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Margaret Wooster for “Another Voice”

A Rare Opportunity

We have done some tremendous work on Buffalo’s Outer Harbor, delta of the Buffalo River, tributary to Niagara. By *we* I don’t just mean the 13 group members of Our Outer Harbor coalition like League of Women Voters, Western New York Environmental Alliance, Friends of Times Beach, and Partnership for the Public Good—or the several hundred more individual members. By *we* I mean *everybody* who has helped reclaim Buffalo’s lakeshore and water supply from almost total industrialization. We includes the city’s own Common Council members, county officials, state legislators and members of Congress. It includes all the caring folks who protected Tiff and Times Beach Nature Preserves from further dumping, and who resisted suburban-style housing and high-rise apartment towers on our increasingly beautiful but still vulnerable Lake Erie coast. In 1990 Brian Higgins, then Buffalo’s South District Councilman, published *From Rustbelt to Greenbelt*, perhaps the first tribute to Buffalo’s four-mile lakeshore as a place significant to the health and well-being of our people, our fish and wildlife, and our environment. Among other things it advocates for trees.

“Ambitious tree plantings throughout the waterfront should take place over the next several years so that when people start using it they will find shade and beauty. Trees . . . can serve to break down the force of the wind blowing in from the water. At this point the waterfront includes vast stretches of wild land which act in many ways as the lungs and liver of our city, providing us with oxygen and filtering our wastes and pollutants.” (37)

At the time, much of the land west of Fuhrmann Boulevard was owned by the Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority, a state agency that once ran the Port of Buffalo. In 2013 Governor Cuomo transferred this land to the Erie Canal Harbor Development Corporation to expedite redevelopment. ECHDC funding came largely from the Niagara power plant relicensing deal—funds designated to compensate Erie-Niagara waterfront communities for the negative impacts of the power plant diversion on river and lake ecosystems. Again, it was *we* the public and our representatives who fought for and secured these funds.

But the ECHDC has a different purpose and need for our waterfront, as they said repeatedly in response to the overwhelmingly negative public comments on their final General Project Plan (adopted in November 2021, before this solicited “public input” was even received). Their first major project—the publicly rejected 8,000-person amphitheater—began the week before Christmas with the bulldozing of five acres of coastal habitat and over 100 trees.

So here we are again, fighting for our lakeshore and all it supports—fish, birds, fresh air, clean water, natural buffer to increasingly powerful lake effect storms. Over 10,000 people have signed a petition - <http://chnng.it/J7V2P4czH9> - to designate this phenomenal asset a state park. As Friends *we* can bring our collective resources and Olmstedian legacy to the table.

It is a rare opportunity.