



For Immediate Release: October 10, 2013

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21st Century Park Concept for Buffalo's Outer Harbor Released

Conceptual rendering reflects strong community desire for waterfront enhancement and permanent public access to Lake Erie

Buffalo, NY-- Community leaders joined together today to release a conceptual rendering for an internationally significant waterfront park on Buffalo's Outer Harbor. The release of this concept is intended to advance community dialogue on the future use and public access to nearly 100 acres of vacant property on the shores of Lake Erie. The concepts presented in this rendering reflect an amalgamation of two years worth of input from over 20 organizations throughout Western New York.

Joanne Kahn, Chairperson of the "21st Century Park on the Outer Harbor" group stated, "For generations, our residents have been cut off from our Great Lakes and waterfront, this is our community's chance to embrace and reconnect to the water, a vision shared by Frederick Law Olmsted back in 1888". Kahn continued, "The goal of releasing this image is to allow the public to begin to visualize an alternate future for the Outer Harbor, and respond to Governor Cuomo's call for public input into waterfront redevelopment".

"We are in the midst of a transformation from a rust-belt region to a blue economy, and every investment decision we make now for the Outer Harbor can either impact or enhance our fresh water systems," said Jill Jedlicka, Executive Director of Buffalo Niagara Riverkeeper. "To ensure we have the best return on investment, the future of our waterfront must be defined with significant input from our diverse community and establish standards of excellence for redevelopment that protects and maintains our public trust resources for the next generation."

The Regional Economic Development Council's Strategy for Prosperity recognizes the economic value of enhancing public access to waterfront areas: "Providing, protecting and improving public access to waterfront areas can enhance quality of life for residents of the region while expanding nature-based tourism."

The park concept, developed in collaboration with Buffalo Niagara Riverkeeper, would feature innovative place-making elements that improve the quality of life by providing recreational opportunities for people to gather, celebrate, contemplate and engage in activities that promote well-being, health, community, and the environment. The vision includes features that allow visitors to experience the natural beauty of Lake Erie, access to the water for sailing, boating, kayaking, fishing, and sunset views. It also envisions dedicated space for an outdoor amphitheater, restaurants, a promenade, and starts to identify appropriate locations as placeholders for future redevelopment.

Congressman Brian Higgins, in a recent letter noted that the “critical mass” of ongoing projects in and around the Outer Harbor will make the area a tourist destination as well as a source of pride for Western New York residents.

“I applaud the efforts of the 21st Century Park group to come up with an idea that would allow for public access to our waterfront as well as a tourist destination for all to enjoy,” said Senator Mark Grisanti. “Buffalo has the largest undeveloped waterfront in the nation and with ideas like the one proposed we have the potential to have a waterfront comparable to those of Chicago and Baltimore.”

Assemblyman Sean Ryan stated, “Our top priority for our waterfront should be public access and recreational opportunities. The release of a new conceptual rendering for the 21st Century Park marks an important step forward in achieving that goal. This is the first all-encompassing rendering released for the 130 acre site, and I encourage all who are interested in preserving public access, and creating green space to take a look at the exciting proposal being put forward.”

The park could also be the nexus of civic and ecological programs along the Niagara River Greenway, a system of parks and conservation areas linking over 50 miles of bikeways, pathways and waterways along the Niagara River between Lake Ontario and Lake Erie.

Joan Bozer, Co-Chair of the 21st Century group said, “This Park could be a catalyst for economic revitalization and tourism in Western New York, as Governor Cuomo recommended, and would enhance the land values of nearby properties”.

The conceptual rendering was developed with internationally renowned Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates, Inc. (MVVA), a Landscape Architecture and Urban Design firm that has recently designed and constructed Brooklyn Bridge Park, and Chelsea Cove at Hudson River Park in New York City. MVVA believes that parks are founded on the idea of the commons - democratic, inclusive open spaces, while promoting ecological, programmatic, experiential and social diversity.

The rendering will be available for viewing on the group’s website www.21stcenturypark.org.

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