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Dept. of Community Affairs Commissioner Joseph Doria discusses new COAH Rules

ULI-NNJ MEMBERS PART OF DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY AFFAIR'S COMMENT PERIOD ON NEW REGULATIONS

By Mel Fabrikant

The Northern New Jersey District Council of the Urban Land Institute (ULI-NNJ) hosted a breakfast roundtable with the Department of Community Affairs (DCA) Commissioner Joseph Doria at the Meadowlands Environmental Center in Lyndhurst on February 20. The discussion touched upon many issues within the DCA, focusing on the most time-sensitive initiative, The Council on Affordable Housing (COAH) regulations. The DCA has updated the COAH rules, which are currently in the comment period and set to be finalized in May and promulgated in June.

The Council on Affordable Housing aides in fulfilling New Jersey's constitutional obligation to build such housing for low-and-moderate income households. COAH is empowered to define housing regions, estimate housing needs, set guidelines for municipalities to determine their fair share numbers, and review and approve affordable housing plans.

"We had a great mix of people in the room including public officials, developers, architects, engineers, environmental consultants and attorneys on both sides of the issue," said Peter Primavera, the communications chair of ULI-NNJ and president of the Highland Park-based Cultural Resource Consulting Group. "The commissioner was very frank and candid, expressing his office's mission and goals."

Doria met with the members of ULI-NNJ to glean their opinions on the changes to the COAH regulations. These changes aim to tighten the previous rules and will include new growth-share ratios and increased funding for affordable housing. Under the new rules, one affordable housing unit must be built for every five new residential units and one affordable unit for every 16 jobs.

"My goal as commissioner is to be able to build houses for people who work and live in New Jersey," said Doria. "If we want economic development, we need to house the workers. If there is no affordable housing, there's no place for the workforce to live or raise a family." The new COAH regulations are expected to raise the supply of affordable housing units necessary in New Jersey over the next 10 years from 52,000 to 115,666, Doria said.

Doria also answered questions from the crowd of more than 30 ULI-NNJ members. Many of their questions focused on the issues of redevelopment and municipal consolidation. "Right now there are a number of factors affecting redevelopment," said Doria. "There's a perfect storm in the market - eminent domain plus the new COAH rules plus public advocate campaigns plus litigation equals a fear of moving forward with redevelopment efforts."

With regard to municipal consolidation, Doria said that since July 2007, the state government has offered a \$15 million incentive to municipalities to share services such as police departments and school systems but that none of the money has been spent. "Every town is for consolidating shared services until it's their turn," he said. Doria also discussed the effect the newly proposed budget cuts will have on his office. The proposed cuts decrease the ability to fund DCA programs and force the department to downsize by 140 employees, he said.

The event was one of a series of members-only breakfast roundtables ULI-NNJ is planning with state public officials.

"The event exemplified benefits of ULI membership, providing a chance to engage with a public figure as important to planning and development as Joe Doria in a close environment," said Lawrence Jacobs, chair of ULI-NNJ and an attorney at Wilentz Goldman and Spitzer in Woodbridge. "It was a great forum for open and honest dialogue between the administration of Governor Corzine and those whom the COAH regulations directly affect. We are honored Commissioner Doria was open to discussing the new COAH regulations and interested in our opinions."

For more information about joining ULI-NNJ, visit the website at <http://nnj.uli.org>.

About the Urban Land Institute

The Urban Land Institute is a non-profit education and research institute that is supported and directed by its members. Its mission is to provide leadership in the responsible use of land and in creating and sustaining thriving communities worldwide. Established in 1936, the Institute today has over 34,000 members and associates representing the entire spectrum of the land use and development disciplines. It is comprised of developers, builders, property owners, investors, architects, public officials, planners, real estate brokers, appraisers, attorneys, engineers, financiers, academics, students and librarians.