

# Rochester region gets \$500 million in Upstate Revitalization



**Christopher J. Brooks**, @AmericanGlow 10:06 a.m. EST December 11, 2015



(Photo: AP)

It's almost like the Finger Lakes just hit the lottery — big time.

Monroe County and its surrounding region was one of three areas of New York to be awarded \$500 million Thursday as part of Gov. Andrew Cuomo's Upstate Revitalization Initiative. With the win, this area will get \$100 million a year for the next five years to help fund special projects that local public and business leaders believe will spur jobs and prosperity.

"This is huge," said Joel Seligman, who doubles as the University of Rochester president and co-chair of the Finger Lakes Regional Economic Development Council. "It gives us a chance to jumpstart the revitalization of

Rochester."

The Finger Lakes won after submitting an application detailing potential ways local leaders would spend the money. The Southern Tier and Central New York also won a \$500 million award.

**Quick look: [What this win means for Rochester \(/story/money/business/2015/12/10/quick-look-finger-lakes-upstate-revitalization-initiative-hunger-games/77093984/\)](http://www.democratandchronicle.com/story/money/business/2015/12/10/quick-look-finger-lakes-upstate-revitalization-initiative-hunger-games/77093984/)**

The [Finger Lakes application \(https://www.scribd.com/doc/292919080/Finger-Lakes-region-URI-application\)](https://www.scribd.com/doc/292919080/Finger-Lakes-region-URI-application) focused on funneling money to agriculture, next-generation manufacturing and the optics/photonics industry. There's also money slated to boost workforce development, higher education research and local entrepreneurship. The Finger Lakes application has a list of projects that look to be funded during the first round of \$100 million, but it's still unclear what companies, agencies and projects will get money in years two through five.

"There are a lot of details we don't know yet," Seligman said. "There'll be some state processes that we don't quite know yet, but the point is, we won."

State and local leaders like Seligman will soon begin looking at which projects appear the most viable and could have the greatest impact on the local economy, as well as how much private investment they have, said Robert Duffy, CEO of the Rochester Business Alliance.

"It's hard to predict exactly what will happen, but after the first of the year, work will begin," said Duffy, who headed the state's 10 regional economic development councils as Cuomo's lieutenant governor.

Whichever projects advance, "it's all going to be big for Rochester," he said.



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[Quick look: What 'Hunger Games' win means for ROC region](http://www.democratandchronicle.com/story/money/business/2015/12/10/quick-look-finger-lakes-upstate-revitalization-initiative-hunger-games/77093984/?from=global)

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## WELL POSITIONED FOR FUNDING

The Finger Lakes plan has several detailed projects, but those projects do not yet have the green light to start. Each idea and organization has to apply to get a piece of the \$500 million.

"Now the hard work begins, because now we have to actually identify specific projects and work with the state to make sure they're funded and make sure that we get the return that the governor is requiring," said Monroe County Executive Maggie Brooks, who will leave office at the end of the month.

Some of this region's most likely projects run the gamut of nanotech research to startup competitions to a super secret optics company.

Under agriculture, money would likely go toward a [Delaware-based startup called AquaTerRen \(/story/money/business/2015/09/09/salmon-fishery-kodak-win-state-funds/71956398/\)](#), which is looking to create a [hydroponic salmon fishery at Eastman Business Park \(/story/money/business/2015/09/09/salmon-fishery-kodak-win-state-funds/71956398/\)](#) Another pot of money will likely go to Rochester-based North American Breweries and their plan to create an Eco-Brewery District that has a brewery incubator, beer education center and a museum.



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[So Rochester won \\$500m. Now what?](#)

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Mary Beth Popp, North American Breweries spokeswoman, said Thursday that company will reveal more details Friday morning.

In the photonics/optics section, money would probably go toward enticing a well-known optics company to Rochester. The company would invest \$400 million and bring 600 jobs. But Rochester is competing with other locales for this company and because it's unclear whether the company will move here, the economic council is calling this plan Project Cataract.

Some of the \$500 million will probably go toward expanding an existing laser laboratory at the University of Rochester so the university could compete for more government research grants in thermonuclear energy. There's also a plan for a new competition for photonics-focused startups.

Jim Senall, president of High Tech Rochester, said the competition would invite optics/photonics startups across the country to apply. The winners would get a small amount of money and help from mentors to develop their business plan. After that, a group of venture capitalists would give a substantial amount of money to the most promising startups.

Senall said this competition copies off an existing program in Boston called MassChallenge. The end game for Rochester, he said, is to attract more startups in optics, photonics or imaging. The early stage money is just the carrot.

"Because we're the optics and photonics capital, they're going to want to stay here because the best assets in the world are here," he said.



