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Moving Forward

Lt. Gov. Sheila Oliver's plans for DCA & Municipalities



Focus:
**Streets
& Communities**

Renewing DCA's Commitment to Community Revitalization

By Lieutenant Governor Sheila Y. Oliver,
Commissioner of the Department of Community Affairs

When I was Speaker of the New Jersey Assembly, I visited all 40 state legislative districts to meet with local officials and people from all walks of life. By taking this tour, I gained an understanding of the unique needs, issues, and mindsets found in New Jersey. This experience, which helped me immensely in the state legislature, is continuing to pay dividends in my role as Lieutenant Governor and Commissioner of the Department of Community Affairs (DCA). It also taught me that all communities in the state have at least one thing in common—they want economic development that makes sense for them. DCA is in a position to help with this goal.

Expanding local economies

One way DCA is leveraging its assets to expand local economies is through the Main Street New Jersey (MSNJ) Program, which provides communities with technical assistance and training to improve their downtown business districts. Another way is with the Neighborhood Preservation Program (NPP), which aims to revitalize declining neighborhoods through efforts such as job creation, housing rehabilitation, and creative use of abandoned properties.

In recent years, both of these programs had been neglected and left to wither and, in the case of NPP, cease operations. We are recommitting resources to these programs because they focus on working with small businesses and community development projects to create places filled with ambience that draw people to visit. Indeed, municipalities that received NPP funding consistently reported a return on investment of eight dollars for every state dollar invested and MSNJ communities routinely credited the MSNJ program as a critical factor behind the revitalization of their downtowns.

If we marry these effective programs with mass transit initiatives, mixed-use developments, and even the guidance of local planning professionals at DCA, what results are places where people put down roots. This is particularly true for millennials who want walkable communities featuring housing they can afford, businesses that are vibrant and experiential, and neighborhoods full of character and historic charm.

As an example, the City of Trenton is ripe for this type of engagement with DCA. From an employment and property perspective, the State of New Jersey occupies the biggest footprint in the city. As older state workers continue to retire, we have to attract a new generation of public sector employees to work in our state offices. This requires finding ways to take full advantage of the Trenton Transit Center, creating housing



Lt. Gov. Oliver with (l to r) NJLM Past President East Windsor Mayor Janice Mironov, Madison Mayor Bob Conley, and Hightstown Mayor Lawrence Quattrone at the League's Mayors Legislative Day.

opportunities in Trenton that appeal to millennials who want to live close to where they work, attracting business establishments that cater to this generation, and developing community amenities, activities, and events this young workforce finds interesting. DCA and its affiliated agencies, the New Jersey Housing and Mortgage Finance Agency and New Jersey Redevelopment Authority, can be able partners with New Jersey municipalities in these types of endeavors. In fact, our staff at DCA is up to the task of working with communities of all sizes and types from one end of the state to the other.

Helping towns succeed

This effort to expand local economies isn't just the focus of DCA—it is the overall objective of Governor Murphy's administration. Helping our small businesses succeed leads to sustained economic growth for communities. This results in revenue, some of which is passed on to local governments to provide public services that are critical to community vitality.



Lt. Gov. Oliver talks to NJLM Executive Director Michael J. Darcy, CAE, and Assistant Executive Director Mike Cerra at the Annual Mayors Legislative Day in Trenton.

DCA remains committed to helping local governments do the best job they can. This includes ensuring the financial integrity of all local governmental entities in the state.

In this regard, DCA continues to make progress in implementing the Financial Automation Submission Tracking (FAST) solution. This secure web-based portal enables local government units to electronically submit financial documents to DCA for review and approval instead of mailing, faxing, or emailing them. It also enhances my department's ability to

collect, manage, and analyze local government financial data, which can help us better develop policies that support local governments and the work they do.

Currently, annual debt statements, supplemental debt statements, and annual financial statements are being accepted through the FAST solution. A working group of local government finance professionals is presently testing the component that will allow local governments to submit their budgets. Since the end goal of the FAST solution is a financial review process that is cost-effective and labor efficient, this field testing is aimed at making the budget module as easy as possible for local government employees to navigate and enter their data. Local governments operating on the state fiscal year will be expected to submit their budgets via the FAST solution this year while local governments operating on the calendar year will be required to use the FAST solution for their 2019 budgets.

Once all local governments are live

with FAST, my department already has plans for subsequent phases of the FAST solution to improve auditing and analyzing the data collected. We believe local governments will save time preparing reports because the data entered into FAST will roll forward to ensuing years and eliminate redundant reporting of prior data. Also, importantly, there will be a web portal specifically for the public that will centrally collect and store all local government financial reports submitted to DCA, including budgets, audited financial statements, and annual debt statements to provide people with open access to the information.

I look forward to meeting officials and community leaders in all of our state's municipalities and to reconnecting with those individuals I've already met. With DCA as a willing partner, we can accomplish extraordinary things in the local communities and neighborhoods where so much of what makes New Jersey great happens. 🇯🇵



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