

The Richardson Olmsted Complex Master Plan

Community Vision: Issues, Goals, and Objectives

Prepared by the Community Advisory Group
With support from the Urban Design Project
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Overview

This report from the Community Advisory Group to the Richardson Center Corporation (RCC) is an overview of community involvement for the Master Plan to date. It is the first of three reports from the advisory group to the RCC. The subsequent reports will be summaries of Draft Plan Comments and Final Plan Comments. These reports are meant to inform ongoing RCC deliberations. This Community Vision report does not represent the overall issues, goals, and objectives of the Master Plan, but is meant to inform the Master Plan team of community values. This report includes a description of the Community Advisory Group (CAG) as well as a summary of the open public meeting hosted by the CAG on August 12, 2008. This initial community vision for the Master Plan and the rehabilitation of the Richardson Olmsted Complex was developed through regular Community Advisory Group meetings, communication with advisory group constituencies, and from feedback from the large public meetings.

The final Community Advisory Group work plan is included with this report as well as each Community Advisory Group meeting summary. The final complete summary of the public meeting is also included. These supplemental documents contain more detailed and extensive Community Advisory Group and public comments, including comments regarding initial concepts from the Master Plan.

Community Involvement Process

Community involvement is vital to the success of the rehabilitation of the Richardson Olmsted Complex. The RCC provides many avenues for community involvement through the planning process. Open public meetings as well as numerous interviews and small meetings have been associated with each aspect of the process. The community had the opportunity to review numerous reports and studies including the 2007 Urban Land Institute Study, the Historic Structures Report, and the Historic Landscape Report. The RCC website provides archived documents and reports, information about the complex and its rehabilitation efforts, and is a forum for public comments and feedback.

In April 2008, the Master Plan consulting team, headed by Chan Krieger Sieniewicz, was formally introduced to the public. The team is charged with continuing and expanding opportunities for community involvement throughout the year-long master planning process, scheduled to be complete in April 2009. As part of the Master Plan team, the Urban Design Project, a center for research, teaching, and community service in the School of Architecture and

Planning at the University at Buffalo is responsible for organizing and supporting ongoing community involvement opportunities. To date, this work has included the establishment and facilitation of the Community Advisory Group, and the facilitation of public meetings.

Overview of the Community Advisory Group

The Community Advisory Group includes representatives from neighboring cultural institutions, the Buffalo Psychiatric Center, community business organizations, neighborhood groups, a Buffalo State College student, historic preservation groups, and city planners. In May 2008, the RCC Board invited community representatives to join the group. Potential representatives were selected from lists of people from past Urban Land Institute studies and interviews and attendees of previous public meetings. Additional representatives were added based upon recommendations from the Community Advisory Group.

The mission of the Community Advisory Group is to ensure broad community engagement in the Master Plan process as well as to encourage potential partner understanding, support, and commitment to the proposed project. Specific CAG responsibilities include:

1. Advising the RCC regarding community values related to the Richardson Olmsted Complex Master Plan.
2. Facilitating the process of broad public engagement throughout the planning process. This includes convening of the three large public meetings, routine Community Advisory Group meetings, and deliberations with different constituencies.
3. Reviewing Master Plan products as they are produced, with public comments.

The Community Advisory Group has held three meetings to date--on June 16, July 21 and September 15, 2008. Each meeting was held at the Polish Cadets Hall on the corner of Amherst St. and Grant St. Subsequent Community Advisory Group meetings for advisory group representatives will occur on the third Monday of every month in which a meeting is scheduled to be held.

Overview of the August 12, 2008 Public Meeting

A Richardson Olmsted Complex Master Plan public meeting was held on August 12, 2008 at the Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society. Over 130 people attended the public meeting. The presentation included a brief overview and updates on RCC work, including progress on stabilization efforts and planning for the Architecture and Visitors Center. The final Historic Structures Report and Cultural Landscape Report were also presented. The Master Plan team gave an overview of their scope of work and presented an initial analysis of the reuse potential of the site and precedents for redevelopment.

The attendees were given opportunities to provide feedback to the RCC and the Master Plan team in multiple ways. The audience was polled during the presentation using “clickers” to assess community values and priorities. These questions lead to open ended discussions and a chance for the audience to make general comments. Each attendee was also given a comment card and asked to fill it out with any comments they had and return it after the meeting was complete. The attendees were also directed to the “community involvement” page of the RCC website where additional opportunities for comments are available.

An Open Planning Process

The community appreciates all of the opportunities for public involvement in the Master Plan. However, some CAG members have expressed concern that some decisions regarding the Architecture and Visitors Center have been predetermined and that their input may be ignored. Some members of the community have expressed concerns over its size, cost, design, and implications for the rest of the Richardson Olmsted Complex. These matters have been discussed at great length and the RCC Board would like it to be clear that concerns are being heard and understood. The RCC will take these and all perspectives into account and do their best to satisfy them as planning moves forward. The RCC intends for the planning process to be transparent, and will continue to vet ideas with the CAG and larger public. Additional ways to disseminate information and gather community opinions were discussed: to hold additional CAG meetings, individual conversations with interested parties, and small group meetings.

Some members of the CAG and their constituents also expressed concern about the audience clicker polling technology used at the 8-12-08 Master Plan public meeting. Although used as a way to begin a conversation and gauge broad community values, some of the questions posed to the audience at the 8-12-08 public meeting seemed too narrow in scope and leading. Future questions will be more closely tied to specific proposals in the presentation to assure more informed choices.

Issues

The Community Advisory Group, its constituents, and the broader public, identified a series of broad issues that should be addressed by the Master Plan. These issues fall generally under the themes of quality of life, public accessibility, historic rehabilitation, and economic development.

Quality of Life – The quality of life of the residents in the surrounding community, as well patients at the Buffalo Psychiatric Center, is a priority of the community that should be reflected in the plan. Specific quality of life issues include safety and security concerns and the desire for stabilization of the surrounding neighborhoods, without gentrification. The site can offer much needed neighborhood recreation space and gathering areas.

Public Accessibility – Public accessibility is an issue closely related to community and regional quality of life. The community voiced its desire for an open campus. Community members expressed interest in access to the site for use as a public destination—such as public park. Public access through the site via improved pathways was another community priority. Public pathways through the site would greatly enhance connections between surrounding residential neighborhoods, commercial districts, institutions, and cultural amenities. Finally, community members asked that any new uses not preclude public access to the site.

Historic Rehabilitation – The community recognizes the historic significance of the site and suggested that the unique history of its buildings and landscape be protected and interpreted. The site's importance as a physical representation of the history of the treatment of mental health should be recognized and the existing use by the Buffalo Psychiatric Center should be respected. The community also suggested that this cultural asset can be better integrated with the region's broader network of cultural assets.

Economic Development – The community recognizes the vast economic development potential that rehabilitation of the site possesses for the surrounding business districts and the entire region. A rehabilitated, accessible site, with uses that attract people to the site, can increase the success of neighborhood businesses and the regional economy. Improved connections can seamlessly connect site users to the surrounding community businesses districts. The rehabilitated site can be a first class cultural tourism destination and can be integrated with surrounding cultural assets.

Goals and Objectives

The exploration of broad community issues led to the formulation of goals and more specific objectives to meet those goals. These goals are considered important by the Community Advisory Group, its constituents, and the broader public. They were developed, in part, when both the Community Advisory Group members and the attendees at the August 12, 2008 public meeting were asked “What will make the Master Plan a success?”

Goal: Benefit the people living in adjacent neighborhoods.

Objectives:

- Increase the quality of life of neighborhood residents.
- Improve the safety and security of the surrounding community.
- Lift the spirit and morale of the surrounding community.
- Use tools to reduce the impact of potential gentrification on existing neighborhood residents by improving their lives without displacing them.

Goal: Help revitalize and compliment the surrounding community.

Objectives:

- Become the foundation for the revitalization of adjacent distressed neighborhoods and business districts.
- Compliment and support existing community assets, including vibrant neighborhoods and business districts.
- Better integrate the Richardson Olmsted Complex with adjacent and regional cultural assets and promote uses of the complex that support these assets rather than duplicating them.

Goal: Allow the site to be publicly accessible.

Objectives:

- Improve the quality of the day-to-day experience of people using the complex and its grounds.
- Allow for public park and recreation space on the campus.
- Promote uses of buildings that allow for a variety of public gathering spaces; do not promote uses that prevent public access to the site.
- Create strong and safe pedestrian and bicycle connections to the site and through the site from surrounding neighborhoods, commercial districts, bike paths, Delaware Park and Buffalo State College.
- Allow public access while respecting the privacy rights of psychiatric center patients.
- Achieve public accessibility in the near term.

Goal: Provide a framework for rehabilitating the historic Richardson Olmsted Complex.

Objectives:

- Prevent further deterioration of the historic landscape and buildings.
- Rehabilitate the complex based upon the historic ‘period of significance.’
- Appropriately reuse the historic complex buildings.
- Rehabilitate the landscape based upon the historic Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr. designs.
- Reduce and redesign surface parking to compliment the historic complex.
- Follow the recommendations for rehabilitation in the Historic Structures and Cultural Landscape Reports.
- Interpret the history and future of the treatment of mental health.

Goal: Better integrate the Buffalo Psychiatric Center with the Richardson Olmsted Complex.

Objectives:

- Respect the need and the right of the Buffalo Psychiatric Center to remain.
- Reduce the stigma of mental illness by physically and programmatically connecting the Buffalo Psychiatric Center and its patients with the complex.
- Improve the quality of life of patients of the Buffalo Psychiatric Center.

Goal: Gain broad community acceptance of the Master Plan.

Objectives:

- Continue constructive and open community involvement.
- Fully and fairly represent all surrounding types of communities.
- Gain acceptance from all stakeholders.
- Create sustainable, long lasting partnerships.
- Create a framework of and set a precedent for cooperative planning with other related planning efforts, including but not limited to planning for Buffalo State College, “upgrading” the Scajaquada Expressway to a parkway, and the restoration of the Buffalo Olmsted Park and Parkway System.

Goal: Implement the Master Plan!

Objectives:

- Complete the rehabilitation of the Richardson Olmsted Complex based upon the recommendations in the Master Plan.
- Allow for flexibility in implementation to accommodate unforeseen changes over time.