

## PUBLIC TESTIMONY, RAIL STATION SITE SELECTION HEARING

Jan. 19, 2017, Buffalo Common Council Chambers

Good day. My name is Mike Vogel. I am a retired journalist and Buffalo News editorial page editor, and the author of several books on local history, but I speak today as the citizen co-chair of the Canalside History Advisory Group.

I also speak in favor of a downtown location for the rail station that is the proposed replacement for a station that also is downtown, the damaged Exchange Street facility. Buffalo currently has a concentrated downtown core, and a welcoming Buffalo train station should be part of that core.

I do not speak for all local historians, but I believe almost anyone with a passion for this city's history would be comfortable with an urban site that is linked to Buffalo's role as a major railway hub, once the second busiest in the nation. That would apply to the 1929 Central Terminal, of course, but it also applies very directly to the Canalside area, which has a much longer railroad history.

The Black Rock Railroad was chartered in 1833, the year after the city got its charter, and ran horse-drawn carriages from the United States Hotel at Pearl Street and The Terrace to the ferry docks at what is now the foot of Ferry Street. That route also was used a few years later by a strap railroad, carriages drawn along wooden rails topped by an iron strap, and then by the Niagara Falls Railroad, another strap railroad that used steam locomotives to pull carloads of tourists from the port that is now Canalside all the way to Niagara Falls.

Railroads also powered the demise of the Canal District, as they siphoned trade from the canals and took over the freight docks of the Inner Harbor. In 1886, a day after the Buffalo Common Council denied a railroad request to lay tracks through Prime Street in what is now Canalside, the Delaware, Lackawanna & Western sent 200 men down there to work from 1:30 a.m. to dawn laying two tracks down the length of the street; when the councilmen awoke the next morning, there were 33 railroad cars and a locomotive parked in that street. The seizure made the New York Times and the Council was outraged, but it was a time when railroads were king and the tracks stayed.

A station located in the Canalside tourism and recreational zone could and should be designed to highlight these and other site-linked railroad heritage stories, as part of the overall effort to attract visitors to an already successful site and increase public pride in the rich historical narrative that is Buffalo. The enhancement and incorporation of that narrative in that location, of course, is my particular concern as a leader of the Canalside History Advisory Group, a largely citizen panel created by the Erie Harbor Development Corp. to do just that. The site also has advantages as a particularly welcoming location, in its direct connectivity with light rail, and in its proximity to sports venues and the downtown business and hotel district, but I will leave transportation issues to those with more expertise in that field. I would urge the selection panel, however, to consider the opportunity to make this facility more than just a train station, and make it also a showcase for Buffalo's railroad heritage.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak.