



# Buffalo Waterfront Corridor Initiative



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Working  
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Anthony M. Masiello

## Conference Sharpens Focus on Waterfront Action

Buffalo has a shared vision for the future of its waterfront, Mayor Masiello told more than 150 citizens at the Buffalo Waterfront Conference at The Pier in May 2003, and the focus is sharpening on action that will achieve that vision.

“We do have a vision,” Masiello said. “It’s a big vision for a big waterfront. It includes many elements. But it boils down to one thing. Working together with common vision, we will take our waterfront back.”

Rep. Jack Quinn joined the Mayor, congratulating him for taking the lead in managing implementation of an array of key waterfront development projects, including the Southtowns Connector, Erie Canal Harbor, the Union Ship Canal redevelopment, and creation of a new wildlife refuge at Times Beach.



Brian Higgins, who led the effort to create direct public access at “Gallagher Beach” on the Outer Harbor, said the project never would have been possible had not Masiello pledged matching money at a crucial moment. County Executive Joel A. Giambra and U.S. Senator Charles Schumer also addressed the group.

Conference participants heard the story of the creation of the Louisville Waterfront Park from David Karem, executive director of the agency that built and manages the park. (See article on page 3).

Part of Karem’s friendly advice to Buffalo waterfront supporters was to “quit whining about what isn’t happening and look around at what a great waterfront you’ve already got.”

The core of the program, however, was in small group discussions aimed at setting general project priorities for future waterfront development. With some projects completed, and others well on the way, it’s time to think about what comes next.

Participants zeroed in on the need to elaborate transportation connections to the waterfront, the potential in heritage preservation and development, economic development, and environmental restoration as key priorities. (See related article on page 3). ■

## Louisville Waterfront Developer Offers “Commandments” for Buffalo

For the past 17 years, David Karem has been hard at work creating, and now managing, a wonderful 90-acre park on the Ohio River waterfront of Louisville, Kentucky.

Karem joined the throng at the Buffalo Waterfront Conference in May to tell the story of the Louisville Waterfront Park and to offer Buffalonians some advice on how to make our own waterfront better.

Like Buffalo’s expansive waterfront, Louisville’s riverfront was once dominated by industry and commerce, and subsequently disused. Today it is a highly visible, heavily used, and intensively programmed string of public spaces. How did this happen?

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## Louisville Waterfront Developer Offers “Commandments” for Buffalo *(continued from page 1)*

Karem puts a heavy emphasis on the fact that state, county, and municipal governments agreed to delegate waterfront development to a single-purpose not-for-profit corporation. This allowed the corporation to focus on long term issues of planning, development, and maintenance while political leaders focused on their shorter-term goals of getting re-elected.

Citizen participation in planning also played a key role in the park’s success. Staff of the Louisville Waterfront Development Corporation made hundreds of presentations and held regular public discussions on the way to creating a plan.

But the continuing success of the park has depended upon doing a lot of different things right, Karem said, and he ticked them off one after the other:

- Improvements won’t happen overnight; the public needs to know you are in it for the long haul.
- Take a positive attitude: ban the phrase “you can’t do that” and never take “no” for an answer.
- Make everyone part of the team and network with other communities. Everyone wants to help.
- Don’t compromise on quality, don’t ever agree to mediocrity, and do it right the first time.



- Monumentality is good for monuments. Design your park at “people scale.”
  - Design the park knowing that it must work as well for three women doing tai chi as for half a million people watching fireworks.
  - All the details matter: daily clean-up, periodic maintenance, security, vendor programs, lighting, signage, shade trees, and more.
  - Programming is crucial to making sure the park is peopled and active.
    - Make sure there’s a place to dock; after all, it is a waterfront park.
    - Parking is important, but it’s as dangerous to have too much as it is to have too little. Plan parking to accommodate daily activity, not your biggest event of the year.
    - After the park is open, be willing to rethink everything and retrofit accordingly. The park is a living thing. It will continue to change.
    - Never, ever, give up ownership of waterfront property.
    - Don’t expect a public park to pay for itself. They’re not supposed to. But a great park will attract new development nearby.
- Finally, Karem told his audience, Buffalonians should “stop whining” about what hasn’t happened on our waterfront and understand how beautiful it already is. Then get to work. ■

## City Pushing LWRP to Completion

The Mayor’s Office of Strategic Planning has extended its contract with consultants Wendel-Duchscherer Architects and Engineers to assist the City in completing the Local Waterfront Revitalization Program (LWRP).

