

## Talk CNY S1E17 Transcript

Andrew Fish 0:06

Welcome to CenterState CEO's semi monthly podcast, Talk CNY, presented by NBT Bank.

Kate Hammer 0:11

On Talk CNY, you get an inside look at the people, projects and planning moving Central New York forward.

Andrew Fish 0:17

I'm Andrew Fish, Senior Vice President of Member and Business Experience at CenterState CEO, Central New York's leading business leadership and economic development organization.

Kate Hammer 0:25

And I'm Kate Hammer, business coach and member at CenterState CEO. we are your hosts for Talk CNY. Take a moment right now to subscribe in your listening app for new episodes every other Wednesday.

Jonathan Link Logan 0:36

If you just invest in the place, the people there might not benefit. That or get forced out and lead to things like gentrification. That is a concern. And if you just invest in the people and not in the place, then the people will likely move out because it no longer has things that they want to maybe take advantage of as their economic mobility increases. And so place based economic development is kind of like layering those two things together.

Andrew Fish 0:59

On this episode of Talk CNY, we'll talk to two members of our CenterState CEO team, Andy Obernesser, Director of Community Investment, and Jonathan Link Logan, Senior Manager of nNeighborhood Development. Andy and Jonathan have worked for years to make our Syracuse neighborhoods thriving and more equitable. Welcome, Andy and Jonathan, great to have you here.

Jonathan Link Logan 1:16

Thank you.

Andy Obernesser 1:17

Thank you very much for having us.

Andrew Fish 1:18

Absolutely.

Kate Hammer 1:19

You've both been doing this work for a number of years. You know, Jonathan, you've been doing this for over a decade. And we just want to know what got you started in neighborhood based economic development? And Jonathan, why don't you answer first.

Jonathan Link Logan 1:31

Sure. So for me, my work in this kind of grew out of my training at ESF and landscape architecture, I took a studio course where we got an opportunity to work with a neighborhood on the east side and really get a chance to meet with and interact with the residents of that community and help them put together a vision plan for what their community could look like in the next 10 years. And that really kind of sort of set my path on this career and working with neighborhood residents to try and help them have a voice in what ultimately they will live and work in every day. I guess for me, the connection to this work in Syracuse says that my mom and my grandmother grew up on the city's Northside. And my wife and I live in the house that my family has been in for about 100 years. And during the pandemic, we bought the vacant house next door and had been renovating that as well.

Andrew Fish 2:19

That's fantastic.

Kate Hammer 2:20

That is so cool.

Andrew Fish 2:21

Putting your putting your work into action.

Kate Hammer 2:24

How about you, Andy?

Andy Obernesser 2:25

So I grew up just outside of Utica, came to Syracuse about 12 years ago or so worked for a few years as a land use and community planner with a consulting firm and really just like the opportunity to be able to do this work, you know, focused on making improvements to the to the built environment and to the kind of business environment in a place that I've come to call home was really important to me. So I joined CenterState in 2019.

Andrew Fish 2:48

Both fantastic members of the team here doing important work. I'm sure throughout this conversation, we're going to hear the term place based economic development from the two of you. Before we get into some of the more meatier questions could you give us a quick definition of what that means, so that our listeners can understand kind of the roots of that when we're talking about place based economic development?

Andy Obernesser 3:08

Sure. So this is, we do use that term a fair bit, this is really about kind of centering our economic development strategies on the competitive advantages and priorities of the places that we serve. So whether that's at the neighborhood scale, the city scale, the region, what have you, it's really so what we're doing in that is really identifying and trying to facilitate improvements to the physical environment, the civic environment and the business environment, really in service of supporting the economic mobility of the people who live and work in those neighborhoods. So it takes a variety of different forms, you know, thinking back the better part of a decade plus this organization has involved been involved with place based economic development, we think of the work that we did in supportive like the the Elmcrest Children's Center, or the Bob Cchool project on Prospect Ave, or the the work that we do with disadvantaged business owners in distressed neighborhoods, you know, the advocacy and coalition building that we've done around issues like I-81 one or like getting the State's land bank legislation passed a decade ago. So it takes a variety of different forms. But really, at the end of the day, it's about leveraging economic growth in those areas to create economic opportunity for the for the folks in those neighborhoods,

Kate Hammer 4:28

What would you say is the most rewarding part of this work for you?

