



95 Perry Street, 5th Floor
Buffalo, NY 14203
P: (716) 846-8200
F: (716) 846-8262
www.eriecanalharbor.com

For Immediate Release: January 9, 2011

Contact:

Erich Weyant (ECHDC) | eweyant@empire.state.ny.us | 716.846.8258

ECHDC MOVES FORWARD WITH PUBLIC CANALS AND CULTURAL MASTER PLAN
Public Canal System will transform the waterfront, creating jobs and public access; Cultural Master Plan establishes guiding principles for the development of cultural institutions at Canalside.

The Board of Directors of the Erie Canal Harbor Development Corporation (ECHDC) today voted to enter into a contract with DiPizio Construction Company, Inc., for the construction of historically aligned public canals at Canalside. This Aud Block development is providing the catalyst for private development, as is evidenced by the investment of \$30 million by the Benderson Development Company at the Donovan Office Building. The board also took action based on the findings of the Canalside Cultural Master Plan, issuing a Request for Proposals (RFP) for the selection of a museum operator for a children’s museum experience at Canalside.

“This is a historic day for Western New York,” said ECHDC Chair Jordan Levy. “We are done with talking and planning and we are moving forward with construction and development, which will generate jobs and tax revenue for our region. I have a simple message for our community: This is real, the work begins now, and by this time next year, we will have radically improved the waterfront, transforming it into a destination that honors our past, while laying the groundwork for our place in the 21st Century.”

“With this announcement, the future of Canalside starts today,” said Sam Hoyt, Empire State Development Regional President. “We are now well positioned to attract businesses that will grow, invest and create the jobs we need to kick-start our local economy.”

“The best destinations in the world incorporate unique, site-specific features and with this action Western New York embraces our history and creates an exciting destination like none other that is sure to draw visitors and economic development to the region,” said Congressman Higgins, who noted the project will be funded with proceeds made available through the New York Power Authority relicensing agreement settlement. “Through the continuation of our waterfront infrastructure investment we are creating real construction jobs today and setting the stage for private sector investment and job creation for decades to come.”

"These positive developments are good news for all County residents, and demonstrate the resiliency, determination and creativity our community is known for," said Erie County Executive Mark Poloncarz. "We look forward to collaborating with all partners to further the transformation of Canalside into both an economic engine and cultural attraction for our region."

"2012 will be another breakthrough year for Buffalo's waterfront, making the full vision of Canalside a reality," said Mayor Byron W. Brown, who noted that the announcement of the construction of the canals continues the positive momentum of Canalside created this summer by the great success of the expanded boardwalk, additional green space and increased entertainment. "Progress continues; we listened to residents and visitors, who made it clear that what they want is a connection to the water."

The public canals will be installed on the Aud Block and will interpret the alignment of the Erie Canal and Commercial Slip, which once crossed the site. The canals are designed to evoke the character and vibrancy of the historic Canal District, and to emphasize downtown Buffalo's connection to the waterfront. Hundreds of jobs will be generated by the construction of the canals, with permanent positions evolving once the work is completed.

On November 22, 2011 ECHDC advertised a "Request for Proposal for the Construction of Historically Aligned Canals and Public Canal Environments" in the New York State Contract Reporter. A total of six submissions were received on December 22, 2011. ECHDC, C&S Engineers, and LiRo Group conducted interviews with the lowest three bidders on December 28th, 29th and 30th and DiPizio Construction Company, Inc., of Cheektowaga was found to be the lowest responsible bidder. The contract amount will not exceed \$19,784,000 plus a 20% construction contingency for a total contract amount of \$23,740,800.

The canals are approximately 37,000 square feet and will include all the necessary equipment to maintain ice during the winter. Three bridges and 22,000 square feet of towpaths lining the canals will reinforce the pedestrian experience and allow for future development as Canalside grows. The new public space will provide a unique setting for four seasons programming, including ice skating during the winter, and special events and activities during spring, summer and fall.

The ECHDC board also took action today on the Canalside Cultural Master Plan, which was finalized under the direction of Maureen Hurley, who has chaired the Canalside Cultural Steering Group since 2007. Lord Cultural Resources and Ralph Applebaum Associates worked with the public volunteers who make up the steering group to develop a comprehensive plan based on the "Story of Buffalo." The plan provides a set of core principles for integrating cultural projects into Canalside, and identifies short-term and long-term opportunities for cultural attractions and events programming that will maximize the use of public spaces and attract visitors and commercial investment to Canalside. The Final Report was approved by the ECHDC board in November.

“The Cultural Master Plan is the culmination of years of hard work and collaboration between Western New York’s leading cultural institutions,” said Ms. Hurley. “With the completion of this plan, we are ready to take the next steps towards telling the ‘Story of Buffalo’ at Canalside, in the very place where Buffalo began.”

An unprecedented number of visitors came to Canalside during the summer of 2011. With more than 300 events over the course of a four-month period, Canalside attracted 400,000 people with a mix of general and “Story of Buffalo” programs. This resulted in over \$300,000 in grants being awarded to nearly 30 local cultural and arts organizations, including the start of the area’s first water taxi service, the Queen City Ferry. ECHDC has already issued an RFP for 2012 Assisted Programming at Canalside, and it is expected that the agency will increase the amount of programming, the number of visitors, and the level of collaboration with cultural institutions in 2012.

The next phase includes opportunities for cultural organizations to become tenants in the shovel-ready Erie Canal Harbor blocks and/or former Aud Block. This past September, in order to determine viable projects, ECHDC sent out an RFP for organizations, institutions and/or individuals with an interest in a long-term presence at Canalside. The Corporation received proposals from 25 groups, and the consultant team interviewed each as part of the Master Plan process.

The Master Plan recommends a children’s experience museum, a “Buffalo Fed America” theme for a public market, and a “Story of Buffalo Center” as the cultural attractions at Canalside. A copy of the final report is available [here](#) and a copy of Maureen Hurley’s presentation to the ECHDC board is available [here](#).

ECHDC took the first step towards the implementation of these recommendations today with the initiation of an RFP process for the selection of a museum operator for a children’s experience museum at Canalside. The selected operator will be required to fund and complete a museum master plan and capital campaign feasibility study. ECHDC will commit \$5 million towards the “core & shell” capital cost of the museum, with the museum operator being responsible for all fundraising, design, legal and/or administration, staffing, operating and exhibit costs.

Erie Canal Harbor Development Corporation is a subsidiary agency of Empire State Development Corporation whose vision is to revitalize Western New York’s waterfront and restore economic growth to Buffalo based on the region’s legacy of pride, urban significance and natural beauty.

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