

I recently read an article in the *Boston Globe* (Neyfakh, L. How Boston City Hall was born. February 12, 2012) that succinctly described Boston's conditions about fifty years ago: "Until the 1950s, it had been a city 'dying on the vine,' as *US News & World Report* put it, and the situation had improved only marginally when [Mayor] Collins took office in 1960. Economically stagnant, notoriously in thrall to political corruption, the city had seen little development for decades. As business owners decamped and residents fled to the suburbs, a fear took hold that Boston would soon be hollowed out for good." Although Boston still has its problems today, it is by and large, a thriving metropolis. What happened that changed Boston from a city "dying on the vine" to the city it is today? The question of why some cities thrive while others decline is a question that has intrigued me for a decade. It is no doubt a very complicated question with many different economic, social, urban design, and political variables. I firmly believe, however, that planners can help steer a city in the direction of success rather than decline.

My decision to move to Buffalo (from my hometown of Boston) to study urban planning at the University at Buffalo stemmed directly from my interest in Buffalo as a case study for a city that declined rather than thrived. A city that experienced declining effects around the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century seemed to me to be the perfect place to understand this burning question and to be challenged by how to plan for its reversal.

I was quite familiar with Buffalo. My husband grew up here, so I had visited many times prior to my applying to school. He is extremely passionate about his hometown (as many Buffalonians are) and would go through waves of encouragement and disappointment (as many Buffalonians do) in regards to the city's burgeoning development projects or poor decision-making. His passion perked my interest in Buffalo as well. This is important because if it had not

been for his connection to this city, I likely would never have thought about Buffalo in any great detail.

There are several Western New York issues that are intriguing to me – ones I am particularly interested in as fields of study at UB and ones I wish to pursue after graduation. The first is to strengthen the city of Buffalo as the commercial and entertainment hub of the region; and a vibrant community for residents to live. Buffalo has the infrastructure, the natural and built environment, and talented individuals to achieve this. I believe it is of the utmost importance to strengthen the core of this region. For example, in one of my classes this semester, I am researching the feasibility of land banking in Buffalo to reduce blight and encourage infill development. Another strategy I would like to see expanded upon is harnessing the revitalization power of arts, culture and history - a field I worked in for five years prior to moving to Buffalo. I have seen this strategy work in places with far fewer resources than Buffalo. I admire organizations like the Erie Canal Harbor Development Corporation and Buffalo Place that have integrated arts and culture into their plans as economic and community development strategies.

The second is the flipside, to reduce the negative effects of sprawling development in Western New York. For example, I am particularly interested in the Erie-Niagara Framework for Regional Growth. Its strategies to steer development in ways that are financially and environmentally sustainable are important and in fact, if not implemented, will have detrimental and likely irreversible effects of the area. Growth management in this region is another area I am focusing my studies on at UB.

The third is to alleviate dependence on automobiles and to increase the use of alternate modes of transportation. Transportation goes hand-and-hand with strengthening the core and managing growth, but is a daunting ambition for a region with a shrinking population to support alternative transit. Buffalo is also challenged because it is plagued by the public's perception of

ill-conceived former transportation projects, and has an ingrained dependence on cars. I have become increasingly interested in more walkable and transit-oriented development in this region especially as the population ages. I am also currently a research assistant for Dr. Hess and through my research have learned much about the significant carless population in Western New York. This work has focused my attention on the transportation needs of this overlooked population.

Since moving to Buffalo and beginning my graduate career here seven months ago, it is clear to me that after graduation my husband and I would like to stay in Buffalo and raise our family here. My ambition is to work in the public sector because, through my past experience in this capacity, that is where I feel I can be the most effective in shaping the future of Western New York. I think my perspective as an “outsider” who by engaging in the community has begun to understand the challenges of this region is a strength for me as a planner. I am also deeply invested in the community because, through marriage, I have a network of family and friends here. What is most encouraging to me is that there are innovative and talented planners working toward the same goals that drive me as a planner. Working with these people and implementing innovative plans that already exist such as the Queen City Hub and the aforementioned Framework for Regional Growth is also something I look forward to as my career advances in Western New York.

I think this is an exciting time for Buffalo. There are already encouraging signs that with time, Buffalo can rewrite its story, just as Boston did. Reversing Buffalo’s economic decline or, more accurately, right-sizing and strengthening the region for the future is something I hope to contribute to in my professional career.

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## EDUCATION

**State University of New York at Buffalo, School of Architecture and Planning**  
Master's in Urban Planning (MUP)

Buffalo, NY  
projected May 2013

- Research Assistant - *Barriers to Resource Coordination for Multi-Modal Evacuation Planning*

**Boston College, College of Arts and Sciences**  
Bachelor of Arts Degree  
Major: Political Science, Minor: History

Chestnut Hill, MA  
May 2002

## EXPERIENCE

**Commonwealth of Massachusetts - Massachusetts Cultural Council (MCC)**  
*Program Coordinator, Cultural Facilities Fund (CFF)*

Boston, MA  
July 2009-August 2011

- Offered technical assistance to non-profit cultural organizations and municipalities interested in this capital grant program that since 2007 has invested \$37 million in the design, repair, renovation, and expansion of 185 cultural facilities in Massachusetts.
- Administered an application review process which included assessing application content, convening a review panel, and composing detailed written feedback to applicants.
- Improved the application process and revised program guidelines to reflect constituents' needs and to strengthen the overall portfolio of best practices.
- Collected data from the cultural sector through tools such as demand surveys in order to make the case for increased investment in the capital needs of cultural facilities.

*Program Coordinator, Adams Arts Program*

May 2006-August 2011

- Offered technical assistance to municipalities and non-profit organizations interested in this creative economy grant program that since 2005 has invested over \$7 million in 77 partnership projects that aid in the revitalization of communities, improve the viability of creative industries, and promote cultural tourism.
- Administered an application review process and revised program guidelines as described above for CFF.
- Analyzed biannual reports from grantees with focus on a project's financial statement and cash match requirement, its goals in relation to its short-term activities, and its economic and community impact evaluation.
- Designed and co-authored guidelines for the state-designated Cultural Districts Initiative launched May 2011.

**Massachusetts State Senate**

Boston, MA

*Legislative Aide, Office of Senator Marian Walsh*

Sept. 2002 - May 2006

- Served as a liaison for the Senator by communicating with constituents about legislation, community issues, and personal matters, e.g. job placement and mediation between other state and city agencies.
- Worked closely with the Senator to respond appropriately and in her constituents' best interests to various housing and commercial real estate development projects especially where a public process was involved.
- Researched complicated and controversial legislation such as same-sex marriage and healthcare reform, as well as the Senator's own legislative and budget priorities each session.
- Acted in an office managerial role for the staff of seven.

**Committee to Re-Elect Senator Marian Walsh**

Boston, MA

*Volunteer Campaign Manager*

Sept. 2002 - May 2006

- Designed a successful campaign strategy with political consultants.
- Planned fundraising events and receptions and maintained a database of nine hundred donors.
- Coordinated over two hundred campaign volunteers to assist in various capacities.

**Harvard Vanguard Medical Associates (HVMA)**

Boston, MA

*Patient Service Representative*

June 2002-August 2002  
May 2000-August 2000

- Reviewed, organized and updated information on all HVMA patients who entered the emergency room at the Brigham and Women's and Faulkner Hospitals.
- Contacted primary care physicians and specialists to discuss patients' emergency medical situations.