well-intentioned local governments can't control growth all by themselves. So let's provide the tools, the guidance, and the incentives to promote smart growth.

If, as Twain suggests, the future is an experiment, let's work together to make this region a laboratory worth visiting.

Thank-you.