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## 2. Achieving the Vision

### Other Major Proposals

A NUMBER OF LARGE-SCALE A number of large-scale proposals for sites located Downtown, or with relevance for Downtown, have been discussed in the course of plan development and reviewed over the past three years. These are large budget, long term, and in some cases, very controversial proposals that represent alternative ideas for the future of Downtown. They command public discussion and, done well, one or more of them could add significant value to Downtown. None, however, are essential to achieving the vision of The Queen City Hub. That will only occur through the sustained implementation of the capital program and related work scheduled in the plan.

#### *Casino Gambling*

The Seneca Nation of Indians has an agreement that allows them to develop casino gambling facilities in Downtown Buffalo. Opinion is divided on whether such a development would be good for Downtown specifically or Buffalo as a whole. In any event, plan reviewers believe a range of key issues need to be addressed and potential social and economic impacts carefully assessed before moving forward. We especially need to know whether a casino would provide net employment and revenue growth for the city, as well as what negative social impacts are likely to occur and how to minimize them.

Some reviewers of The Queen City Hub say that if a casino is developed it should respond to the following performance criteria:

1. Locate in Downtown Buffalo in order to take advantage of existing infrastructure, to reuse the stock of existing buildings, and create synergies with other visitor attractions.
2. Integrate with the City – physically through the careful design of entries and connections, programmatically through

- business arrangements – to make sure the economic benefits are widely shared locally.
3. Target tourists, not residents, to make sure the casino attracts outside revenues, avoids exploiting local players, and complements efforts to build convention and tourism business.
  4. Ensure revenue accrues to local government rather than the State – to pay for new infrastructure and services, to invest in Downtown redevelopment, to support tourism development and marketing, and to help provide for the general needs of the city and county.

### *Convention Center*

Planning for a new 400,000 square foot convention center with a 125,000 square foot main exhibit hall is now on hold due to uncertainty in the convention and meetings market, shifting public investment priorities, and community controversy over the necessity of a new facility. While the long-term need for investment in larger and more up-to-date convention space is clear to many, it is less certain where a new facility should go, how large it should be, or how it will impact other goals of this plan.

A key issue in location and design of any new convention facility is how a building with a very large footprint can be permeable to the public realm, add life to city streets, and provide economic benefits to nearby businesses. Sites near the Theatre District and Chippewa Street have been discussed at length. A site next to HSBC Arena has been offered as an alternative. Expansion of the current convention center, recently renovated, remains an option. Estimated costs for a new facility exceed \$120 million and could go higher depending on the cost of hotel accommodations in the package.

### *Light Rail Expansion*

Light Rail Expansion. Citizens and professional planners reviewing drafts of this plan have strongly endorsed proposals to extend the Metro Rail system. Among the possibilities studied by the Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority (NFTA) are links to the south towns, the Buffalo Niagara International Airport, the University at Buffalo Amherst Campus, and the Tonawandas. The 2025 Long Range Plan of the Greater Buffalo Niagara Regional Transportation Council calls for Metro Rail extensions to the airport as well as the