

## Adirondack groups eye economic stimulus help

PETE KLEIN, Staff Reporter

LONG LAKE — The Adirondack Common Ground Alliance wants Gov. David Paterson to create a new economic development program for rural areas of the state, where boosting small businesses can have a big impact on the economic health of towns, villages and hamlets.

At last count 70 individuals had signed on to the letter, asking the governor to establish a new rural economic development program as he carries out his plan to replace the Pataki Administration's Empire Zone Program with a new "Excelsior Zone" program.

Businesses located inside such zones get incentives to boost job creation.

Paterson says too few Empire Zone businesses have lived up to their promises to create jobs. He has been eliminating Empire Zones around the state and has said he plans to replace the program with his new Excelsior Zone program.

The Adirondack Common Ground Alliance (CGA) is composed of a diverse set of local leaders from the Adirondacks, including elected officials, private entrepreneurs and representatives of education, economic development, health and environmental non-profit organizations.

They are dedicated to identifying solutions that benefit Adirondack communities, their economies and the environment.

### ALLIANCE PROPOSALS

The CGA is making three broad recommendations for policy changes that could be incorporated into the new Excelsior Zone program.

- Designate the entire Adirondack Park as a special economic development zone.

The zone should be responsive to issues of scale and respect the park's natural character. Incentives are needed to overcome increased development costs associated with remote, mountainous areas, as well as limited infrastructure.

- Create a comprehensive program specific to the Adirondack Park.

It should include development of shovel-ready sites, capital investment tax credits, wage credit (similar to the federal program) and a task force to administer a state-supported seed-capital fund.

- The Adirondack Planning Initiative, a group created at Adirondack Park Local Government Day in Lake Placid in 2008, should work with the Empire State Development Corp to develop a specific plan by September 2011.

The group's letter to Paterson notes the Empire Zone program was mainly aimed at big cities and big employers.

But the programs and businesses that work in big cities don't always work in small villages and hamlets, where the need for economic development is just as urgent.

Ross Whaley of the Adirondack Landowners Association, a past chairman of the Adirondack Park Agency that oversees land use within the Adirondack Park, says, "There is widespread agreement on the establishment of an Excelsior Zone ...

"A new or expanded business that adds a handful of jobs might not qualify for state assistance if it was in a city, but those five or six jobs would be welcomed and appreciated in any Adirondack town," Whaley said.

APA Commissioner Lani Ulrich says, "Sixty-three percent of businesses in the park employ four people or less, with a high percentage of self-employed.

"Small and micro-businesses must be seen as the bedrock of development and employment in the park and be given strong attention in terms of state support and incentives.

"Ventures in retail, hospitality and other tourism-related services will remain crucial."

Brian L. Houseal, executive director of the environmental group The Adirondack Council, says, "There is no inherent conflict between boosting small businesses and protecting the environmental health of the Adirondack Park.

"Most of the Park's small, private businesses rely on the protected forests and waters of the Adirondack Park for their long-term survival."

Hamilton County Board of Supervisors Chairman William Farber says, "I see it as very encouraging for all these people coming together to encourage economic development.

"We need to protect the environment in the Adirondacks but we also need to protect and grow the economy."

For more information about CGA see <http://www.adkcommonground.org/>.

The Adirondack Common Ground Alliance started with an informal dialog looking for kernels that might provide common ground among disparate interests.

In March of 2006 Houseal; then-Inlet Supervisor John "JR" Risley; and Ulrich gathered for what was to be a short meeting but became a five-hour session.

By October 2006 the core group had grown to 25 and presented a “Blue Print for the Blue Line” that was submitted to that year’s gubernatorial candidates.

Chief concerns are to identify a common ground agenda focused on improving the economic viability of Adirondack communities while conserving the environment.