

RESNICOW  
SCHROEDER

# THE ARCHITECTS NEWSPAPER

July 24, 2013

## THE BUFFALO BOOM



AFTER DECADES OF STAGNATION AND DECLINE, THIS RUST BELT CITY IS FINALLY ON THE UPSWING.  
BY JENNA M. MCKNIGHT

The Buffalo State Asylum for the Insane, designed by H.H. Richardson with a landscape by Frederick Law Olmsted, has been a mighty but ghostly presence since it was largely abandoned in the 1970s. Preservationists have long fought to save the monolithic complex that stretches across roughly 90 acres. Now, their efforts are paying off, with work under way to transform a portion of the late-19-century structure into a boutique hotel, conference venue, and an architecture center.

"We've been lucky," said architect Barbara Campagna, while giving a hard-hat tour of the facility on a steamy summer afternoon. "It's such a sound building—it's still in decent shape."

Campagna sits on the board of the Richardson Center Corporation, which is tasked with overseeing the site's redevelopment. While the group has engaged a lengthy roster of consultants over the years, the current design team comprises Flynn Battaglia Architects, Deborah Berke Partners, and Goody Clancy.

Public and private money is funding the estimated \$56 million project.

The adaptive reuse of the Richardson Olmsted Complex, as it's now called, is just one of dozens of notable projects moving forward in Buffalo. Indeed, Mayor Byron Brown had much to trumpet when he stood before 1,100 constituents to deliver his State of the City address this past February. Beleaguered for decades by a stagnant economy and depopulation, this Rust Belt city is finally on the upswing. Construction projects totaling more than \$1 billion are in the works, from quaint hotels to large mixed-use complexes, with an eye toward regenerating downtown. "The city is the strongest it's been in years," Brown told the optimistic crowd.

Why the turnaround? Many attribute the boom to low interest rates combined with the city's upgraded credit rating. State and federal tax credits to revitalize historic buildings have also proved alluring. Moreover, in 2012, Governor Andrew Cuomo pledged

\$1 billion in incentives for private-sector development. It all amounts to a renaissance for a city that hopes to return to the glory of its Industrial-age heyday.

"Our plan is to address the impediments that have held back growth: To turn older buildings into adaptive reuse projects, to focus on creating funding sources to stabilize distressed neighborhoods, to have a more vibrant waterfront," explained Brendan Mehaffy, executive director of the city's Office of Strategic Planning. "We'd definitely like to see a population increase," he added, "but we are focused on making a Buffalo that Buffalonians can really enjoy."

To get a sense of how much this Upstate New York metropolis once prospered, one need only take a stroll down Millionaire's Row, a street lined with palatial historic mansions and vast lawns. Buffalo had much going for it through the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It was

Below: Buffalo Canalside by Perkins Eastman; Above: Site plan



COURTESY PERKINS EASTMAN



an industrial powerhouse, a prime shipping hub due to its location on the eastern shore of Lake Erie and at the western terminus of the Erie Canal, and was the second-most-trafficked railroad center for years (after Chicago).

It's not surprising that, given its wealth, the city evolved into an architectural mecca, with a stand-out collection of buildings by

masters such as Louis Sullivan, Daniel Burnham, and Frank Lloyd Wright, as well as an extensive park system conceived by Olmsted.

But the good times stopped rolling in the 1950s. The city was devastated by the loss of heavy industry and cargo traffic, exacerbated by the opening of the Saint Lawrence Seaway to the north—an alternate transportation route

between the Atlantic Ocean and the Great Lakes. It has limped along ever since. Just a decade ago, the city was on the verge of bankruptcy. According to census figures from 2007–2011, the median household income in the city proper was roughly \$30,000, and nearly 30 percent of residents were living below the poverty line.

"For years, we hoped a white

knight would come in and save the day—that never happened," said Bill Pottle, a 45-year-old native and sales manager at Boston Valley Terra Cotta, which supplies materials for building restorations in the area. A variety of smaller-scale, grassroots projects emerged instead—and now they're "starting to add up to something big," he explained. The piecemeal

development has not only paved the way for larger projects, but has also helped unite many Buffalonians in a mission to make their city a thriving work-live-play destination fueled by the sports, health care, and tourism industries.

A key initiative is reinvigorating the waterfront. "Buffalo has always been criticized, and rightfully so, for not taking advantage of its

BURO MANEA

THOMAS MAYER

COURTESY HOK

waterfront," said architect Paul McDonnell, president of the Campaign for Greater Buffalo. That's starting to change. During a recent open-air bus tour showcasing the city's architecture, McDonnell pointed to Harbor Center, a \$172 million entertainment complex under construction on a 1.7-acre block adjacent to the First Niagara Center, home to the NHL's Sabres. Designed by Populous and financed by team owner Terry Pegula, the structure will feature two hockey rinks, a hotel, and space for restaurants, retail, and parking. Full completion is slated for 2015.

