

Philadelphia Daily News Tuesday, April 28, 2009

A 12 Page Special Report - Rethinking Philadelphia
Metropolitan Moment

A new focus on Cities could mean great things for the Philadelphia Region

What it means, and why it's a good thing:

We used to call it "regionalism."

But, these days, that word comes with baggage: While some make it their life's work (like the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission), others dismiss it as a goal, and many are just tired of hearing the word. But in a new age of energy and sustainability and the need to "silo-bust," the idea that communities can achieve more by working together than by acting like islands has never been more relevant.

How Philadelphia stacks up:

Now, much better with the creation of the Metropolitan Caucus, a group of elected officials from the city and the four surrounding counties that met in March for the first time.

Director Laurie Actman says Mayor Nutter got the idea for the Metro Caucus while visiting Chicago. John W. Hickenlooper, mayor of Denver and a Narberth native, also gets credit for his work with the Denver Metro Mayors Conference, whose municipalities worked together to get a light rail system.

That region's voters "supported the ballot referendum, and then each municipality went back and rezoned the land," Actman said. "After a while, those relationships transcend a single issue, and you have a foundation for other things."

The big shifts in national policy on the environment, energy and transportation are all well-suited to collective decision-making. And federal economic stimulus money is also targeted to these areas, as well as foreclosure prevention and workforce development, which also reap benefits that go beyond county boundaries.

In addition, regional teams that apply will get extra credit from the feds, Actman said, because regional thinking can make the money stretch further.

Global competition demands smarter responses that come from collective decision-making, says Alan Greenberger, executive director of the Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

Philadelphia is big in biotech, for example. But he wonders why so many pharmaceutical companies are scattered about

BIG IDEA

THINK GLOBALLY, ACT COLLECTIVELY

By KELLIE PATRICK GATES



the suburbs, while the university research centers are in the city. Maybe both would benefit if they were closer together.

Best example:

The City Avenue Special Services District, started in 1999 to improve the commercial corridor that straddles Philadelphia and Lower Merion, was the first business improvement district in the nation that crossed municipal boundaries.

The Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission, SEPTA, and the Convention Center are often cited as centers for regional decision-making.

Worst example:

Maybe not worst, but annoying: Our region is commonly called the Delaware Valley. Greenberger is on a mission to change that. "This is not Delaware, and we're not in a valley, either," he says. Why not Metro Philadelphia or Greater Philadelphia?

What the Feds can do:

Offer more financial incentives for regions to act together.

What we can do:

City residents, get out of your bunkers. Suburban dwellers; come into the city, and visit a neighborhood other than Center City. We all have to realize that no one acts alone: every decision we make has an impact on the whole. Realize how much we share with our regional neighbors, starting with water, transit, and trails.

The big (local) names in the field:

Mark Schweiker, president, Greater Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce. William Hankowsky, chairman, Liberty Property Trust. Stephen Aichele, attorney. Joseph Manko, attorney. Anthony Conti, managing partner, PricewaterhouseCoopers. U.S. Rep. Allyson Schwartz. Members of the Metropolitan Caucus (see facing page). State Rep. Chris Ross (Chester County). Chris Koons. New Castle (Del.) county executive. Philadelphia Mayor Michael Nutter. DVRPC executive director Barry Seymour. William Penn Foundation president Feather Houstoun. ★

JOHN
SHERLOCK/
Staff artist