



Buffalo Convention Center
Annual Members Meeting
Wednesday, February 27, 2025
Zoom Video Conference

PRESENT: C. Abbott-Letro, M. Alnutt, M. Brown, T. Beauford, D. Castle, A. Chase, M. Chiazza, M. Glasgow, P. Kaler, T. Long, K. Minkel, S. Ranalli, M. Roberts, D. Schutte, D. Spasiano, M. Urbanczyk

ABSENT: D. Gallagher, B. Karmazyn W. Paladino

STAFF: J. Bialek, J. Calkins, K. Fashana, J. Flood, D. Marzo, L. Mueller, H. Nowakowski, R. Toney

GUEST: D. Lorenz

CALL TO ORDER: The annual members meeting was called to order by Board Chair, Cindy Abbott-Letro at 3:04 PM. Before officially beginning the meeting, Dave Lorenz from MMGY Next Factor provided an overview of the strategic plans for both Visit Buffalo Niagara and the Buffalo Convention Center. These plans were developed with input from board members, staff, and community partners to serve as a guiding framework for the next three years.

STRATEGIC PLAN:

Visit Buffalo Niagara Strategic Plan: Mr. Lorenz began by introducing the purpose statement for VBN: "We champion America's greatest reimagined destination." He explained that this statement reflects the organization's role in telling the story of Buffalo's transformation and creating a sense of pride in the community.

The VBN strategic plan is built around four key pillars. The Destination Marketing section focuses on strengthening the region's brand identity. This includes launching a new destination brand strategy, building seasonal campaigns to boost off-peak visitation, and promoting lifestyle experiences like the "Freedom's Footsteps" heritage trail. The plan also highlights the importance of drawing attention to winter tourism and cultural events as a way to support the hospitality community year-round.

In Destination Sales, VBN aims to increase its presence at trade shows, host more familiarization tours, and target key international markets like Canada, the UK, and Germany. Mr. Lorenz emphasized the value of building partnerships with niche travel associations like the African American Travel Conference to bring more diverse audiences to Buffalo.

The Destination Development section outlines VBN's role in advocating for hotel development, expanding flight service at the airport, and supporting the region's growing cruise tourism opportunities.

VBN will also work with partners to enhance heritage tourism offerings and develop more immersive visitor experiences.

Finally, Organizational Excellence is a key priority. VBN plans to engage more with community stakeholders, create workforce training programs like the Certified Tourism Ambassador initiative, and explore new ways to use AI technology to personalize visitor interactions.

Buffalo Convention Center Strategic Plan: The strategic plan for the Buffalo Convention Center is guided by the purpose statement: "To inspire connection through unparalleled hospitality, collaborative partnerships, and exceptional experiences." Lorenz explained that while there is a long-term vision for a new facility, the current plan is focused on maximizing the existing building's potential.

The Facility Investments section highlights immediate improvements like modernizing kitchen equipment, upgrading AV systems, and developing a comprehensive capital improvement plan. The center will also explore renewable energy options like solar panels to make the building more sustainable.

For Sales and Marketing, the convention center will introduce a dynamic pricing model to attract more off-season business and develop a client loyalty program to encourage repeat bookings. These efforts will be coordinated with VBN's broader marketing campaigns.

Stakeholder Engagement is another critical component. The convention center will strengthen relationships with local government, community organizations, and vendors to ensure the facility is integrated into the broader economic development strategy.

Finally, the Organizational Excellence section includes investing in staff training, implementing a centralized CRM system, and partnering with minority-owned businesses to support a more inclusive local economy.

ELECTION OF DIRECTORS: Mr. Kaler reported that Don Spasiano will be terming off the Board. The Executive Committee is recommending Shannon Patch, Vice President, Government Affairs, with Delaware North to fill the open seat. And with the passing of Gail Wells, the Executive Committee is recommending Terry Alford, Executive Director of the Michigan Street African American Heritage Corridor to fill the open seat. Ms. Abbott-Letro presented the slate of directors proposed by the Executive Committee and asked for a motion to elect the slate for 2025:

Representatives of the Hotel Industry:

Matt Chiazza
Thomas Long
Bob Karmazyn

At-Large Directors

Terry Alford
Kimberley A. Minkel
Shannon Patch
Steven P. Ranalli
David Schutte
Michelle Urbanczyk

A motion was made by D. Spasiano and seconded by D. Castle to elect the slate of directors as presented for 2025. Motion carried.

