

**Celebrate NJ! Testimony before the Joint NJ Legislative Committee on Tourism
at the 2008 Governor's Conference on Travel and Tourism in Atlantic City
April 11, 2008**

FINDING OUR WAY IN NEW JERSEY: A WAYFINDING INITIATIVE OF CELEBRATE NJ!

Executive Summary

The spirit of an object or place is intangible, yet essential. At its heart, the New Jersey Wayfinding initiative will reflect in physical terms New Jersey's spirit. It will seek to make us more accessible and visitor-friendly, and be a visible welcome that proudly displays our culture of arts, history, and natural beauty.

For a relatively small investment from the private sector (\$300,000 raised over a two-year period), Celebrate NJ! proposes to enhance the 36 billion dollars generated annually by our third largest industry, travel and tourism. Current technology now makes feasible what wasn't possible before: a comprehensive, statewide Wayfinding system that's integrated with the Internet, cell phones and GPS—a system that is exciting, up-to-date, and welcoming.

Good morning. I'd like to thank the members of the Senate Wagering, Tourism and Historic Preservation Committee and the Assembly Tourism and Gaming Committee for allowing me to testify about the NJ Wayfinding Initiative. I would also like to acknowledge NJ TIA for sponsoring this session.

I'm Karen Hatcher, Executive Director of Celebrate NJ!, a non-profit organization whose mission is

"to create a legacy of pride in the spirit and character of New Jersey, for future generations to celebrate and preserve."

Over the last three years Celebrate NJ! has coordinated a statewide 4th grade school program for 20,000 students using an Internet-based, NJ Studies writing contest, building communication skills and pride in our state. We host dozens of Celebrate NJ! events every Spring for students and their families.

In addition, Celebrate NJ! works to engage the public in a positive conversation about NJ. The “365 Reasons to Celebrate NJ!” campaign and a statewide Celebrate NJ! poster contest are two examples of this. We also partnered with the Secretary of State’s Office on the Statewide Cultural Festival these last two years.

In October, 2007, the NJ History Advocates asked us to coordinate a statewide Wayfinding signage initiative for NJ’s historic sites and other cultural attractions. We accepted because we saw, as people who live and work here, that a successful Wayfinding system using branding, signs, maps and technology, could be of great benefit to us all.

In New Jersey, state, county, and local authorities do not coordinate signage, so it’s easy to lose the trail when trying to find our way. We all recognize the big blue “H” that leads us right to the Emergency Room door. A successful Wayfinding program has the potential for making all our important points of interest as easy to find as a hospital without creating unnecessary and confusing sign clutter.

Everyone has their story of being lost in NJ. A comprehensive, statewide Wayfinding system is critical to the cultural and economic development of our state. New Jersey is the nation’s most densely populated and most culturally diverse state. We also have the greatest density of roads per square mile. In addition to Atlantic City and the Jersey Shore, we are home to over 800 arts and cultural venues, 250 historic sites, hundreds of downtown centers and more parks, wildlife viewing sites, and recreational attractions than most states twice our size.

Current technology not generally available even 10 years ago presents the opportunity to create a seamless, interconnected, real-time Wayfinding System that links paper maps, streets signs, Wayfinding icons, and personal technology to help us find our way.

We began with a vision: to make New Jersey a more welcoming, livable, lovable place by helping us find our way with ease, and by making our many attractions and areas of beauty more accessible.

The Context for our work is this: our roadways are public spaces, part of the “public commons” of our state. In addition to considerations of safety and good engineering

practices, our roads should also serve the highest public good and support healthy, whole communities.

On Dec. 7, 2007 we convened the NJ Wayfinding Symposium in Trenton. Nearly 100 people representing arts, tourism, history, business, parks and recreation organizations joined transportation, planning, and design professionals. We began with presentations by NJDEP Commissioner Lisa Jackson, Stuart Brooks from NJDOT, world famous Wayfinding design pioneer (and New Jersey native!) Lance Wyman and mapping designer, Dr. Wansoo Im.

In the afternoon, we got to work in breakout sessions facilitated by Marty Bierbaum and staff from the NJ Municipal Land Use Center.

Out of that meeting, a Wayfinding Advisory Committee of 70 was formed. Forty-seven individuals organized themselves into four Work Teams (i.e., Funding, Pilot Project, TODS Criteria, and Public Relations). These teams meet monthly by conference call and have been extremely productive. (See attachment for detailed activities.)

Here are a few highlights of what's being done...