Nearby, the vacant Donovan State Office Building, circa 1962, is undergoing a \$30 million facelift. Designed by Fontanesi Folts Aubrecht Ernst Architects and funded by Benderson Development, the run-down concrete-and-glass box is getting a new glass and brick skin. A 96-room Marriott hotel will occupy the bottom four levels; a law firm will take up residence in the upper four. The city is also constructing a \$5 million park, by EE&K (a subsidiary of Perkins Eastman), just south of the revamped building.

Varied programming appears to be a preferred formula for the area. "The synergy of different uses seems to work well," said Bill Paladino, CEO of Ellicott Development and son of company founder and former gubernatorial candidate Carl Paladino. Ellicott hopes to break ground by next spring on The Carlo, a \$75 million project with offices, a hotel, apartments, and restaurants on a 5.5-acre parcel near the Erie Basin Marina.

Echoing the sentiments of many others, Paladino says construction activity is at an all-time high. "With interest rates remaining low, I still see a lot of opportunity out there," he said. "There's a narrow window, and we hope to capitalize on it."

Other areas of the city are also flourishing—most saliently, the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus in downtown. The 120-acre property houses public and private institutions, with half a dozen major projects recently finished or in the pipeline. Last year, a striking building by Cannon's Yazdani Studio opened, work will soon begin on an HOK-designed, 500,000-square-foot medical school for the University of Buffalo, and cranes are onsite for a 300,000-square-foot building, dubbed Conventus, by Kideney Architects.

Ciminelli Real Estate purchased the Conventus site 20 years ago and waited for the right moment to strike. "The medical campus is now one of the top priorities within the region," said CEO Paul Ciminelli. He estimates it will lure several thousand new employees within the decade, with a corresponding uptick in amenities development.

Those amenities include stylish condos in the downtown district, which Ciminelli is already pursuing. His company recently spent \$15 million to convert a former industrial building into Bethune Lofts, which contains 87 market-rate apartments. It's named after the first female American architect, Louise Blanchard Bethune, who was based in Buffalo.

Throughout the city, there are numerous adaptive reuse projects either planned or newly completed. More than 60 years after it ignominiously bulldozed Wright's Larkin Administration Building, Buffalo seems committed to saving notable historic structures (while demolishing more than 4,000 derelict buildings under Mayor Brown's watch).

Rocco R. Termini, who heads Signature Development, is especially committed to the cause. One of his greatest achievements is resurrecting the prized Lafayette Hotel,



COURTESY KIDENEY ARCHITECTS



COURTESY POPULOUS ARCHITECTS



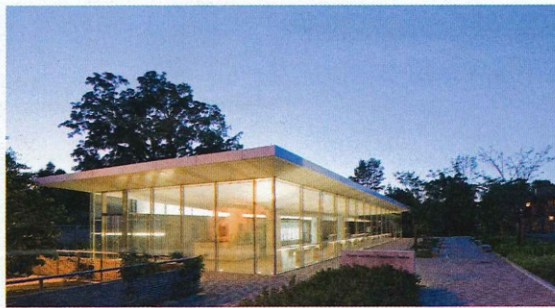
**This page, above:** Conventus, a new medical center, by Kideney Architects; **Middle and below:** Harbor Center, designed by Populous, will include a hotel, retail, and entertainment facilities adjacent to the existing NHL arena.

**Facing page, above:** A new building in the Buffalo-Niagara Medical Campus by Cannon's Yazdani Studio; **Below:** The planned University of Buffalo Medical School by HOK.

**Above left:** The Visitors Center by Toshi-ko Mori by Frank Lloyd Wright's Darwin-Martin House; **Below:** The house could draw 84,000 people a year.

**Above, right:** Rendering of the converted Bethune Lofts; **Below:** The project nearing completion.

**Bottom:** The first phase of the renovation of the Richardson Olmsted Complex will include a boutique hotel, conference center, and an architecture center.



built in the 1920s and designed by Bethune. The 7-story, French Renaissance-style building was once a grand inn for the well-heeled traveler, but it ultimately fell into disrepair. "I always loved that building," said Termini, who purchased it in 2011. "Everyone thought I was crazy; they thought it wouldn't work."

The architecture firm Carmina Wood Morris helped him transform the landmark into an upscale mixed-use building with 34 hotel rooms and 115 apartments, along with banquet facilities and several restaurants. The property, renamed Hotel Lafayette, opened last year.

Termini's gamble paid off. "Every weekend there are four or five weddings held there. Every apartment is rented. The restaurants are doing well," he said. The hotel's occupancy rate is 78 percent—a respectable figure considering the region's occupancy rate for the first five months of 2013 was 58.5

percent, according to data tracker STR Global. "We never had high-quality hotels in the city," said Termini. "Buffalo is just catching up."

