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By Mark Sommer

## **Richardson Olmsted plan is unveiled**

After three years of exhaustive studies and designs, the Richardson Center Corp. presented its completed master plan for the Richardson Olmsted Complex on Tuesday before an audience of about 125 in Buffalo State College's Rockwell Hall.

The plan, developed by architectural design firm Chan Krieger Sieniewicz, envisions the Richardson complex as a cornerstone for boosting Buffalo's architectural and cultural tourism and generating significant economic spin-offs.

The plan calls for mixed public and private use of the eight Medina sandstone and three brick buildings and reinstatement of a parklike character on the grounds. The first stage of redevelopment anticipates an architecture center, visitor center, boutique hotel and events/conference center in the iconic, patina-capped Gothic tower building and two adjacent buildings.

The cost for the "baseline plan" is about \$53 million. The project is eligible for more than \$17 million in historic tax credits.

"When it's all said and done, we'll have something magnificent here that nobody else in the country has," said Stanford Lipsey, chairman of the Richardson Center Corp. and the Richardson Center Architecture Center Board.

Lipsey, publisher of The Buffalo News, was instrumental in lobbying then-Gov. George E. Pataki and Western New York legislators for several years to secure \$76.5 million in state funds to rehabilitate the complex.

Earlier in the day, Drew Cerza, the new executive director of the Buffalo & Erie County Culture and Visitors Bureau, and County Executive Chris Collins announced the tourism body would relocate its office and visitor center there.

"The county fully supports the collaboration between the county, the Convention and Visitors Bureau and the Richardson complex in making this the destination for tourists who come to our area," Collins said.

"They are going to have a world-class visitor center with state-of-the-art graphics promoting our city . . . Located here with the Burchfield Penney, the Albright-Knox and the Historical Society, what better place could there be?"

The master plan would breathe new life into the former Buffalo State Asylum for the Insane, which was started in 1870 and concluded in the early 1890s. The complex was the largest project by noted American architect H. H. Richardson and his first in a style that came to be known as Richardsonian Romanesque.

Frederick Law Olmsted and business partner Calvert Vaux, who developed Buffalo's interconnected park and parkway system, as well as New York's Central Park, designed the grounds.

The Richardson Olmsted Complex, the reconstructed Darwin Martin House Complex, by Frank Lloyd Wright, and Louis Sullivan's Guaranty Building constitute "the three jewels in the crown," Lipsey said.

"The next step will be to really market Buffalo's architecture, particularly to the Orient and to Europe," he said.

Among the changes called for in the master plan is relocating the surface parking lot from the historic south entrance to reinstitute a less intrusive loop road originally designed by Olmsted and to allow the area to be replanted again. The south entrance will be preserved as a ceremonial entry, with the north side of the building becoming the main entrance.

That entrance is expected to be better equipped to deal with large numbers of people and buses, while at the same time reducing the visual presence of the modern Strozzi Building. Maintenance buildings that obstruct the view and clutter the north entrance are to be eventually relocated.

The plan also calls for extending the Olmsted parks system through new pedestrian and vehicular connections, including an east-west road and greater open space on the 90-acre site.

Buffalo State, which is undergoing its own long-term planning, could wind up using the four stone buildings on the eastern end for classrooms, Lipsey said.

The northwest landscape, now partially used for Buffalo State College parking, would eventually be landscaped green space — the plan even suggests a possible nursery—while leaving the possibility of future development, Lipsey said.

"We want that to be heavily landscaped. The caveat is, we have to come up with an economically viable plan," Lipsey said. "If someone says we want to be out in that property but the Richardson buildings don't work for me, then we'd put up some attractive buildings. That would be based on an economic need to sustain the property."

The master plan also calls for continued stabilization work along with the build-out of the first three Richardson Olmsted Complex buildings — to be identified as "the ROC" — expected to be utilized first. The brick buildings, which have sustained the most damage, are seen as the last buildings to be returned to use, Lipsey said.

Lipsey cautioned it's going to take some time to get the complex off and running, but it's on its way.