

the Richardson Olmsted Complex, Buffalo, NY

Public Meeting

August 12, 2010

6:00 PM

Performing Arts Center at Rockwell Hall

The following report is a summary of the Richardson Olmsted Complex public meeting on August 12, 2010. This is the seventh public meeting held since 2007.

Agenda

1. Welcome and Introductions
2. IDENTIFY Building Reuse Programs
3. STABILIZE the Historic Buildings
4. RATIONALIZE the Site (parking/circulation)
5. PRIORITIZE the Landscape Investment
6. ESTABLISH Public Access
7. Review of Near term Activities
8. Questions and Comments

Richardson Center Corporation (RCC) Board and Community Advisory Group (CAG) Public Meeting Attendees

RCC board members, guests, staff

- ✓ Brian Carter
- ✓ Louis Grachos
- ✓ Christopher Greene
- ✓ Eva Hassett
- ✓ Sue Joffe
- ✓ Gail Johnstone
- ✓ Bill Jones
- ✓ Monica Pellegrino Faix
- ✓ Richard Tobe

CAG

- ✓ Michael McLean
- ✓ Gregory Patterson Tanski
- ✓ Tim Tielman
- ✓ Max Willig

Summary

Agenda Item: Welcome and Introductions

Discussion and Conclusions:

Richardson Center Corporation (RCC) Board Member Eva Hassett welcomed the nearly 90 community members in attendance and introduced the board members. On view was the 360° Virtual Reality panorama completed by Bill Lundin of BuffaloVR can be viewed at <http://www.buffalovr.com/bpc/index.html>. This was completed to document the existing conditions and illustrate reuse moving forward.

Eva Hassett thanked the following people who have provided assistance advancing the Richardson Olmsted Complex reuse:

- The Community Advisory Group which consists of neighborhood representatives
- Assemblyman Sam Hoyt and Senator Antoine Thompson for supporting the project and assisting with the transfer legislation
- The John R. Oishei Foundation and the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo for their generous grants to assist with operating funds
- The Dormitory Authority of the State of NY and Empire State Development Corporation
- Rebecca Stadler for hosting a benefit event, Save the Towers, raising \$800 to donate to the project

Exactly two years ago today the RCC held the fourth public meeting to kick off the Master Plan. At this seventh public meeting, the Master Plan is finished, and the RCC is carrying out the recommendations. The Master Plan was recognized by Preservation Buffalo Niagara for the 2010 Planning award.

The RCC is making progress on the following near term goals that will be reviewed today:

- IDENTIFY building reuse programs
- STABILIZE the historic buildings
- PRIORITIZE the landscape investment
- RATIONALIZE THE SITE (parking/circulation)
- ESTABLISH public access

Agenda Item: IDENTIFY Building Reuse programs

Discussion and Conclusions:

Monica Pellegrino Faix, Project Coordinator from the RCC, presented an overview of the Master Plan, four phases of reuse that create a long term phased reuse plan for contemporary users and uses.

Core Project

- Mix of interrelated uses in the Towers Administration Building and adjacent wards: Buffalo Architecture Center, Buffalo Niagara Convention and Visitor Bureau Visitor Center, boutique hotel and event space
- Relocate parking on the South Lawn in front of the Towers Building
- Landscape the South Lawn to create an attractive entry and landscape
- Landscape the immediate north of the historic buildings
- Create a new northern entry and drop off, the “east-west road”

Expanded Core Project

- Expand uses in the historic buildings to include the buildings to the east, possibly for use by Buffalo State College
- Relocate the Buffalo Psychiatric Center maintenance building
- Expand landscape improvements to the south and the north

Full reuse of Historic Structures

- Expand uses in the historic buildings to include the remaining buildings to the west for arts related uses and residences.
- Relocate the Buffalo State College Maintenance building
- Landscape the entire site

Development Landholding

- Should the opportunity for new development arise, it would be located on these lands to the North

Barry Alberts, CityVisions Associates, presented an update on the work to prepare for a developer. CityVisions is examining the space and economic reuse potential of the buildings. They are advancing the Master Plan Core Project concepts for the first four uses. In this implementation stage it is necessary to determine how the uses fit in the buildings, how the project will be financed and phased, and organizational issues.

