



Our view: Rutger Park campus should be maintained

AT ISSUE: City should initiate effort to keep Swancott Home in historic package

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At issue: The future of the Swancott Home, a three-story brick mansion at 4 Rutger Park, in the city's most historic district. It became the Swancott Home in 1955, a care facility for elderly women, and was sold to the Rescue Mission in 2008.

What happened: The Rescue Mission had purchased the property for \$155,000 and had planned to open a 20-bed facility there for men recovering from substance abuse. That plan, however, met with much community opposition and was rejected by the city's Zoning Board of Appeals. As a result, the Rescue Mission decided to auction off the property. An unidentified family agreed to pay \$66,000 for the property, but has asked to be released from the contract. Details are being worked out.

Risks and obstacles. Letting the Swancott Home sit must not be an option. The mansion is part of the historic Rutger Park neighborhood that includes Nos. 1 and 3 Rutger Park, mansions whose owners included gunmaker Samuel Remington and powerful U.S. Sen. Roscoe Conkling. Those two homes are owned by the Landmarks Society of Greater Utica, currently in the process of acquiring state grants to fund their renovation. Given that extensive project, society President Michael Bosak said it would be a huge undertaking to acquire the Swancott Home, too. A key concern is the expense involved. City Assessor David Williams said the Swancott Home is valued at \$270,000, and annual city, county and school taxes run at about \$14,674.

What should happen

** Mayor David Roefaro should initiate a campaign to bring together the area's federal, state and local leaders and Landmarks Society leaders to find the financial means to maintain the historic Rutger Park campus. These mansions and the contiguous front yards that tie them together could become a centerpiece for showcasing the city's history. Other cities have capitalized on much less.

** Further, it could become a catalyst for renewal in that entire neighborhood. In addition, the Neighborhood Investment Association – a nonprofit organization established about five years ago to address the needs of the Cornhill area – plans to occupy the former Teamsters building at 7 Rutger Park. This group will make a terrific partner in the effort to restore the area.

Mayor Roefaro should make this a top priority and weave this into his master plan.

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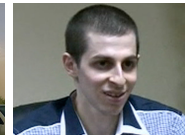
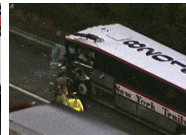


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