



by Mark Sommer
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Reports propel Richardson site plans

Two studies on the buildings and grounds of the Richardson Olmsted Complex were unveiled Tuesday at a public meeting, providing for the first time thorough and comprehensive assessments of the historic buildings and grounds.

The studies also served as a starting point for reimagining the cavernous site's future use for the more than 200 people — including numerous consultants — who filled Buffalo & Erie County Historical Society's auditorium.

"They're extraordinary reports, and the question for tonight was to put some ideas up there and ask the community what they think is important," said Eva Hassett, a Richardson Center board member.

Attendees were provided with clickers so they could vote for a number of improvements to the site. The audience supported re-greening the South Lawn; adding an approach to the iconic twin towers from the Buffalo State College campus; connecting the grounds to the nearby Olmsted park system; and using the site for public green space and cultural activities.

It also was announced that Ralph Appelbaum Associates, an interpretive museum design firm whose work includes the U. S. Holocaust Memorial Museum and the Corning Museum of Glass, has been hired to develop a concept study for the proposed Architecture and Visitors Center. Consult- Econ will provide a market and economic analysis.

A 20-member Community Advisory Group also was introduced.

Many of the preliminary ideas presented by the master plan team, headed by Chan Krieger Sieniewicz, built on those introduced last year by the Urban Planning Institute. Unlike those recommendations, however, there was little discussion of economic development.

The thick "Historic Structures Report," by Goody, Clancy, and the equally comprehensive "Cultural Landscape Report," prepared by Heritage Landscapes, provide site history together with building and grounds analysis and review.

Detailed recommendations for preservation and restoration are bolstered by hundreds of scale drawings and photographs.

Both reports recommend rehabilitating the buildings and grounds to preserve their shared history, culture and architecture, while also allowing for contemporary uses. Each will be available in their entirety at www.richardson-olmsted.com, where public comments are still being solicited. The Cambridge, Mass.-based Chan Krieger Sieniewicz is expected to take the meeting's input and produce a draft statement of recommendations for the fifth public meeting, to be held in January. A final plan is expected in April.