

2003 Regional Agenda – Rebuilding Buffalo Niagara

Rebuilding Buffalo Niagara by *Continuing Efforts in Support of Life Sciences Research and Business Development.*

In the last year, the region made great strides in creating a life sciences research complex that includes the Center of Excellence in Bioinformatics at U.B., the Roswell Park Cancer Institute and the Hauptman-Woodward Research Institute. In 2003, it is imperative to make sure that state and federal commitments of funding for the physical infrastructure come to fruition so construction can remain on schedule.

ACTION ITEMS

Federal funding

- \$14.4 million for UB Center for Excellence in Bioinformatics to cover funding gap for equipment needs and salary packages for new principal investigator teams.
- \$2 million for the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus to establish, improve and enhance an extensive campus-wide landscape, architecture and streetscape improvement plan.

State funding

- \$5.2 million from the GENYSIS program for Hauptman Woodward Research Institute for construction costs.

Rebuilding Buffalo Niagara by *Improving Enforcement and Efficiency at the Canada/U.S. Border.*

Over the last year, the U.S. Federal government has prepared several different CanAm border initiatives aimed at increasing security – some in concert with the region’s goals of increased efficiency, others clearly not.

Due to concern over this direction, the New York State Smart Border Coalition, of which the Partnership is a founding member, was formed. This group’s 12-point plan is clearly the direction in which to head.

ACTION ITEMS

Federal policy

- Enactment of the NYSSBC 12-point plan, which includes adequate staff (24/7), interoperability, and cross designation by U.S. and Canadian authorities at NYS – Canadian border crossings; creation of accord processing zones which would enable shared facilities, staffing, technology, and operations with each zone tailored to the particular circumstances at that crossing; and no implementation of INS Section 110 or any equivalents.

State Policy

- Preparation and emphasis by state elected leaders of a comprehensive CanAm border and trade/tourism corridor needs assessment and strategic plan.

Rebuilding Buffalo Niagara by *Creating Shovel-Ready, Developable Land*

Many are surprised to learn that one of the roadblocks hindering economic development in the Buffalo Niagara region is the lack of shovel-ready, developable land. Indeed, the region lacks large land tracts that are often sought after by site selectors.

One reason for this is that many of the region's best parcels are classified as brownfields. The best hope for the community is to reclaim these brownfields for new development.

ACTION ITEMS

Federal funding

- \$3 million for the development of Union Ship Canal site.
- \$3 million for development of the Bethlehem Steel site.

State Policy

- Adoption of comprehensive state brownfield legislation that provides for use-based clean-up standards as well as limits on liability.

Rebuilding Buffalo Niagara by *Improving the Long-Term Fiscal Stability of Local Governments.*

Local governments, including Erie and Niagara counties and the cities of Buffalo and Niagara Falls, continue to face serious fiscal issues. Given that New York State does not have the resources to aid local governments as in past years, policy changes that provide mandate relief and other reforms to localities are a must.

ACTION ITEMS

State funding

- Re-engineering fund to provide "bridge" support to the City of Buffalo that would be used only for the cost of those negotiated settlements with the Buffalo Police and Fire Unions that resulted in significant long-term reductions in the cost of police and fire services (i.e. to fund workforce reduction through attrition, to fund one-time payments in exchange for work rule changes.)

State policy

- A state takeover the county portion of Medicaid costs (releasing funds which can be used for major service consolidation initiatives, i.e. police/sheriff merger) coupled with cost containment efforts to bring the overall cost of Medicaid benefits in line with private health insurance plans and other government plans like Healthy NY.
- Expedite "Demonstration Project" status for the proposed consolidation of the Buffalo Police and Erie County Sheriff's department.
- Enable the permissive merger of local governments which would provide greater flexibility for municipalities to enter into municipal agreements
- Enact tort reform, which would provide for claims against local governments to be heard in the Court of Claims.
- Provide Mandate Relief by:
 - Creating a new, contributory pension tier for police and fire retirees.
 - Removing the residency exemption for city police, fire and streets employees

- Capping salaries for 207a firefighters on injured-on-duty status.
- Reworking binding arbitration so that an arbiter must give first priority to a municipality's "ability to pay without raising taxes cutting services, causing budget deficits, causing layoffs of employees, impacting cash flow, causing undue harm to taxpayers."
- Repealing Wicks Law

Rebuilding Buffalo Niagara by *Investing in our Region's Transportation Infrastructure*

The Buffalo Niagara region is fortunate to have quality infrastructure for the movement of both people and products. However, maintaining that infrastructure, especially at a time when local governments are cash-strapped, is an increasingly serious problem.

