

## Canal symposium imagines new downtown waterfront

By H. Rose Schneider

ALBANY — What would a canal connecting downtown to the Hudson River look like in the city of Albany? That’s something panelists discussed Saturday at the second annual Albany Canal Symposium.

The symposium was hosted at the New York State Museum by The Albany Waterway, a nonprofit looking to create a waterway along Broadway stemming from the Hudson River — reminiscent of the former Lock 1 that connected the Erie Canal and the Hudson River in Albany in the 1800s. Around 200 people packed the museum’s Huxley Theater, including Mayor Kathy Sheehan and Albany County Comptroller Susan Rizzo.

The idea goes back to the 1990s. Artist Len Tantillo pitched creating a boat basin along Broadway, and the idea has been floated as a means of replacing Interstate 787.

“Aesthetically, it isn’t such a great place,” Tantillo said of the proposed area downtown, before putting up an image of the city’s Central Warehouse on a screen. “This part of the city can be transformed into this ...”

He then showed an image of a repaired Central Warehouse, with extra floors built onto it, overlooking a marina along a canal basin.

Tantillo, whose work focuses on historical and maritime art, was one of the panelists Saturday, along with former state senator and Buffalo Mayor Anthony Masiello, former Providence Foundation Executive Director Ken Orenstein, and academics Denis Foley and F. Andrew Wolfe. The panel was moderated by author and Times Union

columnist Paul Grondahl. Tantillo, Foley, Wolfe and Grondahl also serve on The Albany Waterway’s board of directors.

Dan Rubinstein, a writer who traveled 1,300 miles of canals and other waterways in Canada and New York, spoke after the panel discussion.

Masiello and Orenstein focused on modern restoration of waterways. Masiello discussed the state-backed project in the 2000s to restore Buffalo’s waterfront to something reminiscent of its own history on the Erie Canal, and Orenstein described the relocation of the Providence River in Rhode Island to create a new downtown waterfront from the late 1980s through the 2000s.

Foley and Wolfe walked through their uncovering of where Albany’s canal locks once stood, using maps to determine locations before digging up the old structures. At one point, Foley gestured to an old image of Lock 1, with a bridge over the waterway, looking out to the Hudson River.



“Imagine this whole area with beautiful tables, chairs, restaurants,” he said.

“This is a doable thing.”