

**GROWING JOBS:
Creating an Economic
Development System
That Works for
Erie County**



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In the beginning of his term, Chris Collins proclaimed, “[w]e must grow as a community or we will die.”¹ He also said the public should hold his administration “accountable for [their] promises,” adding, “just like we do in the private sector.”

Mark Poloncarz believes the public should hold the County Executive accountable for his failed policies. Since his election in November 2007, Erie County has lost 14,700 jobs and the unemployment rate is 3.1 percent higher now. Based on the recent census results and Collins own analysis, it appears Erie County is dying under his failed leadership.

The release of the 2010 census figures provided a stark reminder of our stagnating economy, lack of growth and the failure of the county executive to address these issues. While every other area in Upstate New York had reason for optimism because of modest population growth, Erie County lost more than 30,000 people. Further, recent job growth numbers prove that Erie County taxpayers are not better off today than they were four years ago.

Economic activity across New York State is improving, but slowly. Private sector employment throughout the state is increasing, but at a snail’s pace and unemployment is falling in New York State, but too gradually. Right here in Erie County, where unemployment remains high, at 7.6%, we have the opportunity to lead and to capitalize on emerging sectors, like health care and high-tech companies and we have access to thriving markets that we have failed to capitalize on.

Erie County is unique in its easy access to much of the northeast, a large portion of the Midwest and of course, its proximity to Canada. The Buffalo Niagara Region is within a one day’s drive to fifty-five percent of the U.S. population and sixty-two percent of the Canadian population. This radius includes major metropolitan areas like Boston, New York City, Philadelphia, Toronto and Montreal. Erie County must take advantage of its location in order to grow our economy. Mark Poloncarz understands that we must compete for jobs on a national and global basis.

As County Executive, Mark Poloncarz will make it the top priority of his administration to create new jobs for Erie County – not just move jobs from one part of the county to another, as has been the practice under Collins’ tenure. Mark will task his administration to bring in new businesses to the region which will generate new jobs and to create an atmosphere that will add jobs to existing businesses. Mark will also work to consolidate myriad of industrial and municipal development agencies that currently exist to make it easier for out of area businesses to view Erie County as a viable option for business development. Currently, Erie County has six Industrial Development Agencies (“IDAs”) that often poach businesses from one part of the county to another.² Instead of working together as a County and doing whatever possible to attract new business to relocate into the area or grow and sustain current businesses, we are acting as individual towns and cities fighting among ourselves to attract businesses. The reality is we are not creating new jobs, we are merely shifting existing jobs to one town at the expense of another. This practice is not sustainable and it must stop.

Just recently, the Buffalo News reported that the Amherst Industrial Development Agency awarded more than \$500,000 in tax breaks to a retailer to move from the Town of Tonawanda

¹ <http://www.erie.gov/exec/?rebuild-the-economy/road-to-a-bright-future.html>

² The six IDAs are: Town of Amherst Industrial Development Agency, the Town of Clarence Industrial Development Agency, the Town of Concord Industrial Development Agency, the Town of Hamburg Industrial Development Agency, the Town of Lancaster Industrial Development Agency and the Erie County Industrial Development Agency.

to Amherst.³ This practice is in direct conflict with Erie County's Countywide Industrial Development Agency Uniform Tax Exemption Policy ("Policy"), which states that "the purpose of Industrial Development Agencies in Erie County is to promote economic development, prevent economic deterioration, and advance job opportunities and the general prosperity and economic welfare of the people of Erie County through the creation or retention of jobs and the expansion and diversification of the County's tax base." This policy was crafted to encourage further collaborative efforts among the IDAs.⁴

Mark Poloncarz supports our business community because he understands that they are the lifeblood of our economy. However, Erie County taxpayers should not be footing the bill for businesses to relocate from one town to another when there is no evidence that the business would close, reduce jobs or move out of the community. This does little to advance our local economy and prevents sustainable growth. Tax breaks should not be handed out unless there is a significant benefit to the greater community, through the creation or retention of jobs. Granting tax breaks for businesses to relocate that otherwise would not close their doors is not in line with the mission of the IDAs.

Currently, as a result of Erie county having so many economic development agencies, all with competing interests, overlapping areas of responsibility, different mission statements and separate goals for development, we do little more than confuse businesses and force them to navigate a maze of red tape. Mark Poloncarz believes that Erie County should have only one Industrial Development Agency that works to develop a comprehensive plan for economic development designed to help the region as a whole, reduce the administrative costs of having a dozen different offices, and ensure the equitable distribution of tax exemptions.

From his time in the private sector, Mark knows that government cannot create private sector jobs; it can, however, create an economic climate that allows business and industry to grow and create jobs. If elected, Mark Poloncarz will work to modernize Erie County's failed economic development system and will task his Deputy County Executive to be Erie County's "Jobs Czar." The Deputy County Executive's focus will be on job creation and sustainable economic development for Erie County.

Mark believes that we can change our troubling trends by consolidating all of the IDAs in Erie County. Having so many agencies with overlapping areas of responsibility, different mission statements and goals for development creates a cycle of competition between municipalities within the county. The losers under this approach are the taxpayers. By overhauling the way Erie County conducts business, we can develop a comprehensive plan for economic development designed to help the entire county, reducing administrative costs and ensuring a more equitable distribution of tax exemptions.

Create a "One-Stop" Shop for Economic Development.