Jonathan Link Logan 4:31

For me, I think it's been the ability to build relationships with neighborhood residents, whether that's on the Northside or throughout the city of Syracuse. An example I'd kind of like to share for that is there's a woman that I've been working with for over a decade now. Her name is Rosalinda Abby, she owns the African and Caribbean Central Market and I got to know her first in the early 2000 10s when she took advantage of one of our New York Mainstreet grants to improve the business. The building that she had her business in at that time. It allowed her to a expand her business and grow her business to a point where she eventually needed to find a new space. So she rented another location on the city's Northside, but had to move out of that for some unforeseen circumstances outside of her control. And during that process wound up purchasing a new building that she for the last two and a half years, to spend working to renovate to expand her business and also on the Northside, and, and I guess, like, thinking through that, for me, it's been an the ability to watch her grow her business and increase her family wealth by now, the fact that she owns two businesses or two buildings on the city's Northside, helping her serve her community better, which isn't just here in the city of Syracuse, but she has customers who come as far away as Pennsylvania, and then also, you know, helping her sort of help stabilize this important corridor in our city that really has a lot, a lot to offer.

Kate Hammer 5:47

Yeah, that does sound incredibly rewarding.

Andrew Fish 5:49

Absolutely.

Kate Hammer 5:50

What about you, Andy?

Andy Obernesser 5:51

Yeah, you know, I similar to Jonathan's relationship with Rosalinda, I think that like, being able to be witness to the folks that we serve, and the things that they're doing to use their businesses as a force for social good, is really, it just kind of fills you with gratitude, right? So you get to see like the tenacity, the the dedication, the commitment these folks have to their communities, to their families, to their neighborhood, it's just really impressive. The folks that we work with, whether it's to Taneka Jones, that It Takes a Village or Ulysses Moiety, at Taste of Africa, or, you know, I mean, we could go on and on, it's really just fills you with gratitude to be able to serve folks like that, that are doing such incredible work on some hard projects in in tough communities.

Andrew Fish 6:42

You know, it's funny, we, a lot of times the headlines are about the big projects, right? The hundreds of jobs, or 1000s of jobs being created. But really, it's the small business impact that actually moves in economy. We know that right? Small businesses where the majority of jobs are created in this country, and certainly in this community. We've got a lot of programs that we kind of are working with, and designing to help facilitate this, right. I mean, obviously, the direct technical support that you've provided, Rosalinda is important. But we also can offer some programs across the board to help small businesses to help entrepreneurs. Can you talk a little bit about those? And what are some of the successes that we've seen over the years,

Andy Obernesser 7:16

I guess, I would say, in terms of like, what's most important, there isn't necessarily the programs or initiatives per se, right. It's more like the, the approach and the service that we're offering. So I think of like, one of the things that's made a big difference in a lot of the projects that we support, is our ongoing commitment to kind of deep and focused one on one work. So coaching, handholding, troubleshooting, consulting, you know, all that work that we would consider to be like our deep dive technical assistance. It's really It's a service that we offer across multiple different programs. But it's really that kind of commitment to sitting down and, and hashing through complicated projects with small business owners over an extended period of time, that has really made a big difference. It's helped a lot of those small businesses to get launched and to and to grow and pivot. And so I would say it's more the the approach than than programs per se. Sure.

Kate Hammer 8:13

When you think about the direct impact that programming through CenterState CEO has had on the people and the businesses that you're working with, can you give us another specific example? Something that you've seen that's brought someone a lot of success?