The push to complete the LWRP follows on the momentum generated by the recent Buffalo Waterfront Conference; the work will draw on citizen comments captured at that forum.

An LWRP is a locally prepared, comprehensive land and water use plan for a community’s natural, public, and working waterfront, and for developed coastal resources, based on general coastal zone management policies from state government.

The plan will provide a comprehensive framework for waterfront development and protection and will be incorporated into the recently released Buffalo Comprehensive Plan as the waterfront component of that effort.

Already completed for the LWRP is a comprehensive inventory of waterfront conditions and potentials,

as well as an encompassing statement of policy to guide the management of waterfront resources.

In September, the LWRP project team will release a proposed waterfront land use map, project list and implementation strategy for public review.

The land use map and project list are based upon a careful analysis of the past 40 years of planning and project development for Buffalo’s waterfront including previous LWRP documents, regional planning efforts and the Horizon’s project.

Project recommendations have been updated to reflect the regional emergence of heritage and tourism-based economic development, continued public appeals for increased park and marina access, and current population and economic trends.

The Draft LWRP is expected to be submitted to the New York State Department of State for review and acceptance in October, follow by a required 60-day review by county, state and federal agencies. This will pave the way for the Common Council to adopt the LWRP in spring of 2004. ■



## Citizens Set Priorities: Connections, Heritage, Economy, Environment

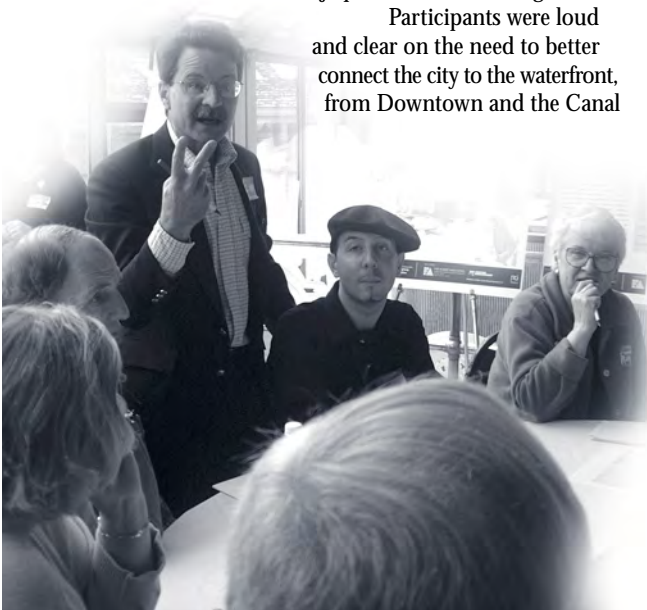
As the main order of business for the conference, citizens met in small groups, heard reports on work in progress, talked about their aspirations for the waterfront, and set down clear priorities for continuing action.

Citizens ranked projects twice, first in 24 separate small group discussions during the day. Later, at the conclusion of the conference, 90 folks who stuck it out until the end made their rankings across all six geographic waterfront regions.

Broadly speaking, citizen participants underlined:

- The need for better connections from the city to the waterfront, visually as well as physically, and better access for pedestrians, cyclists, and transit, as well as cars;
- The potential for heritage preservation and development – in Buffalo’s historic Canal District, in the Cobblestone District, and among the giant grain silos along the Buffalo River;
- The possibilities for waterfront economic development – from the north Outer Harbor to neighborhood commercial strips and beyond; and
- The importance of the environment – in terms of new and improved parks and trails along the waterfront and water quality in the Buffalo River, Scajaquada Creek, and in general.

