



## Real regionalism needs to be restored

By Paul Bray  
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Albany Mayor Erastus Corning 2nd failed in the 1930s when, as a state senator, he advocated regionalism for the Hudson River Valley. Gov. [Nelson Rockefeller](#) failed with regionalism in the Hudson River Valley when he created the [Hudson River Valley Commission](#) in the 1960s. **The [Rockefeller Institute](#) tried and failed to establish a regional plan for the Capital Region in the 1990s.**

Regionalism in a state like New York rarely happens. Home rule means that every city, town and village has almost exclusive zoning and planning authority, key to economic development, and few municipalities are willing to share.

Gov. [Andrew Cuomo](#) approach has been to dangle \$200 million for four regions to compete for \$40 million dollars each, and an additional \$800 million for individual project applications before regional councils of local figures in business, higher education and organizations. Even with that money, The [New York Times](#) said it still “could prove more difficult than his earlier successes with legalizing same-sex marriage and passing a tough state budget.”

Cuomo succeeded with a “regionalism lite,” using smoke, mirrors, and hoopla. The smoke-and-mirrors included the fact that the \$800 million was from existing funding programs, like the [Environmental Protection Fund](#), being grafted onto a new vehicle for their allocation. The governor talked a lot about “bot-

tom-up” planning, but state staff reviewed and decided the allocation of most of the funds.

The hoopla was [Maria Bartiromo](#), a CNBC anchor, announcing the winners in Albany.

The regional planning councils produced proposals to fund a mix of projects, including projects not funded, like the Albany convention center and a \$25 million computer request from [Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute](#).

In contrast, the real economic development going on in New York is the \$4.4 billion investment, announced in a governor’s press release on Sept. 27, by an international tech group led by IBM and Intel for the development of the next generation in computer chip technology. It includes \$400 million in state funds for the [Albany College of Nanoscale Science and Engineering](#).

Alain Kaloyeros, chief executive of Albany Nano, and Assembly Speaker [Sheldon Silver](#) were in the vanguard of the effort to lure the multibillion dollar, public-private computer chip development.

Since New York lost the competition in the late 1980s with Austin, Texas, to get Sematech, a consortium of computer manufacturers, Kaloyeros has been organizing strategic moves that brought Sematech from Austin to [Albany Nano College](#). The nano college did not exist before him. His genius has made the University at Albany into a force that links high tech centers of excellence throughout the state. It also links research for the next generation computer chip among Albany, East Fishkill, Yorktown Heights, Utica and Canandaigua.

While Cuomo brought regionalism into the sunlight, Kaloyeros found a way for New York to be a world-class competitor in computer chips and nano-tech.

Yet, let us not ignore that the overall architecture for regionalism and state planning for economic development, healthy communities, infrastructure, social equity and environmental quality is missing. The regional councils are fine as advisory bodies, but regionalism needs real regions (not the bureaucratic regions of the state economic development agency) and full-time planning professionals monitoring and comprehensively addressing regional issues.

The Capital Region has a regional planning commission, but with limited authority for anti-sprawl controls, regional fair share

workforce housing programs and regional tax-based sharing.

State planning in New York was started by Gov. [Alfred E. Smith](#) in 1926 and reached its peak in the 1960s. New York had the best state planning entity in the nation.

It all died in the 1970s, however, and has not been revived. With its passing went the skilled planners who shaped the vision, analysis and guidance that once helped the Empire State be the greatest in the nation.

We need to have real regionalism and state planning back in New York to regain our excellence.