

NJDEP Commissioner Lisa Jackson Shares Her Vision for Environmental Stewardship with New Jersey Business Leaders

Lisa Jackson, commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, addressed business leaders in April at a special breakfast presented by the Commerce and Industry Association of New Jersey's Environmental Business Council (EBC).



BY ROSEMARY DREGER

IF THERE'S ONE THING THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY of New Jersey seeks from its environmental leaders—it's clarity. Questions are often raised about what opportunities exist, what regulations to expect, and how to ensure the Garden State remains a robust, prosperous and healthy place to do business.

To pursue that clarity, the Environmental Business Council (EBC) of CIANJ went straight to the source, inviting Lisa Jackson, Commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP), to address its members and guests at a special breakfast at the Hilton Woodbridge in April. Commissioner Jackson used the opportunity to explain the "Priorities and Action Plan" she has devised for the 3,300-person department she heads.

Chief among the challenges before us, Jackson explained, is the need to aggressively promote sustainable growth. Defining sustainable growth as "incentivizing, through a regulated system, the kind of growth the state needs in places we like to see growth," Jackson pointed to the Office of Smart Growth, an integrated program for reducing sprawl and promoting economic development, and the "Scorecard" system—a questionnaire designed to streamline and expedite the site approval process—as two highly successful programs that will continue to play a large role in advancing New Jersey's ambitious environmental goals.

Jackson also underscored her department's firm commitment to brownfields redevelopment, characterizing

New Jersey's progress in this area as "second to none in the nation" with more than 4,000 sites approved for redevelopment each year. She cited statistics from the Council on Economic Development showing that for each government dollar invested in brownfields redevelopment, a hefty \$2.48 in private investment typically results. This favorable public/private partnership, when combined with the additional benefits that result from the revitalization of abandoned, urban areas—fewer cars on the road, and reduction of greenhouse gases—make continued investment in brownfields redevelopment a clear and obvious priority for New Jersey, she explained.

Commissioner Jackson grew animated when detailing her next initiative: plans to improve constituent services at the NJDEP. To lend context, she described a department so overburdened with pending caseloads, there exists a potential for projects to "sit in a file for years" before any review or action is taken, posing untold health and safety risks. She then described the measures her department has implemented to reduce that risk, including investments in information technology and the use of online tools to expedite the permitting and approval process.

Jackson also noted the department is reviewing a program currently in use by Massachusetts whereby private contractors, or Licensed Site Professionals (LSPs), would be hired in some capacities to help streamline and expedite the cleanup process, enabling NJDEP case managers to focus on more complex cases.

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