The Core Project is an economically viable mix of uses that create a strong first redevelopment, bring people to the site and create a base that generates interest for future development. All uses relate to the iconic towers building. An addition to the north will be a gathering and orientation point, be a distinct structure to comply with SHPO guidelines, and provide views of the buildings.

The space allocation planning has advanced as follows:

	ADDITION	BUILDING 45	BUILDING 44	BUILDING 10
Lower Level	BNCVB Visitor Center Covered drop off and Porte Cochere/Bridge for accessible access to Bldg. 45 LL and 1 st fl.	Hotel lobby Hotel administration	Hotel back of house	hotel rooms
1st fl.	Primary Arch. Center exhibit space Event space – 300/400 people Viewing platform	Gallery for Arch. Center exhibits Restaurant/Café/ Bar/Lounge	hotel rooms	Arch. Ctr. with ward exhibits
2nd fl.		BNCVB offices Gallery space	hotel rooms	hotel rooms
3rd fl.		Meeting rooms	hotel rooms	hotel rooms
4th fl.		Event/Conference Space		

Barry Alberts, CityVisions Associates, presented an update on Buffalo Architecture Center. The BAC will be a place dedicated to celebrating the locally and nationally significant architecture and planning history of Buffalo and be a hub of activity about the built environment. Visitors will learn about architecture through exhibits, it will house a variety of programs and events for the local community, including programming for school children and as a base for tours.

Agenda Item: STABILIZE the Historic Buildings

Discussion and Conclusions:

Monica Pellegrino Faix presented an update on the buildings and grounds stabilization, fire damage and security

Fire damage from the April, 2010 arson

- Damage was limited to one room on the 2nd floor of the Towers Administration Building.
- Clean up of the debris and water took place revealing the intact maple floors in good condition.

Security

- The RCC responded with an immediate increase in security, hiring a private firm for nightly patrols and installing temporary lighting around the perimeter.
- The result has been improved protection of the buildings as demonstrated by the arrest of trespassers and a reduction in the number of break-ins. Nine people have been arrested.

Stabilization

- An additional \$8 million (total \$10 million) in building stabilization will take place on work to abatement and cleaning, and to seal the buildings from water infiltration to prevent further deterioration.
 - Nearly all the work to stabilize the brick buildings and connectors at risk of collapse has been completed.
 - The electric work is underway and the permanent perimeter lighting will be functional by October, 2010.
 - Roof repairs, estimated at \$1 million, were identified and added to the essential near term activities.
 - Abatement and cleaning, the initial phase of the work to ready the Towers Building and adjacent wards for a developer and public access, is being prepared for bid. It will be complete next year and cost \$4 million dollars.
 - The construction documents are nearly complete for closing the brick building openings, preventing additional water damage, and will commence after the roof repairs.
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Agenda Item: RATIONALIZE THE SITE (parking and circulation)

Discussion and Conclusions:

Bill Jones, RCC board member presented an overview of the work to relocate the parking lots at Forest Avenue to make way for an attractive South Lawn entry and landscape.

Design and construct new Buffalo Psychiatric Center parking lot

- The Office of Mental Health is transferring to the RCC the 4 acre parcel in front of the Towers Building in exchange for new parking lots paid for by the RCC.
 - Wendel Duchscherer is under contract to design the new parking lots for the Buffalo Psychiatric Center.
 - Construction will take place early next year.
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Agenda Item: PRIORITIZE Landscape Investment

Discussion and Conclusions:

Bill Jones, RCC board member, presented an overview of the work to create the South Lawn entry and landscape, and the near term landscape work.

