

The Buffalo News
By Mark Sommer
January 28, 2009

Richardson Olmsted hearing prompts positivity

More than 250 people turned out Tuesday at a public meeting on the future of the Richardson Olmsted Complex. Feasibility plans suggest that the site initially would be most suitable for a small hotel, visitor and architecture center and event space centered around the iconic tower building, and as a rehabilitated public park with less visible parking.

After listening to a 75-minute presentation by some of the eight consultants involved in what has been a 22-year planning process, those in attendance indicated favorable support for what they heard by voting with hand-held devices.

“I think they really took into account all of the suggestions from the last public meeting and that they have a really good vision,” said Tess Fraser, who lives near Delaware Park.

“I like that they are looking into many different uses for the building and playing up the fact that Buffalo is so rich in culture and architecture.”

Jordan Thomas, who lives nearby on Richmond Avenue, was also impressed by what he heard.

“[The presenters] said it: It’s an architectural gem in a city that needs draws, and there is amazing potential here,” Thomas said.

The meeting in Buffalo State College’s Rockwell Hall, the fifth with the public, was put on by Richardson Center Corp., a not-for-profit agency formed in July 2006. The next public meeting will be in April.

A range of concerns was aired, despite the use of prepared questions that some in attendance felt restricted discussion.

They included how the Richardson Olmsted Complex would integrate its activities with Buffalo Psychiatric Center; questions about different parking scenarios, a proposed east-west road on the complex’s north side, and competing plans for walking paths; and whether an architecture center combined with a visitor center is needed.

David Gamble, project manager with Chan Krieger Sieniewicz, which heads the master plan team, stressed the “synergy” of bringing together the architecture/ visitor center, hotel and event space and introduced the concept of re-branding the site as the ROC, for Richardson Olmsted Complex.

Marketing the complex with that name and the visual image of the twin towers would further the process of turning the long-dormant 91-acre site into a destination, Gamble said.

As part of a phased usage, the three uses would initially take up about 120,000 square feet of the 400,000- square-foot complex, Gamble said.

James Cathcart of Ralph Appelbaum Associates, an interpretive museum design firm, showed projected images of creative and often interactive displays to show how the architecture visitor center could celebrate the complex along with other local architectural gems along with arts and culture.

Cathcart also noted that architecture centers around the world were typically between 10,000 and 15,000 square feet, considerably smaller than what was imagined for the Richardson Olmsted Complex at an earlier stage.

John Kett of Reed Hilderbrand, a landscape architecture firm, presented scenarios of how Frederick Law Olmsted's vision for the site could be harnessed once more through parkland, recessed parking, meandering pathways with lots of entry points and reintroduction of a nursery and community garden in the site's northwest corner.