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\* salutations \*

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. As you may know, my architecture firm is based in downtown Buffalo, a locally-owned business with a body of work that is both local and global, with recognition in publications worldwide.

My colleagues and I, familiar both with Buffalo as well as with global trends in architecture and urbanism, have often felt that this city holds tremendous promise, if only a bit more creativity and strategic thinking could be applied to development here. To this end, in 2015, we created an internal urbanism think tank called 202020, with the goal of putting these ideas into practice through a series of detailed studies. Fortuitously, the first of these dealt specifically with the issue of our passenger rail station, and it is this work that we are pleased to present today.

Broadly speaking, Buffalo's rail stations have historically been located downtown, in proximity to today's Exchange Street, and since 1929, at the Buffalo Central Terminal. While conventional thinking would dictate keeping with the choices of the past, we sought instead to investigate analytically, dispassionately, and strategically, what our future goals in this area might be, and proceed from there, wherever the results might lead.

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We believe — and I think these should be fairly non-controversial — that the goals for Buffalo's rail station should be these four points:

- First, a station situated in the City of Buffalo
- Second, a location that has good highway connectivity, and has, or has the potential to have, equally good connectivity to public transportation including the NFTA Metro Rail
- Third, a location that can accommodate all Amtrak services, including long-distance service to Chicago, from a single station
- Fourth, a location that could support both long-distance intercity travel as well as the potential for future regional rail services

A quick glance at the map reveals that the rail lines to Chicago diverge from the line to Niagara Falls and Toronto between the Central Terminal and downtown, in direct proximity to the area that has evolved to become Larkinville. Only two locations — Larkinville and the Central Terminal — can offer nationwide rail service from a single location in the City of Buffalo. Of these, only Larkinville offers close proximity to highways and a realistic potential for connection to the NFTA Metro Rail service in the near term.

I'd like to take a moment to talk about highway access, which may not be the first thing on people's minds at this point, but which is actually quite critical. At the peak of this region's historical rail service, around 1940, Western New York was served not only by famous long-distance express trains like the Twentieth Century Limited, but also by dozens of local trains with service to cities and towns throughout the region.

Today's Amtrak service has stations only in the Buffalo area, Rochester and Niagara Falls. What this means is that passengers en route to Buffalo could have a final destination in downtown Buffalo, but their destination is equally likely to be Hamburg, Williamsville, Jamestown, Dunkirk, Chautauqua, or any number of other places. In most cases, their only realistic option for onward transportation is a private vehicle. What this means is that, although the highway network is in some ways a competing mode of transportation, it is also not only complementary but in fact essential to the viability of today's rail service, in a way that was simply not the case 75 years ago.

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In addition to the four points I named, I would like to articulate an additional goal that I suspect may set our point of view apart: We believe that the people of this city and state should seek to maximize the return on their investment in a passenger rail station.

How might they do that?

Amtrak's current schedule has only one arrival and departure occurring during business hours, with most traffic occurring in the early morning and late evening. This means that the public is asked to finance a structure that would in fact sit idle during much of the day. However, the Amtrak schedule is actually an opportunity: with the right intermodal services and facilities, we believe this structure could serve a complementary role as a commuter hub during business hours.

In this regard, Larkinville is somewhat unique. While downtown Buffalo has been the focus of the region's transportation infrastructure for its entire history, Larkinville, as a former industrial area now turned employment center, is the opposite: an area rapidly expanding as an employment hub, yet lacking much transportation infrastructure other than highways and parking.

Creating a station at this location, with a focus on intermodal services—not only buses, but taxis, bicycles, and eventually a light rail connection, with a modest one mile extension from the Cobblestone District — would set the stage for further growth in Larkinville, thereby increasing the City's tax base, supporting a growing business district, and creating precisely the opportunity for return on investment that might otherwise prove elusive.

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We believe our vision for a station at Larkinville is both efficient and inspiring. It requires no significant new infrastructure, relying instead on existing rail lines and streets. In fact by utilizing the existing Swan Street underpass and Seneca Street overpass, it wouldn't even require a pedestrian bridge over the tracks. The site we have identified can easily accommodate a sufficiently long train platform. Much of the land is owned by CSX, and no demolition or displacement of existing uses would be required.

Our proposal would situate the dedicated Amtrak facilities, including the drop-off area, ticketing and waiting area, and platform, on the west side of the tracks, in closest proximity to the highway ramps, so as to minimize local traffic. This would connect to a second space on the east side of the tracks that would be oriented primarily to people living in, working in, or visiting Larkinville. Bicycle facilities, including indoor parking, repair and bike share, would be complemented by an indoor bus waiting area with an off-street drop-off, a possible retail kiosk or cafe, and the potential for a future light rail platform, which would be aligned to continue to the airport one day.

All of this would be unified by a big lightweight roof, which would provide shelter from the weather to outdoor waiting areas, and create an iconic image for the station, perhaps recalling the soaring roofs that have for centuries been associated with railway stations throughout the world, and creating a new landmark for Buffalo.

The available space could easily accommodate additional tracks, should future service warrant it. However, because the location is so spacious, currently much of it is unused, forming a sort of urban prairie that floats over Swan Street, not unlike New York City's massively successful High Line. So the last component of our proposal is to develop this area as a community park, creating a much-needed resource in a part of the City lacking in green space, and connecting seamlessly with the success of Larkin Square.

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Although it's not a part of the proposal, I'd like to say a few words about the Buffalo Central Terminal. This magnificent structure had the misfortune to be built much too big and way too far. These facts unfortunately cannot be changed. The Central Terminal is poorly situated as a station, is difficult to access from existing highways, and would be significantly more challenging to connect to the Metro Rail system. At approximately half a million square feet, the complex is grossly overscaled for the contemporary needs of our rail service; indeed the distance from the main entry to the currently active tracks is nearly a quarter of a mile and would require a significant new structure to bridge actively used freight tracks.

Notwithstanding these shortcomings, rehabilitating the Central Terminal as a modern station would be a vastly expensive undertaking, significantly more so than any other option, and would still result in a structure with no viable means of supporting itself economically in the long term. Amtrak served the Central Terminal from its creation in 1971 until 1979, when it could no longer viably maintain such a large building. Since that time, the Central Terminal has not gotten any smaller, and Amtrak's service to Buffalo has not gotten significantly larger. Rather than re-making the mistakes of the past, I believe we instead need to learn from them to build strategically for the future. Indeed, relocating Amtrak back to the Central Terminal could well prolong its decay by preventing us from identifying a truly viable reuse.

However, I am not here to advocate for the abandonment or demolition of the Central Terminal, for I do believe it can be rehabilitated and play a role in the future of this city. Just as we are at last witnessing the rebirth of the Richardson Complex, not as a psychiatric center, but rather as a hotel, conference and cultural center, so the best use of the Central Terminal is almost certainly not as a train station, but perhaps as something else yet to be conceived. Although we are out of time and it's beyond the scope of today's discussion, my firm has also developed an alternative proposal with a different possibility for how the Central Terminal might best be reused, and we look forward to the opportunity to share these ideas with the community in the future.

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Some have asked whether our Larkinville proposal is meant to look like a paper plane. The truth is, I don't know. But I do know this: I believe, in my lifetime, we will see trains fly, across New York State, faster than they ever have. I believe this City is going to soar, again. And I believe nothing could be more appropriate than an iconic landmark that invests in the future and tells that story eloquently.

Thank you very much.