ADJOURNMENT: A motion was made by Mr. Beauford and seconded by Ms. Urbanczyk to adjourn the annual members meeting. Motion carried and meeting adjourned at 3:27 p.m.

Minutes prepared by J. Bialek

Approved: /s/ Cindy Abbott-Letro
Cindy Abbott-Letro, Chair



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GUEST: D. Lorenz

CALL TO ORDER: Board Chair, Cindy Abbott-Letro, convened the meeting of the Buffalo Convention Center Board of Directors at 3:28 p.m.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: A motion was made by Mr. Ranalli and seconded by Mr. Alnutt to approve the November minutes as presented. Motion carried.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS: Ms. Cindy Abbott-Letro presented the slate of officers proposed by the Executive Committee and asked for a motion to elect the slate for 2025:

Chair – Cindy Abbott-Letro
Vice Chair – Kimberley A. Minkel
Treasurer – Thomas Long
Secretary – Thomas Beauford, Jr.
Immediate Past Chair – Mary F. Roberts

A motion was made by Mr. Spasiano and seconded by Ms. Urbanczyk to elect the 2025 slate of officers as presented. Motion carried.

FINANCIAL REPORT: Mr. Calkins presented the financial report for Q4 2024, highlighting that the fourth quarter was the strongest quarter of the year for the Buffalo Convention Center. Revenues for the quarter exceeded projections by approximately 40%, driven by several high-performing events including the World's Largest Disco and multiple large-scale galas.

Overall, attendance remained stable, and nearly every event held during the quarter exceeded its own revenue expectations. Food and beverage revenue was particularly strong, resulting in a 10% increase in profit margins compared to the prior year. The positive Q4 results position the Convention Center to carry strong momentum into 2025.

A motion was made by Mr. Spasiano and seconded by Mr. Ranalli to approve the Q4 financial report as presented. Motion carried.

2025 BUDGET: Ms. Flood reviewed the 2025 operating budget for the Convention Center. The budget was reviewed with the Finance Committee and approved prior to today's meeting.

The budget was developed using historical data from the past five years, with a conservative approach to both revenue projections and expenses to reflect current market conditions.

Revenue projections include a 2% increase in sales over the 2024 budget, despite the Convention Center significantly exceeding budgeted income in 2024. While the sales pipeline remains strong, with 65% of projected revenue from definite events and an additional 25-30% in the pipeline, the conservative increase was applied to ensure realistic expectations. The Erie County grant was budgeted at a slightly lower amount than the prior year, in anticipation of gradual reductions in future funding.

On the expense side, staffing costs were budgeted with a 3% increase in salaries and health benefits, consistent with prior years. The budget also reflects ongoing efforts to manage operating expenses in line with historical trends. A significant increase is reflected in the equipment expense category to support the planned replacement of the outdated point-of-sale system, a critical upgrade to improve operational efficiency and guest experience.

No additional capital improvements are planned outside of those already approved and funded by Erie County.

A motion was made by Mr. Beauford and seconded by Ms. Minkel to approve the 2025 budget as presented. Motion carried.

STRATEGIC PLAN: The Strategic Plan for the Buffalo Convention Center was reviewed at the beginning of the meeting.

A motion was made by Mr. Alnutt and seconded by Mr. Chase to approve the Strategic Plan as presented. Motion carried.

2025 BUSINESS PLAN: Mr. Kaler presented the 2025 Business Plan for the Buffalo Convention Center, outlining six key goals with corresponding initiatives and strategies to guide the Center's operations in the upcoming year.

