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Conference speakers affirm better land use can produce better lives

Princeton: At the **Building One New Jersey** event on Friday, July 23, public officials from all branches of government agreed that a statewide plan focused on inclusion would improve New Jersey's economic competitiveness and environmental sustainability. They called for stronger state planning to reduce segregation and the disparities among communities.

Keynote speaker **Ron Sims**, Deputy Secretary of the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), along with author and national expert on fair housing and regional equity **David Rusk** and Georgetown law professor and author on race and integration **Sherryl Cashin**, challenged the audience to work together to change federal and state regulations and investments, as well as local planning and zoning, to produce a better quality of life for all.

PlanSmart NJ and the New Jersey Regional Coalition convened the conference, turning out a capacity audience of 370 people from all walks of life on a hot Friday in July. Pictures and materials handed out at the conference can be found on both organizations' websites: www.plansmartnj.org and www.njregionalequity.org.

PlanSmart NJ President Dianne Brake opened the "**Building One New Jersey: State Planning for Inclusion, Sustainability, and Economic Growth**" conference by drawing attention to the power in the room: the hundreds of people from the congregations and community organizations that are a part of the **New Jersey Regional Coalition** and partners of PlanSmart NJ on the conference; plus the most powerful stakeholders in redevelopment in New Jersey represented by the **Smart Growth Economic Development Coalition**, the conference's Title Sponsor; plus the hundreds of **PlanSmart NJ** members and supporters. "There would be nothing," she said, "that such a coalition could not accomplish."

Brake laid out a 4-step approach for creating a strong state plan that would reflect the equal importance of the economy, the environment and regional equity (reducing segregation and concentrated of poverty).

Step 1: Pursue an aggressive economic development strategy that targets jobs that will strengthen the economic base of each region of New Jersey.

Step 2: Connect to a commensurate housing program to meet the affordability requirements of the workforce and special-needs populations.

Step 3: Locate the jobs in places that will:

- Shift travel to public transit
- Improve natural resources
- Reduce segregation and the concentration of poverty (regional equity)

Step 4: Make regional compact agreements among all agents of government to implement the plan in each county and hold decision-makers accountable.

Brake said that such a plan, with a shared vision of the future of New Jersey, would be more efficient and effective than today's fragmented system. Currently, different agencies of government have conflicting rules. Local governments routinely compete with each other for taxable development rather than work together as a region to compete in the global market.

The conference's first panel was moderated by **Marlene Lao-Collins**, of the New Jersey Catholic Conference, and included **Michael Powers**, Mayor of Lawrence Township; **Assemblywoman Mila Jasey** of the 27th District; **Joseph McNamara** Director of NJ LECET; **Father Joseph Capella**, Pastor of Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church in Lindenwold; and **Dennis Bone**, the President of Verizon NJ. This diverse group confirmed that without such a plan, each and every one of their interests has suffered.

New Jersey's Lt. **Governor Kim Guadagno** spoke at lunch about the need for a new, more streamlined State Plan. She announced the Administration's decision to move the Office of Smart Growth to her office, renaming it the Office of Planning Advocacy.

The second panel was moderated by PlanSmart NJ President **Dianne Brake** and New Jersey Regional Coalition President **Rev. R. Lenton Buffalo** of Union Baptist Church in Elizabeth. It included **Assemblyman Joseph Cryan** of the 20th District and Majority Leader of the Assembly; **Melissa Castro-Marmero**, representing **US Senator Robert Menendez**; **Stefan Pryor**, Deputy Mayor of the City of Newark; and **Timothy Touhey**, Executive Vice President of the NJ Builders Association and former Chairman of the NJ State Planning Commission. The group supported a stronger state plan, supported by housing and tax reform that would produce a better future for all New Jerseyans.

A rousing speech by **Deputy Secretary Ron Sims** met with a standing ovation. The Deputy Secretary challenged the group to train and organize to take on the enormous task of changing the structure of government to achieve inclusion, sustainability and economic growth. In breakouts organized by six **Local District Councils** (six regions of the state) run by the New Jersey Regional Coalition, the audience had a chance to voice their thoughts on what they had heard.

The Local District Council groups reported back to the plenary on dates set in September to begin working on this agenda. For more information on these meetings, watch the New Jersey Regional Coalition's website, www.njregionalequity.org.

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*Founded in 1968, **PlanSmart NJ** is a non-profit research and advocacy organization based in Trenton. PlanSmart NJ's mission is to promote a better quality of community life in New Jersey through sound land use planning and regional cooperation.*