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February 13, 2020

Statler City / Convention Center

Press Release

Statement:

Erie County released its latest convention center study today. The finding proposed a new Convention Center to be located next to the Statler building. Statler City applauds the county's recognition of the important economic benefit of being in the convention business. The county showed a deep understanding of the Convention Center's economic impact, especially in considering the interests of all the small businesses, including restaurants, bars, and hotels, that have organically grown around the current Convention Center. The exact continuing relationship between the Statler building and any new or expanded Convention Center is yet to be determined. Statler City is excited about the possibilities a new or expanded Convention Center could bring, whether based on the plans presented by Mark Croce or on the alternative plan presented by the county.

Statler City looks forward to hearing the public comments on the proposal.

History of the Statler / Convention Center:



Aerial view of the Convention Center and Statler taken February 13, 2020

In 2009, a petition was filed seeking involuntary bankruptcy involving BSC Development Buf, LLC, then owner of the Statler. Morris L. Horwitz was appointed as Chapter 11 trustee and he retained Garry M. Graber as his attorney.

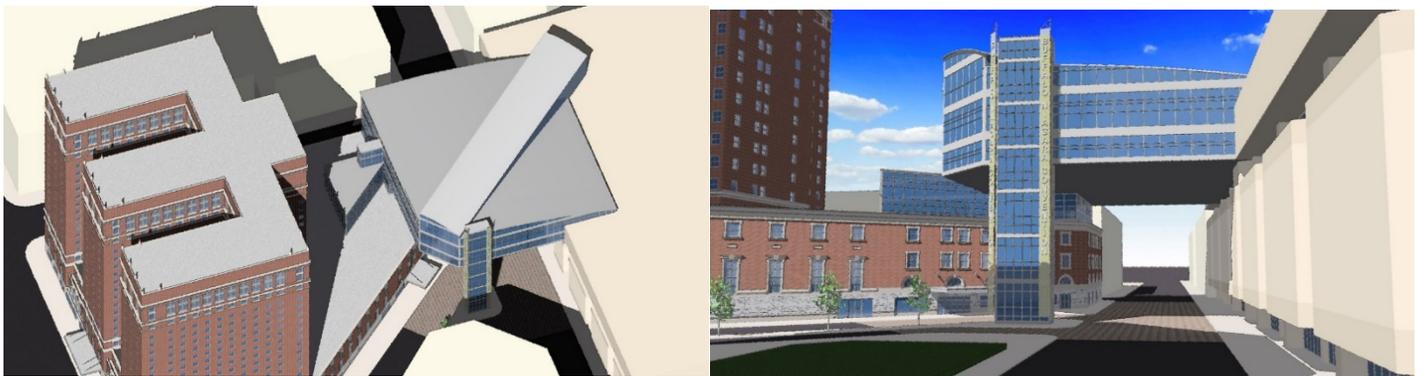
As he followed these events, the late Mark Croce realized that the fate of the Statler building would impact not only his nearby properties but a substantial portion of the center of the city and, indeed, the soul of Buffalo. He reluctantly stepped up to be, as he often referred to himself, a caretaker of the building pending potential future renovation.

When he finally gained control of the property it was on the verge of being swept up into the prior owner's international bankruptcy proceeding. If that happened, local control of the building would have been lost for an indefinite period. With the support and assistance of the City of Buffalo, bankruptcy trustee Morris Horwitz, and the trustee's attorney Garry Graber, Mark was able to obtain control of the building.

Through significant personal expense measured in both time and money Mark stabilized the building. He created a food and events company as well as an upscale bar to generate income to pay the bills. He rightsized the building so that it could live on while awaiting its future.

When Mark took over the building in March 2011, at great financial and personal risk, there was a City Court order not to enter. The building was barricaded and boarded. Leaking roofs caused ballroom floors to buckle, up to several feet in some places. Those in attendance at the ceremonial deed transfer may have been unaware, but those on the platform in front of the Grand Ballroom could hear the water dripping through the roof and onto the ballroom's historic wooden floors. The leaning parapet wall along the Mohawk, Franklin, and Genesee sides of the rear of the building presented a public danger and had to be completely reconstructed. Exterior terra cotta presented additional public dangers, and a significant inch-by-inch inspection of the façade was required, including removal and netting of the affected terra cotta. The City and State participated by making some matching funds available for work on the façade, the public-facing part of the historic structure. That work is ongoing but has been unfortunately stalled by Mark's untimely passing.