Participants were loud and clear on the need to better connect the city to the waterfront, from Downtown and the Canal



District to the Outer Harbor and through the physical barrier of the Niagara Thruway Downtown and all along the waterfront.

Bridges, trams, water taxis, tunnels, and otherwise were suggested as ways to span the gap between Inner and Outer Harbors.

Citizens also made a strong statement about the need to approach waterfront transportation issues “multi-modally” – including pedestrians, bicycles, boaters, and roller-bladers as well as providing improved transit service to the waterfront.

The importance of heritage preservation and development emerged as a very strong theme, with support for “heritage centers” in the Canal District, perhaps in the DL&W Terminal, as well as for development of the Cobblestone District, preservation and interpretation of Buffalo’s grain elevators, and development of an industrial heritage trail.



Conference participants also expressed support for developing the great economic potential of the waterfront – in ways appropriate to the resource. There was support for mixed use development on the Outer Harbor, at the Seaway Piers and Bell Slip and perhaps E-Zone, but only in the context of public aspirations for enhanced access and additional open space.

Citizens expressed a desire for a wide range of new and restored parks, green spaces, and trails. These include plans to restore LaSalle Park, expand Gallagher Beach, develop a new Squaw Island park, complete a waterfront greenway, and preserve Outer Harbor greenspace.

Finally, citizens underscored the need to protect and restore the fundamental waterfront resource – the water itself. Remediation of Buffalo River sediments, a fix for the combined sewer overflow problem, and an overall watershed management plan got strong support in the ranking. ■

*A full report and analysis of the ranking at the conference will be available in September on the Waterfront Corridor Initiative website at [www.city-buffalo.com](http://www.city-buffalo.com)*

**The Buffalo Waterfront Corridor Initiative has been created to:**

- Develop the economic strength of neighborhoods, the community, and the region;
- Extend direct access to our waterfront from Riverside to South Buffalo and everywhere in between;
- Revitalize our waterfront neighborhoods and connect them to the water;
- Protect and repair the health of our water, land, and wildlife along the waterfront;
- Create a magnificent International Gateway at and around the Peace Bridge; and
- Make a better waterfront transportation corridor – for the sake of the waterfront and transportation.

## What's Next for Waterfront Corridor Initiative?

The Waterfront Corridor Initiative has picked up where the waterfront conference left off – working to implement the strong, continuing, shared public vision we have for the Buffalo waterfront.

Already the project team has completed a thorough inventory and analysis of 20 years of waterfront planning. This review has produced greater understanding of the citizen values expressed through these plans, a catalogue of projects already completed, and the basis for the project priorities work conducted at the conference.

This work has emerged in parallel with work on a new Local Waterfront Revitalization Program for Buffalo (see article on page 2) and on the new Buffalo Comprehensive Plan. Together these will provide a strong framework for putting into action citizen demands for access, environmental quality, and appropriate economic development of our waterfront.

A waterfront implementation council will be formed in the near future. This body will comprise leaders of those organizations – public and private – that have the capacity to make priority projects happen. Members will meet regularly and be accountable to the whole council for moving their respective projects forward.

In the coming months, the project team will develop urban design guidelines for four “gateway nodes” to help ensure that clusters of projects come together to have the greatest positive impact possible.

As part of that work, the project team will produce two detailed proposals for potential projects to be identified through the planning inventory, public engagement, and study of gateway neighborhoods. The proposals – what highway bureaucrats call Expanded Project Proposals – will become the basis for future waterfront corridor improvements.

Work will also begin soon on an update of the International Waterfront Gateway Plan that was first developed in 1997. Likewise, discussions on the concept of an “international zone” for commerce will also begin soon.

All of this work – planning inventory, project priorities, urban design guidelines, detailed project proposals, International Waterfront Gateway Plan and international zone work – will be combined in a draft waterfront corridor plan for transportation improvements for release in 2004.

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