

Outer harbor planning flawed from inception

The League of Women Voters of Buffalo/Niagara has maintained an active interest in the use and development of the region's waterfronts in Erie County for many years. A core value of the league is active citizen participation in government. Therefore, we are examining and monitoring closely those various governmental agencies that own or regulate the outer harbor properties, regarding future development on that site.

The Erie Canal Harbor Development Corp., a subsidiary of Empire State Development, has commissioned a study of the outer harbor to create a "blueprint" for future development.

The league regards the whole process as flawed, from its very inception. First, the request for proposals (RFP) was and is not readily available to the public, whether on the ECHDC website or in hard copy.

Second, the "public meetings" conducted by the consultants failed to engage the public in meaningful discussions, but divided the public into small groups where their views could not be shared with each other.

Third, the planning process has been hurried along as requested in the RFP, without regard for effective public engagement. The "public meetings" were held in July and August when many people were away from the area; the Sept. 9 summary meeting was held on Primary Day.

Fourth, the ECHDC has not acknowledged the need for required State Environmental Quality Review Act oversight. Environmental impact studies should be done in compliance with SEQR regulations, followed by public hearings.

The league supports viable public use and enjoyment of the outer harbor. Let the public participate fully in planning for the future of this unique community asset.

Joan T. Parks

President, LWVBN

Gladys Gifford

Chairwoman, Waterfront/

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