Next year South Lawn

- Design of the South Lawn entry and landscape will take place this winter 2010/2011
- Construction will take place in 2011.

Near term landscape work

- The dead and poor condition trees will be addressed this Fall. With the assistance of the Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy and the guidance of the Cultural Landscape Report, a plan for appropriate pruning or removal has been identified.
 - A landscape company is taking care of the lawn inside the fence and once the property is acquired the RCC will assume responsibility outside the fence.
 - The RCC's goal is to improve the look of the grounds.
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Agenda Item: ESTABLISH Public Access

Discussion and Conclusions:

Chris Greene, RCC board member, presented an overview of the public access and ownership. Chris reiterated appreciation for the public participation and support. The RCC has undertaken a transparent planning process in which public input has been important. All reports can be found on line at www.richardson-olmsted.com/documents.php. The project is moving from planning to implementation and many activities will be taking place over the next year or two to advance the reuse plans.

Ownership

- A map of the entire site was shown, from Elmwood to Rees and Rockwell to Forest. RCC is currently on the site with an access agreement with the Dormitory Authority of the State of NY. The site is still owned by the State of NY. It was deeded from the City of Buffalo to the State in 1870's. The RCC will acquire part of this parcel: 38 acres declared surplus, plus in the future an additional 4 acres in exchange for park lots and 2.5 acres to the north. The BPC and other social service entities will continue to operate on site.
- In order to move ahead with implementation the RCC needs to own the site and is undertaking activities that would normally take place prior to ownership. A boundary survey and Phase I Environmental Assessment are complete. A Phase II Environmental Assessment and efforts to secure property insurance are underway.
- The RCC will take title through special legislation. Assemblyman Hoyt and Senator Thompson sponsored bill A10578/S07488 to transfer the property from the State of NY to the RCC for \$1. Several issues needed to be resolved and the bill is ready to pass when the legislature returns to session, anticipated to be in the next month or two.

Public Access

- A tour program will be instituted next year when the buildings are safe
 - A showcase space will be prepared in Towers Building (#45) and the adjacent ward (#10). This space will allow for events and to enable developers to see the potential of the site.
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Agenda Item: REVIEW of Near Term Activities

Discussion and Conclusions:

ACTIVITY

Complete Generic Environmental Impact Statement
Secure Ownership
Master Developer RFP
Move parking lots
Complete Phase II stabilization
Create South Lawn
Create showcase space
Tour program & access for public

DEADLINE

Winter, 2010
Winter, 2010/2011
Winter, 2010
Spring/Summer, 2011
Summer, 2011
Fall, 2011
Fall, 2011
Fall, 2011

Agenda Item: Comments

Discussion and Conclusions:

The audience was given an opportunity to ask questions and provide comments after the presentation. Many audience members offered positive remarks about the process and opportunities for public input. A summary of all of the comments include:

- Take caution when construction an addition; new construction is not compatible with the existing structure and there is sufficient space in the complex. Consider the former kitchens, Buildings 43 or 12, or the former greenhouse foundation. These alternatives should be explored in the DGEIS.
 - Allow vehicular access through the “subway” tunnels on the east and west of Building 45.
 - The north entrance subverts the historic design intent and wayfinding on the site, the entrance should be directly into Building 45. These issues should be explored in the DGEIS.
 - Changes to the site and buildings should be supported; a new addition can be compatible with the existing.
 - A geothermal heating system should be installed.
 - Security shouldn’t deter people from enjoying the site.
 - Respect the mental health treatment past and present on the site.
 - Support for the Buffalo Psychiatric Center and other social service agencies remaining on site
 - Create an authentic mental health exhibit by restoring a ward, or a portion of a ward.
 - Consider a labyrinth, green research facility, and the contribution of the site to Buffalo’s sacred space geomancy.
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Agenda Item: Closing Remarks

Discussion and Conclusions:

Eva Hassett closed the meeting by thanking everyone in the public for their participation.