The Public Relations Team has created and distributed a five-minute video, "Finding Your Way in NJ". This video is being shown all around the state and is posted on our website. The NJ League of Municipalities published a Wayfinding article in their February magazine, and a Wayfinding panel is scheduled for the League's conference in November. We have also created an online Wayfinding survey completed by over 800 people so far. We're collecting hard copies of the survey at statewide events as well.

The NJDOT-managed "Tourist Oriented Destination Signage" (TODS) program presents a unique, "once in 10 year" opportunity to influence a statewide signage program originally designed to support cultural, historic, recreational and educational venues. This program expires in December, 2008 and NJDOT has agreed to accept recommendations to improve this program.

Of the 500 TODS signs currently in place, 83% represent food, lodging and fuel locations, most of which are members of national chains. A scant 7% of all signs represent amusements, cultural, historical, eco-tourism, camping and other attractions. Further, NJ's TODS program is the most expensive at \$800 per sign, followed by Virginia at \$450 per sign, with Illinois at \$65 per sign at the bottom.

The TODS Criteria Team has crafted a set of recommendations that seeks to bring the TODS program more in line with its intended purpose and make the TODS program more affordable to groups with limited resources.

The Pilot Project Team is developing criteria for one or more Pilot Projects that will demonstrate a regional wayfinding system incorporating multiple counties, and federal, State, county and local roads. This criteria will be incorporated into an RFP to attract groups to participate in this public/private partnership opportunity. We plan to raise the \$200,000 needed for the pilot project through grants.

The Funding Team has already successfully secured a \$50,000 grant from the Community Foundation of NJ, enabling Celebrate NJ! to hire a nationally-prominent Wayfinding design team, RMJM Hillier of Philadelphia, to develop a set of standards and best practices that will provide for a consistent, comprehensive statewide framework. Lance Wyman is also serving as a consultant to the project.

A second grant is pending to fund the development of a "NJ Points of Interest Community Map". This innovative, Internet-based tool provides a level playing field for destinations of all sizes and gives visitors a one-stop, intuitive map site with which to plan their trips throughout New Jersey.

Year 1: What Comes Next?

1. **A meeting of the Steering Committee** will take place later this month.
This is a key group of stakeholders whose role is to work with the Hillier team to make decisions on behalf of the Wayfinding Advisory Board. Members are listed on the attachment.
2. **We are meeting with Deputy Commissioner Steve Dilts and his team at NJ DOT** on April 21st to present our recommendations for the TODS program and to discuss the Wayfinding Master Planning process.
3. **We're developing a Request for Proposals (RFP) for the Pilot Project** over the next two months. We'll distribute the RFP and select one or more Pilot Projects by year-end.
4. **We're developing and launching the NJ Points of Interest Community Map** over the next 3-6 months.

Finally, we seek to empower this initiative with Wayfinding Legislation.

Fully implementing a statewide Wayfinding system will take about 10 years, allowing for the natural process of sign deterioration and replacement, based on a Wayfinding Master Plan of standards and best practices. Equally important will be legislation that points communities to these same standards over time. We do not seek to create rigid rules and a cookie cutter approach, rather one that allows each region to promote its unique character within a uniform framework that helps our visitors and residents to find their way to the best of New Jersey.

This framework will integrate existing local Wayfinding systems, federal, state and county sign systems and trail marker programs. We see this as a step-by-step process that enhances a sense of place and pride in our home state. This is not about more signs: it's about a uniform system that helps us find our way.

To conclude, Celebrate NJ! is not asking for new sources of state funding for this initiative. Instead we seek to create efficiencies using existing resources. What has been accomplished to date is the result of the enthusiastic collaboration of individuals and groups at many levels, representing a wide range of interests. The one thing we all have in common is our love for New Jersey and our commitment to creating a comprehensive, first-class, statewide Wayfinding system for all of New Jersey's points of interest.

New Jersey has always been the place where innovation happens. We ask that you endorse this Wayfinding Initiative by sponsoring legislation that calls all stakeholders to the table—at state, county and local levels—to bring our best efforts to bear on this innovative undertaking

Thank you for your time and for this opportunity to come before you.

Karen Hatcher, Executive Director
Celebrate NJ! Inc.
49 Ford Avenue
Freehold, NJ 07728
Khatcher@celebratenj.org
732-333-0462

Attachments:

Wayfinding Survey
NJ Points of Interest Map Flyer
Wayfinding Work Team Details
Wayfinding Steering Committee List
Celebrate NJ! Poster