

# NE Ohio leaders are embracing regionalism

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**William A. Currin**

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As we all closely follow the consequences of the global economic downturn, I am reassured by an underlying belief: This time things will be different as we come out of this recession! Yes, we are hurting now and we have been hurt before, but this time Northeast Ohio will be ready to take advantage of this economic crisis. This time will be different because there are Northeast Ohio leaders who refuse to sit back and do nothing during this time of economic crisis.

Let me assure everyone that there are leaders in Northeast Ohio who know the time to act is now. We know there is a better way to govern, to collaborate, to benefit from our collective resources, to provide a better region for everyone to live, work and raise their families. There are leaders who are already engaging in the largest government reform our region has ever seen, covering 16 counties and 487 municipalities, all of Northeast Ohio.

What began as a study two years ago to find a way to bolster economic development has now become our call to action. The time for academic studies is over. The time to act is now -- because if we do not prepare to come out of this economic downturn with a comprehensive, sustainable and nonpartisan collaborative process for economic development, then shame on us. Yes, shame on us if we allow other regions to out-compete, out-grow and out-perform us.

With our coalition of mayors, city council members, county commissioners, township trustees, state and federal elected officials, philanthropic organizations, school district officials, chambers of commerce, regional economic development organizations, the business community and many other planning associations, we will develop and implement a program that will allow our region to plan, share and grow -- together. Why? Because neither the rising cost of local government, the competition among ourselves, the rising financial disparities between our communities nor the continued expansion of urbanized land is sustainable, and each exacerbates the economic and social challenges facing our region's core cities.

As chairman of the Northeast Ohio Mayors and City Managers Association, I am proud to announce the Regional Prosperity Initiative (RPI) as our call to action. Once implemented, the RPI will provide the structure for coordinated, region-wide land use planning and new growth revenue sharing in Northeast Ohio. This initiative is a monumental step toward collaborative government reform at the municipal, county and regional levels, with comprehensive results that will propel our region into a new and prosperous era.

The fact that every region that has collaboratively planned for growth has succeeded is a message in itself. Our time has come -- it is now that we must take action. We must take the best practices of other regions and apply them to Northeast Ohio, where everyone participates and everyone benefits. If we do this now, during a time of global economic downturn, we will be prepared to take advantage of our collective strength when our economy does turn upward. With the Regional Prosperity Initiative, I believe we will reverse the economic downturn before others do!

We have much to gain and everything to lose if we don't use this time of crisis wisely. But we still need other leaders to step up and act with us. By preparing for a successful future, as opposed to just hoping for it, we can assure our future prosperity.

*Currin is the mayor of Hudson and chairman of the Northeast Ohio Mayors & City Managers Association.*