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October 11, 2012

Mr. James Comerford, Commissioner  
City of Buffalo Office of Permits and Inspections Services  
Buffalo City Hall  
Buffalo, New York 14202

**RE: Proposed demolition of Erie Freight House, Ohio Street**

Dear Commissioner Comerford:

Buffalo Niagara RIVERKEEPER has dedicated the last 22 years to the restoration and revitalization of the Buffalo River corridor. The recent focus and progress on Ohio Street is encouraging, especially as we continue the implementation of the community vision for revitalization of the corridor and the massive \$50 million investment in Buffalo River remediation and restoration.

RIVERKEEPER shares the broader community's vision for a revitalized waterfront that fosters economic growth while celebrating the region's cultural history and natural beauty. Regardless of the redevelopment scenario, the Erie Freight House site poses significant challenges to both the current developer and the preservation community. However, as RIVERKEEPER has learned through its collaborative efforts on the river clean-up, we believe that if the various parties work together a project could be achieved that will result in a revitalized section of the riverfront.

The Erie Freight House is the last historical connection and remnant of its kind related to the Buffalo River's role in the development of our Great Lakes city and region. Nearly a decade ago, RIVERKEEPER proactively engaged the previous owners, Great Lakes Paper Fibre (GLPF), in a dialogue about possible conversion of this property. We envisioned a transformation of the site from an industrial, non-water dependent use to one that would more actively support the emerging water-based community redevelopment. At that time, GLPF was not in a position to relocate from the Freight House property, and talks ceased.

Despite repeated calls from the preservation community for better protection of this important cultural resource, over the last few years the Erie Freight House was not properly maintained. When GLPF was ready to relocate and divest its property, RIVERKEEPER immediately moved to secure a preservation-friendly owner, who entered into a purchase contract with the owner and was waiting for GLPF to secure their new location prior to closing. At some point thereafter, GLPF chose to sell to a different purchaser who has since declined to preserve the building.

RIVERKEEPER is supportive of the preservation community's efforts to purchase and restore this unique riverfront property for a modern use. If additional resources and partners can be identified in the short term to preserve and protect the site from further decay, we encourage the current owner to negotiate reasonable terms upon which to transfer ownership. We would hope that the City would also work to encourage the developer to transfer ownership to an entity that can safely secure the property rather than grant a demolition permit.

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However, in the event that none of the aforementioned opportunities are able to be implemented, it is expected that the Office of Permits and Inspections Services would inform the developer of the *Coastal Overlay Zone* ordinance. RIVERKEEPER will work to ensure that any future redevelopment of this site follows this zoning ordinance, which requires that:

- The public's interests in the waterfront is protected by requiring public access to and along the river by means of a 25-100 foot new development setback; and
- The project includes shoreline restoration or ecological enhancement wherever possible.

If you would like to discuss this matter further or if we can be of any assistance to you on this matter, please contact me directly at 852-7483 ext. 21, or email [jedlicka@bnriverkeeper.org](mailto:jedlicka@bnriverkeeper.org).

Sincerely,



Jill Jedlicka  
Executive Director

cc: Brendan Mehaffey, Executive Director, Office of Strategic Planning  
Nadine Merrero, Director of Environmental Affairs  
Sam Savarino, Savarino Development  
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