Andy Obernesser 8:27

Sure. Yeah. You know, one of the first that comes to mind. I know that, so we've had a Shawni Davis in on the podcast. You know, she's obviously been a great success in terms of her launch and growth of her business. Another one that comes to mind that maybe doesn't get quite the amount of coverage is Darin Lucky at Ollie Fix It. Darin is somebody that we've been able to serve in partnership with the City of Syracuse and the Community Foundation. So they had given us the support to try to increase the capacity of minority owned contractors who could take on more lead paint remediation projects in the City of Syracuse. So obviously, a big public health crisis that both the city and the Community Foundation care deeply about. So we were able to bring our services to bear to increase Darin's capacity as a contractor through our Upstart Technical Assistance Program, and we were able to get him, you know, his first loan, who came up with accounting services really worked with him in kind of sorting out some of those first business planning exercises that he had to do, projecting his finances, things like that, working with other service providers like SBDC, to try to help Darin sort out some of those initial business planning exercises, financial projections, those sort of thing to really get him to a point where he could take on a lot more work. So he's taken on a lot more contracts. He's going to be looking for his first office in the not too distant future. So it's really you know, seeing the commitment of folks like Darin, that's been a huge success for us, and it's certainly really rewarding.

Jonathan Link Logan 9:56

I think, one of the things that make CenterState CEO's work in helping support small businesses like this so important is that we kind of act as that friends and family network for folks who might not have the access to that, or the access to that is thinner than it might be for others. And I kind of look at that, not just as sort of, you know, traditionally, when you think of that, it's maybe more on the financing side of the equation. But it's also about kind of walking alongside them in this process, and bringing the ability to be a dot connector to say, you know, if you, if you're looking for this, there's this service out there, or this consultant out there who can help you. And then also, and lastly, and maybe sometimes, most importantly, kind of being there, when the waves get really choppy, and they're kind of ready to like, like throw it all away, and stop because it's so hard. And just kind of help them push through that and being their sort of like cheerleader or mental health professional or whatever you want to call it,

Andrew Fish 10:50

It is important to understand that a lot of individuals don't have those same access to resources. And I know that that's what this this work really is designed to do is, is set up that system to support individuals who traditionally not had that opportunity to make a difference in those communities.

Andy Obernesser 11:06

Absolutely.

Andrew Fish 11:07

So it was recently announced that the Allyn Family Foundation is going to be, has acquired, the Chimes building is going to be redeveloping it into 150 mixed use residential units. I know both

of you have been a part of getting this project off the ground and ready to go. How is this project, this redevelopment? First? Why is it so important? And how is it different from traditional property redevelopment that we've seen? And what is that difference doing to kind of drive some of that, you know, equitable growth that we're looking to see?

Andy Obernesser 11:33

Sure. So I would say kind of first and foremost, how it's different is you have to think about how transformative it is when you have a change agent driving the project, like the Allyn Family Foundation is right. So we look live right across the street, you need no more evidence of their commitment to that kind of long term benevolent perspective as a property developer than the Salt City Market, right. So to be able to have them in, you know, in their perspective as kind of long term stewards of their community, it's really important that they're involved in this work. This is not out of town developers, this is not somebody who's coming in looking to extract wealth out of a building, right? So this is a foundation who is looking to use real estate development as a tool to help strengthen a neighborhood and really create community wealth.

Andrew Fish 12:24

Absolutely. So what's the importance when you think about, you know, the term is mixed income residential. Talk to me a little bit about the importance of that, when you think about place based economic development, I told you, I was gonna bring that

Kate Hammer 12:35

You did do that.