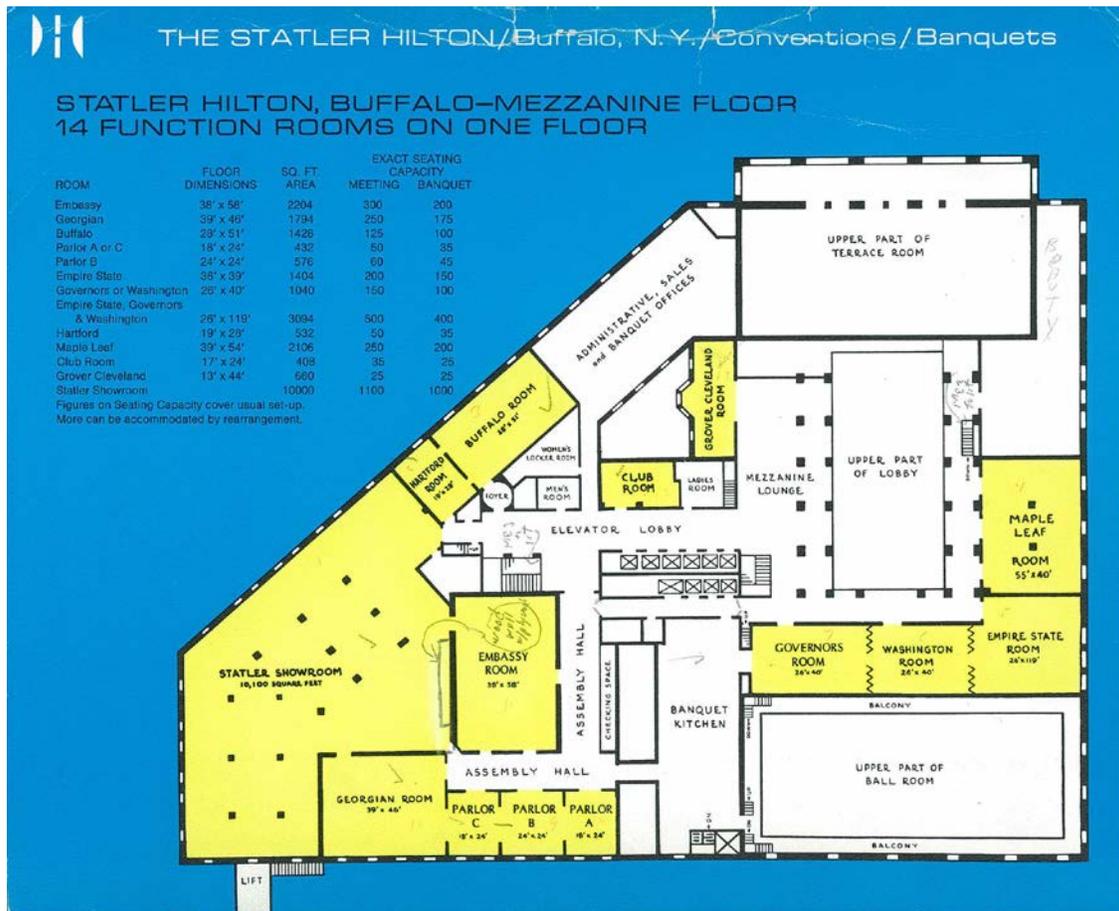
Mark presented a Rescue Rehabilitation and Adaptive Reuse Plan to convince the City and others to allow him the opportunity to preserve this building for future generations. As part of that plan Mark proposed physically connecting the existing Convention Center to the historic Statler. The Statler was, after all, born as a Convention Center hotel.



2010 Rescue Rehabilitation and Adaptive Reuse Plan renderings by Flynn Battaglia Architects, depicting an aerial view of the Convention Center (left) and a view facing north up Franklin Street (right)

