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## Texas firm to map Tier's future

### Development plan to include projects, costs

**BY TODD MCADAM**  
*Press & Sun-Bulletin*

Julie Sweet doesn't like to count the economic development plans gathering dust on her shelf. In fact, Broome County's planning and economic development commissioner doesn't like even talking about counting the plans.

And next spring, she'll get yet another one. "One of our concerns was that people would think, 'Oh no, here we go again,'" Sweet said in discussing the latest effort.

This time, county leaders announce, the plan will be followed.

Broome County and Partnership 2000 are paying AngelouEconomics of Austin, Texas, \$130,000 to map out a long-term plan to expand Broome County's economy and focus its efforts on technology. The effort, begun this week, will include a number of focus groups and other sessions starting in November to gain public comment. It will also incorporate economic and demographic data, infrastructure and property inventories.

The report, to be released next spring, will include specific projects and even dollar figures to get the work done. Earlier reports lack that. What the new plan won't provide is the vision of the earlier plans. That's because one has been provided for it.



**Bernie Levy of Binghamton takes a look around the Kilmer Building at Lewis and Chenango streets. Rep. Maurice Hinchey announced plans Wednesday to convert the Binghamton building into apartments and commercial space.**

*KATHRYN DEUEL / Press & Sun-Bulletin*

**ONE PART OF THE PLAN**  
The Kilmer Building will play a role in Broome County's upcoming economic development plan. Here are some details about the building.

**Location:** Chenango and Lewis streets, Binghamton.

**Size:** 72,000 square feet on six floors.

**Needs:** New infrastructure, including plumbing, wiring, and technology capabilities.

**Offers:** Central location to downtown Binghamton

For details on how the economic development plan will be compiled and how you can play a role, go to [www.theBCplan.com](http://www.theBCplan.com)

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Project Manager Dan Houston said the community is already taking steps that will be incorporated in the plan. The latest was this week, when the Broome County Industrial Development Agency contracted with a consortium led by William H. Lane Inc. to renovate the 98-year-old Kilmer Building in Binghamton. Once the \$5 million project is completed, the building would be used, in part, as a commercial incubator.

"Incubators have a big role to play in a community like Binghamton," Houston said, particularly in a plan to diversify the economy.

"The BC Plan will take on a life of its own and will provide us with the tools we need to achieve our goals for the future," said Broome County Executive Jeffrey Kraham.

"Tools" is the key word. Economic developers have decided the county's future rests with a new series of industrial parks and research facilities, and with new technology companies to diversify the economic base.

Earlier plans provided more vision, but lacked details.

One such plan, commissioned by the High Technology Council of the Southern Tier in April 1987, shares a number of goals with what Broome County leaders already want:

- \* A high-quality, high-technology labor force.
- \* A cluster of technology companies, diverse enough to weather hard times and numerous enough to create interactive synergies. It includes biotechnology among target industries.
- \* Education institutions capable of both training workers and conducting ground-breaking research. That would include some type of research facility based around Binghamton University.
- \* Some place to put those companies and research groups, including incubators and industrial parks.
- \* A nice quality of life.

"I don't think that plan has been off the shelf for a while," said Theodore Mulford, chairman of the technology council in 1987. "I'm not sure they've even heard of it."

Deputy Executive Terrence Kane admits he's never heard of it, but he didn't enter the economic development game in Broome County until 1997, when he resigned a Binghamton City Council seat to join Empire State Development.

Even if the 1987 plan was solid, it's too old, Mulford said. "The base line has changed considerably. You don't have the giant IBM, or a very large Link presence."

The 1987 plan was predicated on huge corporations and the need to broaden the economy. To a degree, that's happened, although that was a diversification by contraction rather than expansion. Manufacturing, which accounted for 37 percent of Broome County's jobs in 1980, now counts for about 20 percent.

IBM sold one of its facilities that now houses Lockheed Martin, and closed the other. It has gone from more than 16,000 employees to 5,500. What was then Singer Link employing 3,000 went through a variety of corporate buyouts and breakups. Today, the L-3 Communications Link division employs about 200 people, but other simulator companies, including Binghamton Simulator, NLX Corp. and Diamond Visionics, have popped up.

The economy has changed drastically even in the few years since the former Chamber of Commerce President Rick Lutovsky began his plan to streamline economic development efforts by incorporating Partnership 2000 and the IDA under the auspices of the Chamber, and then to refurbish the aging infrastructure of the county.

That plan, unlike the M&H plan of 1987, never mentioned biotechnology, Kane said.

What both earlier plans lacked was acceptance from the community. Lutovsky left Binghamton in 2000 to lead the chamber in Asheville, N.C., about the same time the county contracted with the IDA to act as its economic development department. "County government and the chamber have been trying to sort out whose turf it (development) would be," Mulford said.

And 1987 was a time of big change, too, he added. "It was about that time there was a change in management at the chamber. The high-technology council soon after disappeared," he said. A more academically oriented organization followed, but with decreasing influence for several years. "It's disappointing the ideas weren't followed further," he said.

This time the acceptance is there. "We put the team together, then we put a plan together," he said. "We have a good idea of where we want to go. We just need to make sure we have a clear road plan."

Earlier plans also lacked as much public input as this one plans. The 1987 plan approached about 60 corporate and community leaders for input. The Lutovsky plan also did not directly approach the public, although it drew in part on data compiled from several hundred people who participated in the year-long "Facing Our Future" project led in 1995 by the *Press & Sun-Bulletin*.

Public involvement most concerns Houston. "Sometimes it's hard to draw the community back to the table one more time and say 'This time it will work,' " he said.

"Can a community take charge and drive its own destiny? I'd have to say yes, or I wouldn't be a community planner."

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