Jonathan Link Logan 12:37

I feel like the importance of mixed income developments, like what we're helping to support at the Chimes project is that it's not something that's been widely done in our community, and is has the potential to be significantly transformative, and what the access to resources look like for folks across the spectrum. So first mixed income for the way that we define that means that it will allow for folks who are live at all different levels of income to have access to a unit in that building. So that's low income, you know, a very affordable units all the way through workforce housing, and then market rates, so your higher income folks, and I think that kind of is unique in the sense that there isn't a lot of really prominent examples of that here in Syracuse. And at a time when we're really without even Micron on the horizon, we are facing a housing issue, and then you layer on top of that Micron, having the Allyn Family Foundation out in front leading what could be something that hopefully would be not just a model here in Syracuse, but as we think about the entire county and further afield of what could the potential be to sort of deconcentrate poverty and, and allow access to resources and housing in different parts of our community.

Andrew Fish 13:52

It's an important way to build a community and get people interacting with each other and, and get people feeling like they're in this name, shared ownership neighborhood with other people.

And I think that's the key to kind of disrupting some of the challenges we've seen in the past, right and moving more towards equitable growth where all people prosper.

Kate Hammer 14:13

What sort of challenges do the business owners you work with run into? And are there some examples maybe that have served as inspiration to CenterState CEO and the way that you have come about offering programming,

Jonathan Link Logan 14:26

I think I'm gonna go back to Rosalinda for a second. One of the problems that I think she experienced in her process of purchasing this building was that she did it at a time when the pandemic was just kind of ramping up. And so she had purchased the building with a little bit of extra in her mortgage to help her fund this redevelopment, that little bit very rapidly became quite insufficient. And so we helped her go through the process of identifying different financial resources that were out there and applying for some of those and in one particular instance, the closing that getting through that closing, there were a whole bunch of things that turned up in that process. And so we helped her connect to different resources to fix those challenges. And really just like, you know, be able to do her project, because I think without the access to those funds, she would have had a much more challenging project ahead of her because she would have had to layer on different things, and maybe not been able to overcome some of the challenges that were uncovered in the process of her closing.

Andy Obernesser 15:29

And also probably just add there, this kind of goes back to something you were saying earlier, Andrew about network. One of the things that we're trying to do is we're trying to enhance people's access to a network of service providers just kind of helpers, you know, folks that can help them launch and grow their businesses. And it's really like, if you don't have that network, entrepreneurship, and small business ownership can be super lonely. So I think just like as a, as a kind of problem that I think a lot of entrepreneurs and small business owners encounter that kind of goes under the radar, it can be, it can be a pretty lonely path. And there's not a whole lot of safety nets built into that path. Right. So when you think about somebody who's using entrepreneurship and small business ownership, as a as a way to grow wealth for themselves and their families and get out of poverty, you know, folks on the margins who don't have that network, it can be an extra lonely path, right. So that's one of the things that we we try to pay attention to. And we're trying to make sure that the the folks that we serve in the in the business owners that we work with, are really connected to as many different service providers and kind of just helpers as we can connect them to in the community.

Kate Hammer 16:44

Yeah, I think that's really interesting. The actual, the social piece, the emotional piece, and not just the red tape that we might imagine,

Andrew Fish 16:50

Right. Yeah. We'll be back to continue our conversation with Andy and Jonathan, where we'll learn more about some of the projects that are going to be happening to drive community investment, and how that will impact the growth of Central New York. But first, a note from our presenting sponsor of Talk CNY, NBT Bank.

NBT Bank Sponsor 17:06

Every day at NBT Bank, we focus our business around all the ways we can help yours were large enough to offer leading business and digital solutions, but local enough to ensure personalized one on one service. So turn to NBT Bank for a full range of business solutions like capital and treasury management services, even fraud protection, and see how NBT Bank is just the right size to help you do big things. Visit [NBTbank.com](https://www.nbtbank.com) to learn more, and start a conversation. Equal Housing lender, member FDIC.

