

## Introduction

Buffalo's waterfront renaissance was principally brought about by hundreds of local residents, citizen activists, and scores of local nonprofit/nongovernmental organizations. The overall result of the many citizen-inspired efforts and projects described in this book has been to reclaim a substantial portion of Buffalo's forlorn, industrially abandoned waterfront for public use and enjoyment, and thereby to make Buffalo a much more appealing place to live and work.

After losing more than half of its inhabitants between 1950 and 2010, Buffalo's population increased for the first time in seventy years between 2010 and 2020—from 261,310 to 278,349. “The most visible sign of Buffalo's changing fortunes are its new apartments . . . In the last decade, 224 multifamily projects, encompassing 10,150 apartments, have opened or are underway. And the pace of new housing activity appears to be quickening. A third of the total, or 78 projects, were unveiled just in 2020 and 2021” (Hughes 2022). Having weathered the negative economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic over a two-year period, Buffalo's prospects for the future now look much brighter.

While doing the research for this book, I contacted and spoke with dozens of individuals with firsthand knowledge of the waterfront outcomes described in the book, many of whom were directly involved in helping to bring them about. I also engaged in back-and-forth email communications with a number of those individuals. Quotes from these interviews and excerpts of these email communications are interwoven at various points in the book.

Another invaluable source of information was the e-edition of the *Buffalo News*, which provided me with a running commentary on what was happening on the waterfront. Over one hundred articles published in

the *Buffalo News* are referenced in the book, including 9 editorials and 16 contributed op-eds. In addition to providing factual accounts of what was happening on Buffalo's waterfront at different points in time, such newspaper accounts also often revealed how the events being reported on were viewed by the public at the time. Two former *Buffalo News* reporters and columnists (Philip Langdon, 1973–1982 and Donn Esmonde, 1982–2015) provided me with hard copies of many of the columns and articles they wrote during their respective tenures at the newspaper. Nineteen articles posted online on *Buffalo Rising* also provided useful information and insights.

Two master of urban planning theses written by students enrolled in graduate degree urban planning programs at New York State universities served as valuable sources of information: Bradshaw Hovey's 1991 master of urban planning thesis at the University at Buffalo School of Architecture and Planning, "Taken in Again—Citizen Participation in the Buffalo Waterfront plan 1982–1987" and Jimmy Vielkind's 2012 master of urban planning thesis at the University at Albany Department of Geography and Planning, "Media Coverage of Major Land Use and Development Issues." Equally valuable was the 1983 report prepared by lawyer Frank S. Palen for the School of Law at the University at Buffalo, "City Planning in Buffalo: A History of Institutions," in which he describes in detail how planning was conducted in Buffalo in the years before the waterfront renaissance.

## Structure of the Book

The chapters of this book are presented in five parts. The first five chapters in part I orient readers to the three main parts of Buffalo's waterfront and describe the impact that industrial development brought about by the opening of the Erie Canal had on the Inner Harbor, Buffalo River, and Outer Harbor. Chapter 4 describes the factors that contributed to the decline of the Inner Harbor and lower Main Street and government-funded projects that were undertaken in an effort to counteract that decline. Waterfront planning efforts undertaken in the early 1980s and early 1990s are described in chapter 5. The failure of a major waterfront planning effort undertaken by the City of Buffalo and the Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority is particularly notable because it opened the door for the first entity associated with state government to begin planning for Buffalo's waterfront.

Chapters 6 through 9 (in part II) describe the recent history of the Inner Harbor. Chapter 6 explains why Empire State Development Corporation's (ESDC) 1998 Inner Harbor Plan was so controversial and why the Preservation Coalition of Erie County filed a lawsuit against ESDC in Federal District Court. Chapter 7 describes how a new controversy was ignited in 2004 when Governor Pataki announced that preservationists and ESDC had resolved their differences, but also announced that a large-scale Bass Pro Outdoor World retail outlet would be developed in the Inner Harbor.

Two public forums held in fall 2010 in the wake of Bass Pro's withdrawal from the Inner Harbor project are described in chapter 8, which produced strong support for a lighter, quicker, and cheaper approach to activating the waterfront. Chapter 9 describes three projects initiated and carried out by NGOs with the help of the state waterfront agency that broadened Canalside's appeal as a visitor destination.

Chapters 10 and 11 (in part III) return to the Buffalo River. Chapter 10 describes the key role Friends of the Buffalo River, a fledgling nongovernmental organization, played in cleaning up the river as well as in restoring natural habitat within and along the shorelines of the river. Chapter 11 describes a number of projects that took advantage of the river's improving water quality by expanding public use and enjoyment of the Buffalo River.

Chapters 12 and 13 (in part IV) return to the Outer Harbor. Chapter 12 describes how the establishment of nature preserves at Tiff Farm and Times Beach provided the earliest indication of the public's growing recognition of the need to prevent further contamination of the Outer Harbor. Chapter 13 picks up the story from there by describing the series of plans that were developed by state agencies over a quarter century that called for the Outer Harbor to be extensively privately developed. Also described is Our Outer Harbor's eventual success in getting the City of Buffalo to adopt a new Unified Development Ordinance (the "Green Code") that prohibited developing housing on most of the Outer Harbor. The final chapter in part V highlights a number of key observations and lessons that can be learned from Buffalo's experience.