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<http://www.democratandchronicle.com/story/news/2015/12/10/finger-lakes-upstate-revitalization-project-list-500-million/77093488/>

For next-generation manufacturing, the plan is to co-invest in a manufacturing facility with [Sweetwater Energy at Eastman Business Park \(/story/money/business/2015/11/20/sweetwater-eyes-53m-plant-eastman-business-park/76100058/\)](#) The facility would hire 150 people and they would make concentrated sugars for biofuels and chemicals. Also, the money could fund the building costs of a nanomaterials research facility at the business park managed by Rochester-based Cerion. That facility would create 200 jobs with anywhere from \$75 million to \$125 million from a group of companies.

Cerion CEO Landon Mertz said Thursday that the facility is basically a research and development laboratory to figure out what new chemicals could be used to make different nanomaterials. Multinational companies that aren't nanotech, but depend on nanotech, will go dutch on funding the research. Mertz said the facility would be filled with "high-paying research" jobs slated for chemists, chemical technicians and some kinds of engineers.

"But it's no manufacturing," he added. "Purely R&D (research and development)."

Mertz said he chose Eastman Business Park because Cerion already has a manufacturing site there. Depending on how soon Cerion can bring aboard 10 multinational companies, Mertz said the research facility could open in six months or 18 months.



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Hillside Family of Agencies is also looking to expand its Hillside Work-Scholarship Connection program from now serving 2,400 Rochester high school students to 4,300, said CEO Dennis Richardson. Doing so would mean hiring more youth advocates and spending more money on tutoring services and vans to take students to their part-time jobs, Richardson said Thursday.

The Upstate Revitalization Initiative was money slated for three regions outside of Buffalo and New York City. It's patterned after the Buffalo Billion initiative that Cuomo launched during his first term.

The underlying push behind these state funds is to reverse upstate New York's recent history of job loss. In the Finger Lakes specifically, 63,000 jobs disappeared starting in the early 1990s, a situation that has helped fuel poverty and high unemployment. However, since 2011, the area has added more than 20,000 jobs.

With a few exceptions, local public officials said the \$500 million will help the average Joe earn a paycheck.

When asked what the \$500 million means for the region, Brooks responded: "It's very easy. It's jobs."



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Southern Tier, Central NY also get \$500M awards

<http://www.democratandchronicle.com/story/money/business/2015/12/10/southern-tier-central-ny-also-get-awards/77096244/?from=global>

Scores of public officials cheered about the region's new funding.

- "Our region's winning application is a substantial victory for the Rochester area and will help inject additional energy into our efforts to establish an economy built to last generations," said Rep. Louise Slaughter, D-Fairport.
- "The unprecedented funding made available through the Upstate Revitalization Initiative will significantly bolster our efforts to secure a brighter economic future for Rochester and all of the Finger Lakes Region by creating thousands of new jobs and potentially leveraging billions in new investments," said Assembly Majority Leader Joseph Morelle, D-Irondequoit.
- "The name of the game is creating jobs, and this will help our region do just that by bolstering new technology, investing in the University of Rochester, RIT and other local colleges and universities, and putting resources into our skilled and trained workforce, it truly is a win-win for our community," said State Senator Joseph Robach, R-Greece.
- "Rochester deserves its fair share. This is a good start. Now it's time to ensure these dollars do what we need them to do most, and that's create jobs and opportunity right here in our community," said State Senator Rich Funke, R-Perinton.
- "This is an exciting award and exciting time to work and raise a family in greater Rochester. We are on the road toward economic recovery," said Assemblyman Peter Lawrence, R-Greece.



New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo speaks during an economic development awards ceremony. (Photo: AP)

But others voiced their displeasure with the fanfare and the process:

- Assembly Minority Leader Brian Kolb, R-Canandaigua, said in a statement that the funding was welcome, but pitting upstate regions against each other is not a catalyst for sustained revitalization. "True economic development must come in the form of lowering taxes and fees on job-creators, reducing onerous regulations, and helping the thousands of small businesses that will never see a nickel from programs like the Upstate Revitalization Initiative," he said.
- Assemblyman Bill Nojay, R-Pittsford, criticized "self-congratulatory high-fives between detached Albany politicians" at Thursday's announcement. "The reality is that these economic development grants are a pitiful and desperate tip of the hat to regions the governor's policies have continued to wreck during his administration," Nojay said in a statement.

Seligman, the UR president, said Thursday's \$500 million represents the fruit of hard work from 450 people who worked on the application. He said the plan would benefit the Rochester Downtown Innovation Zone, Eastman Business Park and the Western New York Science and Technology Advanced Manufacturing Park, also known as STAMP.

In the same spirit of everyone working together to submit the application, Seligman said everyone in the region will benefit from the money.

"We intend to lift everybody up together," he said.

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*This story includes reporting from staff reporters David Riley and Brian Sharp.*

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