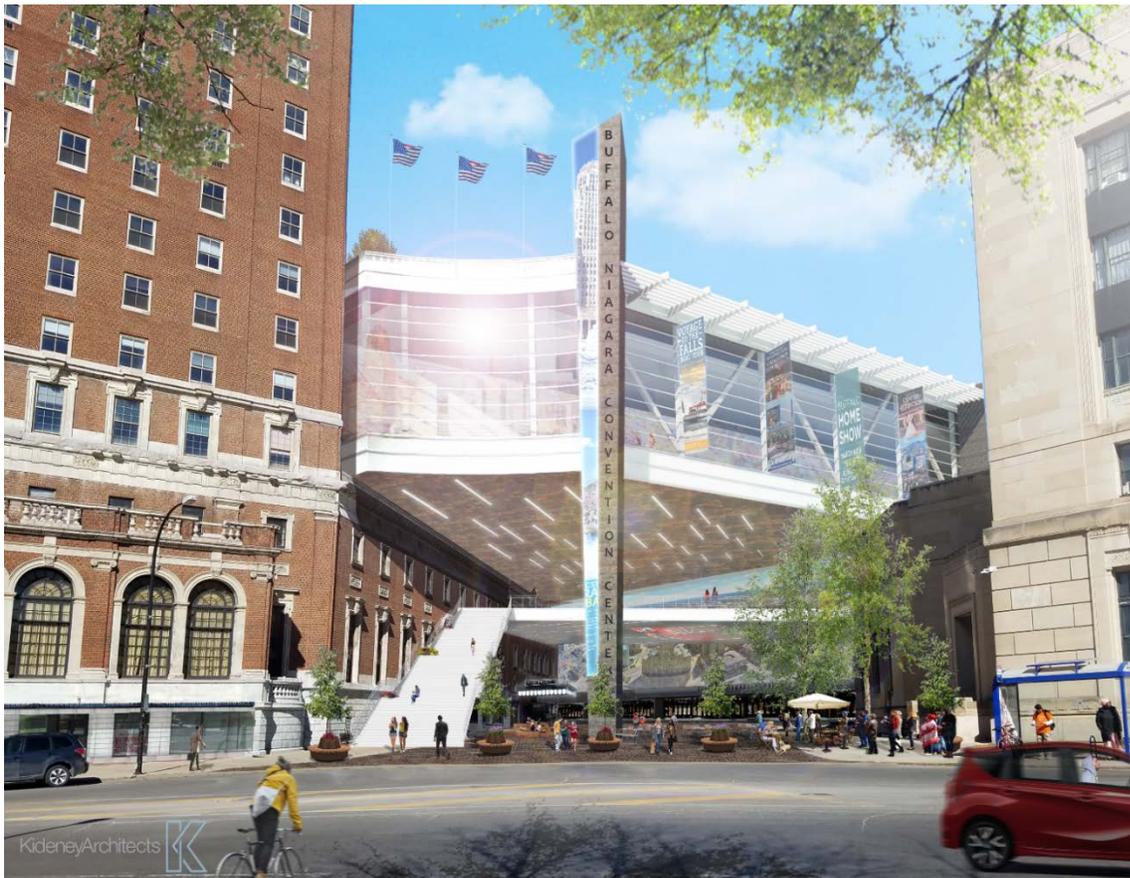


2010 Rescue Rehabilitation and Adaptive Reuse Plan rendering by Flynn Battaglia Architects, depicting the Convention Center from the intersection of Genesee Street and Niagara Square



Statler Hilton Convention Center Hotel Brochure, circa 1950s

Years later, when Erie County decided to consider in earnest the possibility of a new or expanded Convention Center, Mark presented an even bolder vision to the consultants which provided for an even greater public benefit.



2018 rendering by Kideney Architects P.C., submitted in connection with the Convention Center study, depicting the Convention Center from Niagara Square

The Statler already has magnificent ballrooms, open public spaces, meeting and breakout rooms, and kitchen and other necessary facilities in a historic setting.



*Interior photographs of the renovated Statler as it exists presently.
Clockwise from upper left: The Terrace Room, the Niagara Room,
the Golden Ballroom, and the Georgian Ballroom.
All rights reserved to the noted photographers.*

The connection would add to the marketability of the Convention Center as a mix of fresh new space for efficient modern convention logistics coupled with Buffalo's historic charm. The Towers could serve as a development site for a large-scale convention-style hotel expansion to meet the needs of convention planners.

Mark felt deeply that any public funds being spent should do more than just create a space for out-of-town visitors to gather while they are here. During any 7-day week, four of those days are “down days” while the Center is loaded and unloaded. Mark felt that there should be a significant public benefit resulting from the expenditure of public money. He therefore included in his plan a large-scale, publicly accessible urban park and gathering space.



2018 rendering by Kideney Architects P.C., submitted in connection with the Convention Center study, depicting the Convention Center as viewed from the Liberty Building at \ Court Street and Pearl Street

Placing a brand-new convention hall across the back of the Statler and over the top of the existing Convention Center, with significant open spans and high ceilings as needed for certain events, would simultaneously create a covered area along Franklin Street to allow attendees to get into and out of their vehicles while protected from falling snow or rain, while also creating additional space.

The historic building has an unknown yet exciting future ahead as the community contemplates its fate.