Kate Hammer 17:36

This is Talk CNY and we are continuing our conversation with CenterState CEO's, Andy Obernesser, Director of Community Investment, and Jonathan Link Logan, Senior Manager of Neighborhood Development. We're in this awesome period of growth right now. Right? So how do you hope it affects the entrepreneurs you work with in the neighborhoods that you're investing in?

Jonathan Link Logan 18:00

For me, I think what I'm hoping is that some of this investment is brought to bear on the neighborhoods that we work in, and the folks who live there and the entrepreneurs who live in those neighborhoods. And by that, I mean, it would be really great to see some of the housing that is being talked about not just happen in Clay are in some of the outlying suburbs, but also happen in the city of Syracuse reinvesting in our neighborhoods so that the homes that are there can be repopulated can get the upgrades that they need, and and be attractive to folks from across the community that some of our neighborhood entrepreneurs who have maybe been toying with the idea of starting a business or starting a business, but not really getting the traction that it deserves, for them to see. And be able to capture some of that growth. I think the idea that we were talking about earlier about mixed income housing, I would love to see that start to play out more in our neighborhoods.

Andrew Fish 18:51

So lots of great stuff ahead of us. Clearly, we've got some intentionality around how we want to do this work. But what's ahead for the community investment team as we finish out 2023. And as we go into 2024, what are some of the projects? And then in the new initiatives? How are our things playing out for us?

Andy Obernesser 19:07

Yeah, we've got a busy few months ahead, we are helping to staff the Micron Community Engagement committee's process. So helping them-

Andrew Fish 19:14

Sorry- for those that may not know, sorry, Community Engagement Committee is a group that was put together by Micron in New York State, that's really focusing on some of the ways that this growth is going to have an impact across the region and some of the key issues that we need to work with. So just want to make sure you know what that was started. Yeah.

Andy Obernesser 19:29

So that's, that's great context, really trying to help that committee to identify what some of those priorities are so that we can maximize the opportunity for place based economic development, so helping to staff that and we are expanding our own capacity to be an alternative lender for some of the folks that we've worked with in our small business in entrepreneurship programs. And so that's really keeping us busy. That's some some great work that we've been involved in for the better part of a couple of years trying to grow that capacity. We are supporting a couple of projects that are really interesting in the city of Syracuse. So playing a supporting role on things like the city of Syracuse is East Adams neighborhood redevelopment initiative in support of the city and Blueprint 15 also obviously, working to support the project at Chimes, which is really exciting and working to support a project over at the former Syracuse Developmental Center to help land an advanced manufacturing facility at that site. So.

Andrew Fish 20:26

It's great. It's the big derelict building next to the zoo currently is that site if folks are unfamiliar with it, we're working on the manufacturing side. And I know there's about 600 units of housing that's planned for the other half of that site. So that's great.

Andy Obernesser 20:38

Yes, very transformative for that neighborhood. So.

Andrew Fish 20:40

Awesome. Sounds like we've got a tremendous amount of projects opportunity, a lot of work still to do to ensure that this growth happens equitably and can be place based as we would like to like it to be so that we've got that layering in of investment in the place and investment in the people so that those communities can thrive. Jonathan, Andy, thank you both so much for joining us today. Really appreciate all that you do and for your time today.

Andy Obernesser 21:03

Thanks for having us.

Kate Hammer 21:05

CenterState CEO's podcast, Talk CNY, is presented by NBT Bank and is available on [clickcny.com](http://clickcny.com) and all major podcast platforms.

Andrew Fish 21:14

After each episode, join us in Click. We will continue to chat about this topic and provide additional resources and links.

Kate Hammer 21:20

In Click you can also listen to or watch every episode of this series of Talk CNY.

Andrew Fish 21:25

Click is CenterState CEO's digital chamber platform where members connect, learn and receive support from our staff.

Kate Hammer 21:31

For new episode reminders every other Wednesday. Be sure to subscribe in your favorite podcast listening app.

Andrew Fish 21:37

If you're enjoying Talk CNY, consider leaving a quick review or a five star rating.