The first goal is to increase revenue and market share, with a target of achieving \$5 million in total earned revenue and a 10% increase in repeat bookings. The Center will also seek to secure five long-term partnerships with corporations or associations to generate ongoing business.

To enhance operations and client satisfaction, the Center will continue its commitment to high-quality food and service, maintaining consistently high satisfaction ratings. The implementation of the Momentus CRM system across all departments will improve efficiency and client communication.

Facility maintenance and sustainability will remain a priority, with a focus on keeping the building at the highest standard of cleanliness and functionality. The Center will explore sustainable practices, including the potential installation of solar panels through Erie County's green initiatives.

Efforts to elevate event services and the client experience will include developing customized menus and service packages to meet the needs of different event types, upgrading audio-visual technology with modern TV screens and plug-and-play systems, and aligning hospitality training with VBN's new Certified Tourism Ambassador program.

Under marketing and sales expansion, the Center will continue increasing brand awareness, strengthen its digital presence, and build a robust sales pipeline for 2025 and 2026. The team will explore the creation of a client referral program to encourage repeat business.

The final goal is to achieve financial growth and stability by diversifying revenue streams, developing a strategy to increase revenue annually by a minimum of 5% year-over-year, and supporting local and minority-owned businesses. The Center will seek partnerships with local farmers, purveyors, and vendors to strengthen the regional economy while promoting sustainability and corporate responsibility.

A motion was made by Mr. Spasiano and seconded by Ms. Minkel to approve the 2025 business plan as presented. Motion carried.

Q4 REPORT Mr. Calkins reported that Q4 2024 was the strongest quarter of the year, with overall revenue exceeding both 2023 and 2019 operational performance levels. The Convention Center is seeing steady growth, with event numbers returning to pre-2019 levels.

High-performing events such as the World's Largest Disco, multiple galas, and other signature events drove the quarter's success, with many events exceeding their own revenue projections. Food and beverage revenue also continued to perform strongly, contributing to the positive financial results.

The sales team maintained a robust pipeline despite temporary staffing challenges and transitions. While the number of sales calls temporarily dipped due to staff changes, the team is focused on rebuilding momentum and capitalizing on new business opportunities, with numerous leads in the pipeline.

Looking ahead, 2025 is expected to be another strong year, with a solid calendar of returning events, including the Auto Show and the Northeast Winterfest, which is anticipating additional growth. The New York State Bar Exam extended its agreement for another five years, while efforts are underway to backfill events like Motorama, which will be relocating out of the region.

UPCOMING PROJECTS: Mr. Calkins outlined several upcoming projects in partnership with Erie County to enhance the Convention Center's facilities and infrastructure.

Structural repairs to the soffits will begin in the spring, with the project expected to cost approximately \$1 million. Phase two of the IT infrastructure upgrade will replace cable and hardline ports throughout the building, following the successful installation of upgraded Wi-Fi in 2024.

A significant investment will be made to replace the outdated point-of-sale system, which is currently operating on Windows XP. Bids are being reviewed, with the goal of installing a modern system that improves efficiency and customer experience.

The County is also moving forward with the Pearl Street Streetscape project, which will transform the underutilized concrete area along Pearl Street into an inviting public space with lighting installations and landscape improvements.

Additional projects under discussion include a ballroom renovation with updated lighting, carpeting, and wall fixtures, as well as the potential installation of a solar-paneled roof as part of a microgrid upgrade. This project could make the Buffalo Convention Center one of the first convention centers in the country to be powered by solar energy, with the potential to sell excess power back to the grid.

A public art mural project is also in development, with funding already identified. The proposal will be submitted to the Erie County Legislature, with installation anticipated later this year.

OTHER BUSINESS/ADJOURNMENT: There being no further business, a motion was made by Mr. Spasiano and seconded by Mr. Castle to adjourn the meeting. Motion carried. Meeting adjourned at 3:58 p.m.

Minutes prepared by J. Bialek.

Approved: /s/ Cindy Abbott-Letro
Cindy Abbott-Letro Chair