

Building in Buffalo will be done with new set of rules – finally

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Could a new steel plant be built on Buffalo's Outer Harbor?

No way.

That much is clear just a few weeks into implementation of the first phase of the city's Green Code, the telephone book-thick document that has been hailed a clearer road map for the development landscape.

"No, you are not going to see a steel plant or coke oven built on the Outer Harbor," said Brendan Mehaffy, executive director of the Buffalo Office of Strategic Planning and Mayor Byron Brown's economic development chief.

Crafting the Green Code was Mehaffy's project and it came at the urging of Brown.

It took Mehaffy and his staff more than six years and some 242 public meetings to create the Green Code, which covers what can or can't be built on all 94,000 properties and parcels in the city. They range from single-family homes and vacant lots to office and apartment buildings and factories.

He and five other panelists were part of a Feb. 28 discussion about the code that was presented by Business First and sponsored by Phillips Lytle.

Joining him on the panel were Jessie Fisher, Preservation Buffalo Niagara executive director; Michael Leydecker, Wendel associate principal; Dennis Penman, Ciminelli Real Estate Corp. executive vice president and principal; Sam Savarino, president of Savarino Cos.; and Adam Walters.

The discussion came just 11 days after the first phase became the city's new economic development law.

The next phase will begin April 3.

For Buffalo, the Green Code marks the first time since 1953 that the development guidelines were overhauled. To do so required lots of meetings, community input and perhaps the most extensive review in the city's history.



Buffalo's new Green Code covers what can or can't be built on all 94,000 properties and parcels in the city. (File photo by Jim Courtney)

“It was a massive undertaking,” Mehaffy said. “But at the end of the day we have a new set of rules and predictability for both the citizens and development community.”

The public is beginning to come to grips with the rules, he said.

The Green Code is coming online when area development continues at a record-breaking pace.

Last year alone, there was \$7.8 billion in projects in the city’s economic pipeline.

This year, the development boom continues.

At the Buffalo Planning Board meeting on Feb. 13, more than \$400 million in private sector-driven projects was approved.

And at the Feb. 27 meeting, another \$60 million in projects was approved.

“It took a very long time to get here but it couldn’t have come at a better time,” Walters said.

“Development is not a one-size-fits-all process. It never was and never will be.

“The (development) rules just got a heck of a lot cleaner today than they were just a few weeks ago,” he said.

Mehaffy was a private sector land-use attorney before joining the Brown administration in 2006.

He said that under the 1953 code, lawyers were able to challenge decisions and rulings that came from Buffalo agencies.

“The regulations were so outdated,” he said.

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