

SWBR, Fisher Associates and MRB Group submit winning design in Buffalo Skyway competition

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Buffalo, NY Governor Andrew Cuomo revealed that the “City of Lights: Re-View our Waterfront” proposal submitted by SWBR, Fisher Associates and MRB Group from Rochester, is the winner of the “Aim for the Sky” competition to re-imagine the Buffalo Skyway Corridor.

SWBR’s “City of Lights” design calls for taking what will remain of the Skyway bridge and transforming it into “SkyPark,” providing views and recreational amenities. It also calls for a lift bridge to be built at Michigan Ave. to connect to the Outer Harbor.

“It’ll be a really nice experience when you’re just up there walking and looking at the skyline or the water,” said SWBR landscape architect and urban planner Bill Price, RLA.

Nine finalist teams from across the U.S. pitched their ideas in front of a live audience and panel of judges as they competed for a \$100,000 award.

“The Buffalo waterfront has always been one of our state’s great assets, and by removing the existing Skyway we will lay the foundation for further transformation and growth in this community,” gov. Cuomo said. “This competition generated ideas and proposals from some of the nation’s greatest minds to redesign this obsolete corridor into a modern transportation network that reflects the exciting turnaround in Western New York and sends a message to the rest of the country that Buffalo is back.”

According to the governor, the project will utilize an expedited Environmental Impact Statement that

will be completed in under two years. Project construction will be completed in under three years. This expedited process will allow the entire project to be completed in under five years—four years faster than the process for typical projects of this nature.

“Skyway River Loop” by Marvel Architects of NYC with Barbara Campagna Architecture and Planning, and Preservation & Restoration took home \$50,000 for second place; and “Queen City Harbor: Bringing Buffalo to the Water’s Edge” by Christian Calleri, Jeannine Muller, Min Soo Kang, and Andrea De Carlo of Washington, D.C. took home \$25,000 for third place.

The winning idea proposes removing the Skyway and redistributing traffic over a series of new facilities. A piece of the Skyway high level bridge would be re-purposed as “Skyway Park,” which would provide iconic views and recreational amenities. The Buffalo Skyway Corridor competition challenged the nation’s top urban designers, economists, planners and architects to reimagine the corridor - stretching four miles from downtown to Lackawanna—while also building on the investment and momentum that has transformed the city over the past eight years.

This concept for Skyway and Rte. 5 Corridor is “actually quite simple; remove the barriers separating the City of Buffalo from its waterfront.” Removal of the Skyway (Church St. to Prime St.) along with the access ramps makes 12 acres available for development in downtown and Canalside. A piece of the Skyway high level bridge would be re-purposed as “SkyPark,” which would provide views and recreational amenities. Traffic would be redistributed over a series of new facilities including a new “Tiff St. Extension” road connecting to I-190; a new lift bridge at Michigan Ave.; and a new road connection between Ohio St. and Fuhrmann Blvd. south of the City Ship Canal; among other improvements.

The judging panel was chaired by Empire State Development chairman Howard Zensky, with eight panelists including Buffalo mayor Byron Brown, New York Secretary of State Rossana Rosado and local and national experts in the fields of architecture, design, urban planning and transportation.

Teams participating in the competition were challenged to share solutions that could be implemented with a degree of affordability, feasibility and technical achievability - taking anticipated traffic volume into account - and superior design quality. Empire State Development received more than 100 submissions during Part 1 of the Competition - which included “summary-level” submissions that were screened against the “affordable, feasible and achievable” criteria, resulting in the 20 teams that were invited to submit final presentation boards and proposals during part 2 of the competition. 16 of the 20 teams submitted final proposals, and that list was narrowed down to nine finalist teams that pitched their ideas to a review panel.

In February, governor Cuomo announced his plan for a national design competition to solicit the best ideas for a new vision for the current Skyway Corridor that would be completed in six months. The Skyway, a four-lane limited access expressway, extends four miles along the city’s Buffalo River and Lake Erie waterfront and carries roughly 40,000 trips per day of commuter traffic as part of the regional highway system. Completed in the 1950s, the Skyway was originally designed to connect workers and truck traffic from multiple large and small factory complexes and the Port of

Buffalo to the then-fledgling interstate highway system. Yet with the closings of the region's major steel plants in the 1980s and changing land uses along the corridor from heavy manufacturing to recreation, the Skyway now largely services daily commuter traffic from the Southtowns.

Mayor Brown said, "Congratulations to the talented firm selected to re-design the Skyway Corridor in downtown Buffalo. Among the creative designs submitted, this proposal stood out. I would like to thank Governor Andrew Cuomo for his continued commitment to the residents and businesses of Buffalo and Western New York as we continue to build our reputation as a city of opportunity for all people."

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