



State grant boosts Rutger Park restoration

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UTICA — A state grant obtained by a local historic preservation group will help that group move forward with its goal of restoring the mansions at 1 and 3 Rutger Park to their former glory, an official with the group said Tuesday.

The Landmarks Society of Greater Utica purchased those properties, along with 2 Rutger Park, which no longer has a house, about a year ago, President Michael Bosak said. Since then, the group has been working on restoring the buildings with the goal of making them "mansion museums" and creating a heritage tourism destination.

Late U.S. Sen. Roscoe Conkling, a Republican and key figure nationally during the Reconstruction era of the 1870s, lived in one of the mansions.

Bosak said the grant validates the mansion projects because the state is recognizing their importance.

"This is a huge step forward," Bosak said. "We have some stunning architecture here and we need to celebrate that."

The \$600,000 grant was awarded by the state Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, Bosak said. Most of the funds require a matching contribution from the Landmarks Society, which has already spent \$325,000 on the properties that qualifies for the grant.

"A lot of work needs to be done; the roofs, the exteriors," Bosak said. "These buildings are very old."

The Landmarks Society has existed for about 35 years, but the acquisition and rehabilitation of historic properties represents a change in direction from its traditional advocacy role.

"Last year was a quantum leap in purchasing the properties," Bosak said. "People still talk about losing Vice President Sherman's house and old City Hall, we if we didn't step up to the plate we may have lost these buildings."

The society recently held a fundraiser party to commemorate the one-year anniversary of buying the properties. It raised \$7,000.

The state sent Bosak a letter dated May 15 congratulating the Landmarks Society on receiving the grant.

In the letter, Carol Ash, commissioner of the state Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation office, said the state received 300 applications requesting \$87.1 million for the grant.

"We are eager to initiate our partnership with you and move these important projects ahead expeditiously," Ash wrote.

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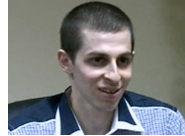
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