

# Developer chosen to remake old Aud site in project that helps reshape the Buffalo waterfront

**Mark Sommer**

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Plans unveiled Monday call for Pennrose, a Brooklyn developer, to build 367 residential units with two levels of underground parking at Canalside. Four buildings are planned on the site, which appear to be more because of their design and massing.

Erie Canal Harbor Development Corp.

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**C**analside already bustles with a boat house, ferry and boat tours, a carousel, a children's museum and an ice rink.

By the end of the decade, hundreds of people will live there, with a lot more options for fun and entertainment.



Buffalo waterfront projects gain traction

A Brooklyn developer was selected Monday to build hundreds of residences, along with commercial storefronts, where Memorial Auditorium once stood.

The groundbreaking is expected to occur in early 2025, with a phased construction expected to be completed in 2027, said Steven Ranalli, president of Erie Canal Harbor Development Corp.

"We want a truly organic feel to the place," Ranalli said. "We don't want it to feel like Disneyland, where everything is overly contrived. We are trying to re-create and bring back the feel of the Canal District, but without it feeling fake."



A view from street level of the planned development at Canalside, where Buffalo Memorial Auditorium once was. The projects calls for 367 residential units with two levels of underground parking. Five buildings are planned on the site.

Erie Canal Harbor Development Corp.

Pennrose, which specializes in affordable and mixed-income housing, was chosen for the area known as the North Aud Block over two other developers, including Douglas Development. The project calls for 367 residences, roughly half of them affordable units.

The height of two buildings across the replica canals from the Ralph C. Wilson Jr. Explore & More Children's Museum will be four to five stories. Two behind them, toward the Niagara Thruway and Seneca One tower, will stand 10 to 14 stories tall, and are expected to help block out noise from the traffic.

The block is bounded by Lower Terrace to the north, Main Street to the east, the canals to the south and Commercial and Pearl streets to the west.

Renderings that show the massing and design of the buildings make it appear as though more buildings are present.

An estimated 1,000 workers will be needed to build the \$160 million project, which will create an expected 122 full-time jobs.



Take an up-close look at some of the animals guests can ride on at the **Buffalo Heritage Carousel at Canalside**. The attraction is set to welcome it's 50,000th rider this week.

News staff photographer



Wanted: A developer to transform the hole in the ground at Canalside

Memorial Auditorium, a former concert venue and home of the Buffalo Sabres, closed in 1996 and was demolished in 2009.

"We are really excited that Pennrose maxed out the development," Ranalli said, referring to the number of residences planned, which surpassed the number suggested when the waterfront agency sent out its request in May for proposals for the nearly 2-acre site.

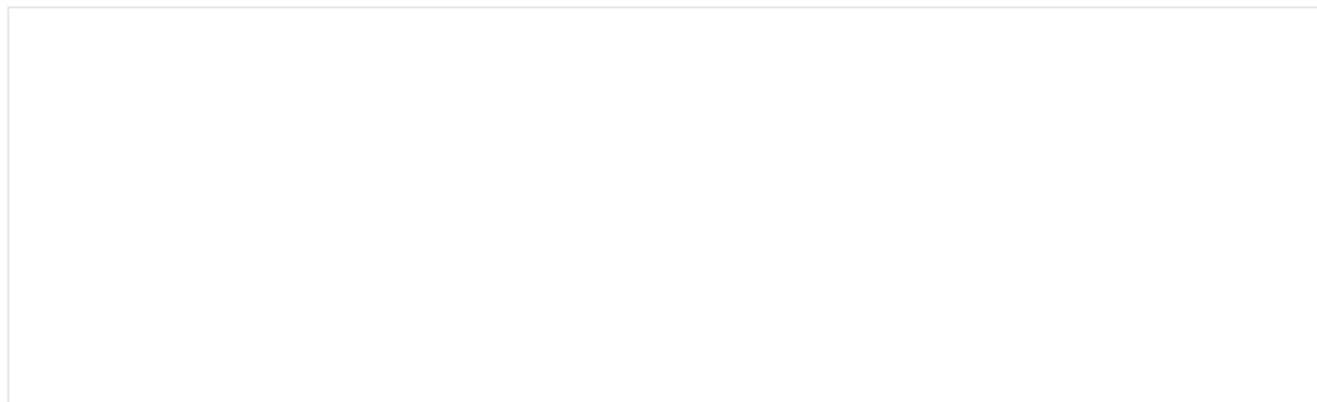
"As we work to transform the Buffalo waterfront, this vacant parcel, the last of the state-owned parcels at Canalside, will boost the economy and create new spaces where residents and visitors will want to live, work and play," Gov. Kathy Hochul said in a statement.