As discussed above, development agencies are abundant in Erie County, but communication is lacking which has led to the deterioration of our local economy. The creation of a "one-stop" shop for economic development in Erie County would reduce fragmentation and duplication of services. Mark Poloncarz knows we must consolidate our economic development tools in Erie

³ Robinson, David. Prime Wines gets scaled-back tax breaks. Buffalo News. July 2011. <http://www.buffalonews.com/city/article506355.ece>.

⁴ Erie County Industrial Development Agency. "Countywide Industrial Development Agency Uniform Tax Exemption Policy." January 2010. <http://www.ecidany.com/documents/utep-info.pdf>.

County. Currently we have too many agencies focusing on each municipality and not on the greater community. There should not be six “IDAs” working in opposition to each other. There should be one IDA that works to grow our economy. Erie County IDAs must be consolidated into one general agency for the entire county, saving the taxpayers money and ending our practice of poaching businesses from one part of the county to another.

This consolidation of our IDAs will create an environment where we work together, rather than compete, and eliminate the duplication of services, thereby ending our lack of progress on economic development, and, ultimately, allowing Erie County and its underlying municipalities to stop throwing away tax dollars.

Expanding our efforts to Canada

In order to compete, Erie County must broaden its horizons because we cannot grow if we fail to attract businesses from around the country and across the globe. For too long, our leaders have been complacent and non-innovative. It’s time for Erie County to enter the 21st Century and it’s time for the world to see what we are capable of. We must expand our efforts and this includes making a strong push into the Canadian market to attract new businesses into Erie County. Under Mark Poloncarz, Erie County will work with its partners in government and with organizations like the Buffalo Niagara Partnership (“BNP”) and Buffalo Niagara Enterprise (“BNE”) to attract Canadian business to Erie County.

BNP and BNE are important players in local economic development. BNP has long served as a lobbying arm in Albany to support more business friendly rules and regulations, with the goal of increasing the region’s competitiveness. BNE’s primary activity involves the marketing of the region throughout the country and providing marketing support to local economic development agencies, including ECIDA. Mark Poloncarz, by consolidating our IDAs will work to provide a streamlined process which will result in the establishment of a more cohesive and comprehensive economic development policy for Erie County.

Mark Poloncarz understands that the United States largest trading partner is Canada, and the economic hub of Canada is Toronto. Erie County’s economic development focus should be on bringing new businesses from Canada. No leader has proposed this before and Mark intends to make a major push to bring Canadian business to the U.S., right here in Erie County. When Mark practiced law, his former firm had an office in Toronto and Mark represented many Canadian businesses with American subsidiaries. Erie County should be the American subsidiary home for Canadian businesses, and under Mark’s leadership it will be.

As County Executive, Mark will open an economic development office in the middle of the thriving Canadian market in order to attract businesses to Erie County who are looking to expand into the U.S. The Poloncarz Administration will focus on places like Ontario, Hamilton, Montreal and Toronto – all locations within a one day’s drive from Erie County. It is imperative that we expand opportunities across the border into the “Golden Horseshoe.”

Mark Poloncarz understands that we must capitalize on Erie County’s assets to attract business from Canada. Erie County already enjoys heavy cross-border trade and benefits from the area’s international crossings. Over one million trucks per year haul freight from Canada to the U.S. We also experience a lot of visitors from Canada for our tourism attractions. We have to use our existing assets to draw businesses looking to expand from Canada into the United States and there is no better place than Erie County, which is less than a 90 minute drive from downtown Toronto.

Deputy County Executive to focus on Jobs, Jobs, Jobs!

In order to responsibly move forward with efforts to create a streamlined, sustainable and efficient approach to economic development in Erie County, our next County Executive must put a capable, thoughtful and experienced individual in place to spearhead these efforts. Mark Poloncarz believes this person must be his Deputy County Executive, who will serve as the County's Jobs Czar.

Under the Poloncarz Administration, the Deputy County Executive will coordinate all of the county's economic development tools and agencies to provide technical support and assistance to businesses seeking to expand into or relocate to Erie County, including chairing monthly meetings with all local development entities, including the IDA, BNP, BNE and other appropriate local and state economic development entities.

The monthly meetings will work to develop and execute a comprehensive plan for growing Erie County. The Deputy County Executive will lead Erie County's operations around the country and globe, with an intense focus on marketing the county to Canada and Mark Poloncarz will personally see to it, that if there is potential for a business to relocate to New York, he will meet with their executives in person to attract them to Erie County and educate them on the world-class workforce we have here.

The Deputy County Executive will work side-by-side with Mark to organize the resources available at the county level to provide the economic development information and technical assistance required by investors from the inquiry phase to the successful completion of a new project; assist established companies in their efforts to retain local jobs and to expand; and aid local companies in capitalizing on incentives offered by the different development zones at all levels of government in an effort to reward businesses for innovation through job creation, retention and expansion.

The Deputy County Executive will oversee the county's efforts to maintain an inventory of available buildings and sites for the reuse of developable sites, rather than costing taxpayers unnecessary money by building new sites. Mark Poloncarz's Administration will undertake a campaign to market these facilities, touting the benefits of each one, thereby capitalizing on the county's unique and wonderful architecture and infrastructure attracting out of area businesses to our county.

The Deputy County Executive will also be charged with overhauling and developing a new, efficient method for providing funding sources for potential economic development projects which will promote the growth of our already strong areas and emerging sectors, such as tourism, health care, manufacturing and renewable energy.