

YOUR REGION

Advisers warn 'pay to play' costing Bridgeport

By **BILL CUMMINGS**
bcummings@ctpost.com

BRIDGEPORT — A consulting firm hired to suggest ways to redevelop the state's largest city is recommending a top-to-bottom reorganization of how Bridgeport deals with issues ranging from ethics to community involvement.

The Urban Land Institute's 112-page final report, the result of hours of interviews and a weeklong visit to the city in January, offers both good and bad news.

ULI stressed that the era of corruption in municipal government must end, as well as eradicating the perception that developers seeking to do business in Bridgeport have to "pay to play"

ULI is a national think tank that gathers experts in a variety of fields and issues advisory reports on development and planning. The Bridgeport Regional Business Council, city government and other busi-

nesses funded the \$100,000 study of Bridgeport.

The report's authors noted that Mayor John M. Fabrizi's stated commitment to open government offers an encouraging sign.

"In order for Bridgeport to regain economic prosperity, it must regain a sound reputation," the report states. "The reputation of quid pro quo governance has been attached to the city for many years.

"Private investment in the city had declined, as developers were unable and ethically unwilling to deal with the city's bureaucracy."

But beyond running an ethical government, the report said the city needs to improve and, in some cases, change its approach to economic development in almost every category

Some suggestions include creating a viable master plan, reorganizing the city's Economic Development Department and its approach, consolidating 11

outside development agencies and creating a reliable process to seek and analyze proposals.

The report urged the city to abandon the idea of returning to its manufacturing past and instead concentrate on retail, residential and office development. It also advised against spending too much time on large, long-term projects, such as the Lake Success office park proposed for Remington Woods.

And ULI advised the city to create a Bridgeport Leadership Council consisting of business leaders, civic groups, elected officials and others. The group would help determine future directions and priorities, and culminate with a Bridgeport Summit to hash out those ideas.

"This consensus-building process will be an important step in ending the period of mistrust between government and city residents. A major goal of the Bridgeport Partnership is to [include] groups that have been marginalized in the

Pumping life into Bridgeport

Following are development suggestions in the 112-page Urban Land Institute report on reviving Bridgeport:

- Seek new proposals to redevelop the 50-acre peninsula known as Steel Point.
- Abandon dreams of becoming a manufacturing powerhouse and focus on retail, residential and office development.
- Learn to seek proposals from developers and properly analyze them.
- Create an Arts and Entertainment Commission.
- Stop selling tax liens and adopt a "re-use" approach to return property to tax rolls.
- Convert the Main Street Remington property into luxury housing.
- Revive Pleasure Beach as a seasonal recreational facility.
- Convert Sikorsky Memorial Airport into an office park.
- Build affordable homes on the site of the former Father Panik housing complex.

past," the report said.

Paul Timpanelli, the BRBC president, said the report will prove useful.

"I think it's going to be very valuable process. Right now we are thinking about how to implement it," Timpanelli said.

ULI's controversial suggestion to close the city-owned Sikorsky Memorial Airport in Stratford and develop the property commercially has been rejected by Fabrizi.

Under that scenario, the city would have to pay back millions in federal grants if the airport closes.

In other areas, ULI urged the city to create an arts and entertainment commission and inventory its old factories to determine which can be cleaned up and returned to the tax rolls.

While the report concedes the city faces many obstacles, it also lists advantages, such

as proximity to New York City, a first-class rail and transportation system, major highway access, ample areas for redevelopment and a citizenry eager to help improve the community.

Bill Cummings, who covers regional issues, can be reached at 330-6230.