The project reestablishes the historic Lloyd and Commercial streets, and calls for the building of a pedestrian-friendly public piazza in a project that hopes to bring vibrancy to what is now a hole in the ground.

All 360 parking spaces will be on two levels of underground parking.

The Pennrose renderings present a more contemporary look than what had been proposed by Pleasant People, Happy Places, an architectural consultant from the Netherlands. The materials are stone, brick and glass, but Ranalli said the design will complement, not conflict with its surroundings.

"We are extremely excited about the development team," he said, "and even more excited that the long process for replacing Memorial Auditorium has finally come to fruition."





Coming soon to Canalside: Bathrooms and a visitors center

The development isn't beginning sooner, Ranalli said, because Pennrose's applications for affordable housing tax credits and other economic incentives will likely take them well into 2024 to confirm financing for the project.

**Pennrose** is teaming up with **MSquared**, a women-owned business out of New York City, and the **Westminster Economic Development Initiative** in Buffalo, which has operated the culturally diverse West Side Bazaar and will help fill out the first-floor commercial spaces.

The State of New York will spend \$10 million on developing the historic-looking streets and on public amenities.



A view of the planned development at Canalside, where Buffalo Memorial Auditorium once stood, as seen from the replica canals where ice skating is a popular winter activity. Plans unveiled Monday call for Penrose, a Brooklyn developer, to build 367 residential units with two levels of underground parking. Five buildings are planned on the site.

Erie Canal Harbor Development Corp.

The project also includes the already-announced four-story Gateway building, a brick masonry building with a stone base that will be in the site's southwest corner, with the Commercial Bridge to the east. Construction is expected to break ground in June, with an opening planned for January 2025. The building will house an information center, bathrooms, security office and Erie Canal Harbor Development Corp. offices and space for operations and maintenance.

### **Outer Harbor project languishes**

The selection of Penrose as developer comes as another waterfront project – this one to revive the Terminal A Building on the Outer Harbor for residences or other uses – failed to interest a developer.

Erie Canal Harbor Development Corp. had high hopes for Terminal A, the behemoth structure toward the southern end of the Outer Harbor, near where a new amphitheater is being built.

At Hochul's direction, the waterfront agency in December issued a request for proposals from experienced real estate developers interested in buying and developing the vacant 523,000-square-foot building at 901 Fuhrmann Blvd., along with three small adjacent buildings, all north of Buffalo Harbor State Park.



An attempt by Erie Canal Harbor Development Corp. to find a developer for the 523,000-square-foot Terminal A on Buffalo's Outer Harbor were unsuccessful.

Derek Gee/Buffalo News

The search process brought 15 interested parties from Toronto, New York City, Miami and Pittsburgh, as well as the Buffalo Niagara region, to walk through the building.

"We were surprised that, given the momentum we've had on the waterfront, we didn't, ultimately, get a proposal," Ranalli said. "We had enough interest that we had high hopes going into March that we would receive a proposal or two."

The agency plans to reach out to those who expressed interest to see whether they will share their reasons why they decided not to pursue development.



"What we want to find out from folks is how close were they to actually moving forward, and what some of the biggest issues are that we might be able to address in a different way moving forward," he said.

Some of the obstacles are known, Ranalli said: The property is huge, it is isolated, there are concerns about being there in the winter months, there are environmental issues and it is a local landmark, which could create additional challenges.

"We understand, or think we understand, some of the obvious negatives regarding the project site," Ranalli said. "At the same time, it's a magnificent site right on Lake Erie, the building is structurally sound and you could do just about anything with it. It also has a deep slip for marina space, so we know there are a lot of positives."

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