

(always welcome!) are small and infrequent. Important growth in revenue in recent years has come from amateur sports.

But there's more.

One of the proposed sites is next to Pegulaville, and the Pegulas have voiced a desire to have a new convention center next to their sports, hotel, working, and beer, donut, and fried-food complex.

The argument is that Buffalo can't be "competitive" without a new, bigger place, and that such a place should be next to the new icons of our Renaissance.

A handful of huge destinations—New York City, Las Vegas, Orlando, Chicago, Los Angeles, and some amenity-rich places like Washington DC, Toronto, Montreal, Nashville, and San Francisco—get the big meetings. That's where the actual conventions go, leaving medium-sized cities like Buffalo to scrape along with regional meetings of medical associations, statewide teachers' unions, boat and car and home-repair shows, and a few bargain-hunting small-time affinity groups that can't afford the Javits Center, McCormick Place, or the immense behavioral and bacteriological risks posed by Las Vegas professionals.

So when the guy from the Buffalo-area automobile dealers' association says that he wishes he had more space to show his cars during the annual two-week Auto Show, he's saying that he wants Erie County taxpayers to take 100 years' worth of all the money we currently invest in the Zoo, the Philharmonic, the Science Museum, the Botanical Gardens, 19 theaters and about 50 other cultural organizations that the County funds annually to make life here nice.

Or we could just get the State of New York to buy him a virtual-reality headset for each of his hot prospects.

Or we could pop some popcorn, and sit back, and wait for the usual rent-seekers (the economist term for people who bribe politicians in order to get public money) to trot out their fantastic promises, and then order drinks as the usual bobble-heads from academia and the private sector agree that Buffalo can only be "competitive" if we have a new convention center.

Last fact: In 1996, two economists from the University of Pennsylvania predicted that Erie County's population would be 909,000 in 2020. The Census estimates that Erie County's population will be 925,000 in 2020. The Penn. economists in 1996 didn't estimate that approximately 20,000 refugees would accumulate in Buffalo over the past two decades; otherwise, their estimate of our population was spot-on.

In all that time, we had a convention center. Our population in 1980, a couple of years after the convention center opened, was 1.01 million. In 2000, it was 949,494. It would seem that the existence or non-existence of the convention center would mean about the same.

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