

Peace Bridge Expansion Project Position Paper

Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy

Adopted by the Board of Trustees 11/18/10

The struggling economy of the Buffalo and the Niagara Region has been a topic of discussion and anguish for many years, worsened by the recent nationwide economic crisis. As American cities invest in infrastructure to become more economically competitive, there is a growing recognition that economic development potential increases when barriers between communities and important waterfront properties (such as expressways and other 20th-century symbols of driving efficiency) are removed and replaced with parks and green space designed to enrich the human experience. The proposed creation of an enlarged truck stop and 400 car parking lot in connection with the proposed new bridge, while being touted as a boon to the local economy, in reality represents a massive step in the opposite direction in one of the most important historic park settings in the City of Buffalo.

As the Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy (Conservancy) consistently has maintained, the project will have a significant adverse effect on the west side of Buffalo and historic Front Park. Every visitor arriving into the United States and thousands of local residents of this densely developed historic neighborhood will feel, smell and hear the adverse impact.

Unfortunately, to date, the Buffalo and Fort Erie Public Bridge Authority (PBA) has failed to acknowledge ANY negative impact on Front Park. Here is what will happen if the current project proposal moves ahead:

- The historic parklands will be further isolated by a large paved parking area, populated by numerous idling diesel trucks. These trucks will continue to produce significant amounts of air pollution, exacerbating pollution in one of the nation's worst air quality regions.
- A significant portion of the historic neighborhood that provides the setting for the historic parklands will be demolished.
- The number of park users who can walk to the park and enjoy its amenities will be reduced.
- The project will block the views to the magnificent confluence of Lake Erie and the Niagara River. This vista was personally chosen by America's preeminent landscape architect, Frederick Law Olmsted, who strategically located Front Park to capture these views and fresh air for posterity. It is a grim irony that the Authority now advocates a massive parking ramp and truck stop and related concrete infrastructure at a waterfront vista that inspired Frederick Law Olmsted to design a park in this location, which he called "the lungs of the city."

Buffalo's Olmsted Parks have enjoyed a green renaissance through one of the most effective public/private partnerships in the nation. The Conservancy manages the 1200-acres of parks in partnership with the city of

Buffalo. The parks are a 19th century masterpiece of urban design and park/parkway planning and now constitute National Historic Register landmarks. The park system is acknowledged widely as one of Buffalo's greatest assets.

The interconnected parks and parkways are threaded throughout the city, touching almost every neighborhood. These beautifully manicured parklands greatly enhance Buffalo's present and future as a cultural tourism destination. With this green infrastructure, our region can provide a quality of life that continues to draw new knowledge-based businesses, creating new opportunities for our children to stay to live and work in Western New York. Sustainable economic growth based on a diversified and rich cultural heritage will generate true and long lasting benefits. These benefits will create an authentic quality of life for Buffalo's residents and visitors.

Front Park represents an opportunity to greet our many visitors from Canada with our best foot forward in an Olmsted landscape. Front Park is directly linked to the rest of the park system along Porter Avenue, an Olmsted-streetscape. Almost every major Buffalo cultural institution is in or along an Olmsted-designed landscape. Front Park and its original visitor center, Lakeview House, should be restored, not ignored.

The PBA and Federal Highway Administration have failed to provide any prudent and feasible alternatives to PBA's preferred design including avoidance and/or minimization, a mandate of the DEIS process. They have also failed to demonstrate that PBA's preferred design will avoid adverse impacts to important historic resources, , or that the proposal will mitigate adverse impacts to historic resources and the environment to the maximum extent practicable as required by law. At the same time, the PBA has failed to provide any credible evidence that a 400 car parking ramp and massive truck plaza on Buffalo's waterfront will have any material economic benefit to the local community. The National Trust for Historic Preservation and the Advisory Council for Historic Preservation both recently agreed with the Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy on the historic preservation issues and urged the Federal Highway Administration to re-examine the potential impacts on historic assets.

The Conservancy has been promoting the innovative solution of moving the plaza with its associated customs, immigration and duty-free land uses to the Canadian side. Many of the barriers to undertaking this potential solution have been overcome. The Conservancy is dismayed that the PBA and its principal backers have been unwilling to re-open this previously supported discussion.

The Conservancy has proposed many ways to minimize the adverse impacts if the project moves forward. The Conservancy's recommendation to depress the ramp that blocks the view of the water remains a key initiative. However, the Conservancy's list of proposed mitigation measures also includes: restoration of the historic park, visitor center and its views, and re-connecting the park to the surrounding neighborhood and the waterfront; air pollution controls through green roof technologies, underground parking (to minimize the impact of a 400 car parking ramp) and relocation of the duty-free retail operations off- site.

Buffalo and the Niagara Frontier now face a fundamental question about the type of place we want to be. Rather than reducing it to a concrete doormat, our international gateway should embrace our City and Region as a place of great historic, environmental, and cultural riches. Past transportation "enhancement" projects in Buffalo have left terrible scars on our community; highways have bisected and decimated our parks and historic neighborhoods and cut us off from our waterfront. Diesel trucks in densely populated

areas poison our air, block our views and threaten the health of our children. For these reasons, the Conservancy has opposed the current PBA proposal and has offered a myriad of alternatives throughout the regulatory process.

Summary of Conservancy's Comments and Recommendations

- Full restoration of Front Park: historic landscape patterns, circulation, and amenities
- Portions of the historic part of Front Park currently used by the Peace Bridge plaza should be returned to the Front Park "envelope." This includes portions of the historic Fort Porter, the Bank, and Sheridan Terrace areas.
- Enhancement of connection between Front Park and the surrounding neighborhood by the elimination of Baird Drive.
- Restore Porter Ave to its former grandeur as the waterfront connector of the Buffalo Olmsted Park and Parkway System by: eliminating commercial truck traffic, enhancement of Porter Ave streetscape, elimination of expressway on ramps east of the I-190 Bridge, and widening of the bridge for enhanced pedestrian connection to the Riverwalk and waterfront.
- The view of Lake Erie and the Niagara River should be restored by depressing the fly-over ramp connecting the plaza to the I-190 south.
- Elimination of Visitors Center, Duty-free Shop and Parking Ramp from reconstruction plan for Niagara St. This will save 30 residences and businesses from demolition and retain the urban character of Niagara St. and provide the community with an extensive vegetative buffer from the plaza.
- Reconstruction of the Lakeview House in Front Park as Visitors Center. Also reconstruct access from toll plaza.
- Relocation of parking structure to one underground level under the Peace Bridge Plaza.
- Relocate Hutchinson Chapel one block south on Busti Ave. diagonally across the intersection of Busti Ave. and Vermont St. from the entrance to Front Park.
- Green roof / Air pollution control covering secondary truck inspection area.

The Conservancy has never opposed the construction of a new international crossing. It stands, however, by its extensive record of mitigation demands with regard to the currently proposed PBA Bridge Expansion Project.