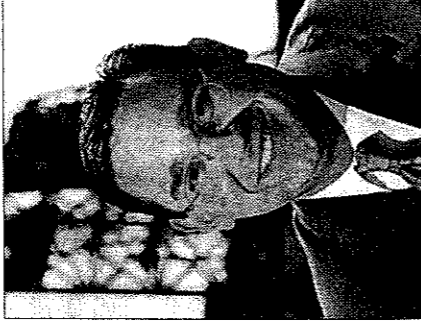


THREE QUESTIONS

Rhea N. Bernard

Group's founder seeks better N.J.



Ted Zangari founded the Smart Growth Economic Development Coalition in 2007.

Ted Zangari's childhood dream was to own a professional sports team.

Years later, Zangari, an attorney with the Newark-based law firm of Sillis Cummis & Gross, is working with a large team of businesses.

The Morris Township resident founded the Smart Growth Economic Development Coalition in 2007. The coalition is a collaborative group of more than 20 state-wide business, labor and land-use planning groups and other trade associations. Together, the groups aim to affect positive change for New Jersey, by sponsoring legislation designed to create jobs and lower taxes, while also maintaining the state's quality of life.

Zangari said the group's first wave of proposed legislation — now law — included financial incentives to attract new businesses and development to smart growth areas, particularly distressed cities as a means of weaning them off state aid.

The next wave of proposed bills will focus primarily on bringing predictability, certainty and transparency to state government, he said.

Zangari spoke to The Star-Ledger about the coalition.

Q. Was there a specific issue that triggered the Smart Growth Economic Development Coalition's conception?

A. We came together to address twin crises threatening New Jersey's future. A short-term demand crisis, due to the alarming out migration of residents and businesses to neighboring states and beyond, and a longer-term supply crisis, due to the lack of developable land left in our state as well as the overwhelming burdens and costs of redeveloping our contaminated sites, abandoned factories and other challenged sites.

Q. Apart from its effect on the business community, how does the coalition see its efforts as helping New Jersey residents?

A. Our state is effectively bankrupt. The only way we can slash our staggering debt load, fund our massive unfunded pension liabilities

and stabilize or even cut taxes is to grow our way out. This can be done without harming our environment or further clogging our roads. To the contrary, if we do this correctly, smart-growth development can spur the clean-up of our brownfields, increase the use of mass transit and reduce our state's carbon footprint while also feeding our economic engine with new and better jobs closer to where our residents live, shop, recreate, learn and worship.

Q. Is there a bill you have worked on that you are the most passionate about? Why?

A. The Permit Extension of 2008, because it gave temporary relief to businesses and developers who had spent many years and hundreds of thousands of dollars obtaining permits for job-creating projects, only to be met at the end of the process by a weak economy and frozen credit market.

Instead of dying on the vine during the recession, those permits were frozen by the law and can be thawed out and put to immediate use at the first sign of life in the marketplace. The alternative of sending a business back through the permitting process anew was unacceptable, and the Legislature agreed.

In fact, due to the prolonged nature of this recession, the coalition is looking to further extend permits beyond this year until 2012.

Please submit suggestions for "Three Questions" to rbernard@njtns.com.