The city is also working to preserve its architectural gems in hopes of boosting cultural tourism. A nonprofit organization that owns Wright's Darwin D. Martin House is

continuing to oversee its meticulous restoration. "If you had been here five years ago, you wouldn't have believed this was the same house," said the group's executive director Mary Roberts, while showing visitors around the Prairie-Style property that dates to 1905.

Based on an independent

consultant's estimates, the Martin House has the potential to draw up to 84,000 visitors annually and generate more than \$17 million in revenue for the city. "It just hasn't been marketed yet," said Roberts.

Buffalo certainly is brimming with activity and promise, but one wonders if it is doing too much,

too fast? Developer Ciminelli says no, emphasizing that most projects are not speculative. "It's not like other markets where it's a 'Field of Dreams'—build it and they will come," he said. "We're building it because we're already here."

**JENNA M. MCKNIGHT IS AN ARCHITECTURE WRITER BASED IN NEW YORK CITY.**



# THE EAST ARCHITECTS NEWSPAPER

## 10\_07.24.2013

WWW.ARCHPAPER.COM IF IT MATTERS, WE TELL YOU

\$3.95

AFTER 10 YEARS, BOSTON DEVELOPMENT WINS APPROVAL



COURTESY THE ARCHITECTURAL TEAM

## BREAKING THE BARRIER

More than ten years ago, John Rosenthal, president of the Boston real estate firm Meredith, conceived plans for an ambitious development in the Kenmore Square neighborhood to be called The Fenway Center. Just this month, the city's department of transportation finally approved the five-building project. As American cities

become denser, the low-lying fruit of real estate becomes scarcer, leaving developers and municipalities to cobble together more challenging sites. Such was the case here. While it redevelops two surface-level parking areas—themselves prime candidates for redevelopment—these areas happen to be bisected by the

continued on page 7

NYPL AGREES TO FINANCIAL REVIEW AS RENOVATION LAWSUITS LOOM



COURTESY FOSTER + PARTNERS

## LIBRARY REVIEW OVERDUE

Facing two new lawsuits and vociferous protests from numerous scholars and critics, the New York Public Library (NYPL) has decided to take a step back and re-evaluate its proposed renovation plans for the iconic 5th Avenue branch.

In December, Foster + Partners unveiled renderings of the new circulating library to be housed in the Stephen A. Schwarzman

building with an ambiguous price tag of \$300 million. This costly overhaul of the historic Beaux-Arts branch called for the removal of seven tiers of stacks beneath the Rose Main Reading Room to make way for a new circulating library. NYPL's controversial "Central Library Plan" would consolidate the Mid-Manhattan and Innovative Science, Industry, and Business

continued on page 4

A Proposal by  
Pelli Clarke Pelli.



COURTESY PELLI CLARKE PELLI

HISTORIC DOWNTOWN CHURCH  
CONSIDERS MIXED-USE PROJECT

## Upjohn One Upped

Nestled amid the towers of the world's biggest banks and financial companies, Trinity Wall Street, a relatively diminutive neo-Gothic structure designed by Richard Upjohn in 1846, might seem quaint. But with assets estimated at more than \$2 billion (thanks, in large part, to a colonial land donation in 1705), Trinity is right at home with its wealthy neighbors. Though its bank account would be the envy of many parishes, it is generating internal strife since the church must now decide how to best deal with its considerable real estate holdings.

At the moment, the source of this tension is the building code of its 90-year-old administrative office at 68-74 Trinity Place. Faced with a \$33 million price tag for building-related work aimed at meeting 2018 code compliance, the church's vestry, or overseeing board, is considering razing the existing structure

continued on page 9

## DEVELOPERS ISSUE

LONG A DECLINING PRESENCE ON THE RUST BELT, BUFFALO IS AT LAST A HIVE OF DEVELOPMENT. JENNA MCKNIGHT INVESTIGATES. SEE PAGE 19

## CONTENTS

08  
LIVE IN AN  
EISENMAN

10  
CHIPPERFIELD  
IN ST. LOUIS

24  
CORBU AT MOMA

05 EAVESDROP

23 CALENDAR

27 MARKETPLACE

PHILLY INSERTS PARK ON  
BENJAMIN FRANKLIN PARKWAY  
Painting the Lot



COURTESY LESLA

In 1972, artist Gene Davis painted a parking lot in front of the Philadelphia Museum of Art with vibrant stripes for the art installation *Franklin's Footpath*. Four decades later, Philadelphia is repainting the lot, not for art, but as an experiment in public space. On July 17, a pop-up park carved from a parking lot inside Eakins Oval at the northwest terminus of Benjamin

continued on page 5

BUFFALO ASCENDANT  
SEE PAGE 19



THOMAS MAYER

PRASRT STD  
US POSTAGE  
PAID  
ITHACA, NY  
PERMIT  
NO. 188

The Architect's Newspaper  
21 Murray St., 5th Floor  
New York, NY 10007  
B101  
p2  
3178