A fully funded, on-time program must be developed to improve deteriorating road and bridge infrastructure.

ACTON ITEMS

Federal funding:

- Congress must maximize the amount of funding available through TEA-3. In this context, the Buffalo Niagara region must then develop a comprehensive, region-wide strategy and priority list for ensuring we receive our fair share of these funds.
- A joint TEA-3 priority list is currently being developed with specific projects that could be considered as priorities for federal earmarks from TEA-3, including Continental 1, initial funding for the Peace Bridge expansion project, and the return of cars to Main Street.

State policy:

- Securing state approval for innovative financing techniques, such as Garvee bonds, that allow funds to be leveraged in order to fund more projects in the short term.

State Funding:

- Ensure that the Buffalo Niagara region receives its fair share of transportation dollars that flow from Washington through TEA-3 to the state Department of Transportation.

Rebuilding Buffalo Niagara by *Developing Our Waterfront Lands and Urban Centers.*

Rebuilding the Buffalo Niagara region must be predicated upon taking advantage of its natural assets, such as the vast waterfront, as well as strengthening urban areas. The waterfront has long been a source of frustration for the community, but signs of progress are clearly evident. A good example is the progress at the Outer Harbor, including the announcement that Gallagher Beach will be converted to a state park. We support this effort and believe that with the proper federal and state support of the items below, the enormous potential of the waterfront will finally become a reality.

Strengthening the region's urban cores requires a concentration of industry sectors that will produce new jobs. Construction of a regional public safety campus in downtown Buffalo that

would work in conjunction with the public safety program at Erie Community College creates such an opportunity.

The next step is to provide housing for those who work in these sectors. Downtown Neighborhood Development, Inc. is working to strategically implement a plan for new housing units in downtown Buffalo, but this new effort requires initial funding to get off the ground.

ACTION ITEMS

Federal funding

- \$3 million for parking and infrastructure improvements in and around Erie Canal Harbor, which is necessary for the Bass Pro retail project.
- \$2 million in funding for mixed use development in downtown Buffalo, a portion of which can come from the Economic Development Initiative fund
- \$1.5 million for the Olcott Harbor Breakwater which will provide docking facilities for transient, non-trailerable vessels
- Funding for the downtown Public Safety Campus comprised of \$21 million for the Academy Building (phase 2) and fulfillment of \$5 million commitment for the Service Building (phase 1).
- Fulfillment of funding commitment that the National Park Service has designated for the Erie Canal National Heritage Corridor
- \$3 million for the design work for the Rain Forest exhibit at the Buffalo Zoo which will be completed in 2003-2004 (construction to be completed late 2005)
- \$650,000 for the next phase of the City of Buffalo Multi-Modal Main Street Access and Revitalization Project

Federal policy

- Support the expansion of the Niagara Falls and Buffalo/Lackawanna Renewal Communities through passage of legislation that would allow for the use of 2000 census data

Federal and State Policy

- GSA and OGS should have a 10-year plan for meeting the needs of federal and state government offices in the region and should tie that plan to placement of these offices in the cities of Buffalo, Niagara Falls, Lackawanna and Tonawanda. GSA and OGS office space RFP's should encourage the use of existing office buildings in these urban central business districts.

State funding

- \$25 million, plus dedication of state share of sales tax, for the Bass Pro retail development project.
- \$2 million for the Buffalo Zoo project, specifically the river otter/sea lion exhibit
- \$5 million for the completion of the Services Building (first phase) of the public safety campus.

