



OPPOSITION TO

A SENECA CASINO IN DOWNTOWN BUFFALO

The Buffalo Niagara Partnership opposes a Seneca casino anywhere within the Buffalo central business district and remains skeptical of the benefit of a second Seneca casino anywhere in Erie County.

The Buffalo Niagara Partnership previously expressed support for the casino compact between the Seneca Nation and New York State primarily as a vehicle to rebuild Niagara Falls (NY) as a tourism destination, and to generate resources to be used to fund priority economic development projects in the region. We attached specific caveats to that support and adopted a “wait and see” attitude toward a Buffalo casino.

Now that there is a plan to locate a second Seneca casino in the Buffalo Convention Center in downtown Buffalo, we express our staunch opposition to that specific proposal, and any other location for a Seneca casino in downtown Buffalo.

The Buffalo Niagara Partnership will not falter in its opposition to a Seneca casino in downtown Buffalo, and specifically in the Buffalo Convention Center, because:

- **The Seneca casino, as proposed, is incompatible with downtown Buffalo’s urban planning/design.** The streets that radiate from Niagara Square form a burgeoning corridor of government office buildings including City Hall, County Hall, and the Rath Building, and will soon be home to a new signature federal courthouse. Downtown Buffalo is also the region’s hub of commercial and banking activity. The function of a casino, and any unlikely, though potential, spin-off enterprises, are fundamentally incongruent with downtown’s existing central purpose, and the impacts on traffic flow and parking are a major concern of existing downtown employers.

A commitment should be made to maintaining – and improving – downtown, not to impairing it, as the proposed Seneca casino would. Government entities relocating from the Dulski Building should be encouraged to move into existing property in the government corridor, including the Statler Tower. And effort should be made to encourage development downtown (such as housing and retail) that has been proven elsewhere to complement and strengthen the urban core. The Seneca casino as proposed does not support, nor encourage, such investments.

- **The Seneca casino, as proposed, could lead to disinvestment downtown.** Major downtown employers – government and business – have expressed concern about the impact of a casino on the heart of the business district (i.e. traffic flow, parking, incompatible functions). If employers believe a casino will adversely affect their operations, Buffalo could lose existing *and potential* private and public sector investments and jobs – as well as related revenues from property taxes.

- **The Seneca casino, as proposed, will not create a tourism destination, and thus will fail to bring “out-of-town dollars” to Buffalo.** A “local casino,” as opposed to a “tourist casino,” is a drain on a region’s residents’ limited resources. Already, we have seen that the casino in Niagara Falls – in spite of its location in a major tourism destination – is mostly attracting a local audience. One result is that locals who attend the casino are simply redistributing their scarce disposable income – i.e. spending money at the casino instead of at other local venues. Considering Buffalo does not begin with a tourist base of 8 million people like Niagara Falls, this local audience will be even more prevalent, which raises additional serious concerns given the socioeconomic profile of Buffalo. A Seneca casino in Buffalo would be poor public policy.

Rather than encourage the development of a Seneca casino in downtown Buffalo as an economic catalyst, we believe community efforts and resources should continue to focus on **creating destination retail, neighborhood housing, and shovel-ready sites for major developments in the downtown.** The Partnership is involved in each of these efforts and believes that success in these areas will do much more for the true and long-lasting revitalization of downtown Buffalo.

Some alternative sites in Erie County have been mentioned for the Seneca casino, but at first blush, these also fail to meet the necessary criteria for Partnership support, including their inability to attract out-of-town dollars to the region, or serve as a springboard for other development. We will, however, give any site additional review should a specific plan for it emerge.

Further, beyond tourism development, our main support for the Seneca casino compact in 2001 was predicated on dedicating the local share of casino revenue to fund priority economic development projects. State officials have all but rejected such a plan. **If Seneca casinos and their revenues are not going to be a means to fostering new economic development, we must now question the fundamental value of the overall compact.**

This position statement only deals with the question of Seneca gaming under the current compact with New York State. Should New York State ever take the step to amend the constitution to allow for legalized gaming, we would reconsider casino site proposals at that time.