Rebuilding Buffalo Niagara *by Improving Homeland Security*

Homeland Security is an area of great concern for the Buffalo Niagara region. Local governments, already facing tough budget constraints, need federal reimbursement for such items as the cost of police and fire who serve as one of the region's "first responders" to potential

terrorist threats. There are also significant infrastructure needs to meet the demands of homeland security.

ACTION ITEM

Federal & State Funding

- A regional priority list of homeland security and public safety needs is currently being developed which could include funds for the completion of the public safety campus (see above), funds in support of the Buffalo Police and Fire Departments for personnel cost (including overtime, training, equipment and technology) in their role as one of the region's first responder to suspected terrorist activity (\$15 million) and funds for an anti-bioterrorism database (\$2 million.)

Rebuilding Buffalo Niagara by ***Providing More Employer-driven, Workplace-based Training for Employees and more effective recruiting, repatriating and retaining of employees***

Some of the most underrated issues for employers in the Buffalo Niagara region is the need for more employer-driven, workplace-based training as well as a system that identifies employer needs and assists in effectively recruiting, retaining and repatriating employees. While government has attempted to respond to these needs over the years, the dollars provided never quite seem to match up with the training desired by employers.

Unfortunately, part of the problem is the lack of flexibility that comes with these training dollars. Simply changing current policy could meet many training needs without requiring additional government funding.

ACTION ITEMS

Federal policy

- Revision of Workforce Investment Act (WIA) pending renewal to provide local Workforce Investment Boards with increased funding for workplace based/employer driven training and retraining and with greater flexibility to channel that funding.

State policy

- The state should use the 25 percent it retains from federal workforce dollars to fund the programs of local workforce investment boards rather than administer programs at the state Department of Labor.

Rebuilding Buffalo Niagara by ***Ensuring the Future Viability of Our Region's Federal Installations.***

Buffalo Niagara is home to two very important federal installations – the Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station and the West Valley Demonstration Project. Current budget constraints continue to put pressure on both of these institutions.

The Niagara Air Reserve Station is the last U.S. Air Force Installation in the State of New York and is the second largest employer in Niagara County with an overall economic impact of \$100 million. It is vital that a high level of community support is continued through the Niagara

Military Affairs Council so that appropriate federal military investments are made in the facility to support the overall mission of the Air Station.

West Valley has seen its funding reduced each of the last two years. As a result, the Project is in need of continued Congressional and community support to allow it to complete its mandated tasks. The federal funding level for 2002 budget year was \$90 million. New York State contributes an additional 10 percent annually as part of its agreement with the federal government. Any proposed funding reduction would have huge economic and environmental impacts on Western New York.

ACTION ITEMS

Federal Funding

- Work with the Niagara Military Affairs Council to ensure that military construction funds continue to flow to the Niagara Air Reserve Station.
- Maintain stable funding for West Valley Demonstration Project.

Federal and State Policy

- The U.S. Department of Energy and the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority must resolve their differences over long-term site stewardship for West Valley.

Rebuilding Buffalo Niagara by *Crafting a Fair Agreement for Local Communities in the Establishment of Seneca Gaming in Our Region.*

Casino gaming can be a catalyst for development in both Niagara Falls and Buffalo. With the Seneca Nation having opened its first casino in Niagara Falls, now is the time for the State Legislature to act to improve the legislation that authorized the Seneca casino.

These improvements should focus on increasing the amount of money that localities receive from the casinos and how such funds should be dedicated to further future economic growth.

ACTION ITEMS

State funding

- New York State should guarantee localities a minimum of 50% of the state share of slot machine revenue dedicated for the full 14 years of the agreement.

State policy

- Dedicated funds should be allocated to designated local development authorities to support development-related initiatives and a portion of those funds should be advanced – according to an agreed upon formula – to the designated entity to cover up front costs associated with Seneca casinos.
- Commitment from NYS to work with Buffalo to craft a development agreement with the Seneca Nation for city services provided to the casino.