



Editorial: Rutger Park must be a package

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AT ISSUE: Leaders should work to find Rescue Mission alternate site.

The Utica Rescue Mission has been helping people in this community for more than a century. And it does a marvelous job.

But if it wants to continue doing what is best for this community and its people, the mission needs to abandon plans to expand its outreach into a home at 4 Rutger Park and instead work with other community leaders on a plan to develop this area into a historic park.

That will be challenging, if not a bit awkward. The Rescue Mission closed a purchase on the former Swancott Home June 6, only a day before the Landmarks Society of Greater Utica sealed a deal to acquire the two historic mansions next door at Nos. 1 and 3 Rutger Park. The society had been trying desperately for years to purchase the two 19th century mansions, which include the home once occupied by U.S. Sen. Roscoe Conkling, one of the most powerful political brokers in the country in the 1870s.

The Landmarks Society first needs to evaluate and stabilize both mansions, which have suffered deterioration through the years. Leaders hope to eventually create a museum and/or park at the site, using public and private investment.

A solid plan for that will be needed, but the potential of this historic area cannot be fully realized with a treatment center only a few steps away. As honorable a mission as that may be, such a use in what is arguably the most historic row of homes in the city is not in the best interest of this community.

The Roefaro administration has a tremendous opportunity here to right past wrongs.

Most recently, the city provided gap financing in the form of a \$50,000 loan from the Department of Urban and Economic Development as part of Landmarks' purchase package.

The city needs to remain pro-active. The city can work closely with the Landmarks Society to create a comprehensive park plan for this tract. Then the Landmarks Society can focus on executing a comprehensive, cohesive plan to develop, use and maintain these historic sites.

Finally, all parties should work with the Rescue Mission to recover its \$155,000 investment and locate other, more appropriate facilities to continue to serve people in need.

This needs to be a package, and leaders in this community owe it to the people of the past - and people of the future - to make sure this grand opportunity doesn't slip away.

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RUTGER PARK HISTORY

*** 1 Rutger Park:** The Italian Villa-style home was designed by Alexander Jackson Davis and built around 1854 for Utica banker John Munn. Gunmaker Samuel Remington lived here during the Civil War, and it was eventually bequeathed to Grace Episcopal Church by the late Walter Jerome Green. It was purchased for \$27,000 in 1952 by Mr. and Mrs. James Dowling of Utica.

*** 2 Rutger Park:** Bracketed Cottage Italian Villa style, it also had been owned by the Dowlings, but had deteriorated beyond repair. The owners were allowed to demolish it in 1994 on the condition they make improvements to Nos. 1 and 3. The mansion, built in 1852, was based on actual plans of the man whose writings had popularized the shift in architectural direction, landscape designer Andrew Jackson Downing. Based on a design from Downing's "Cottage Residences" book, the "Picturesque" style features included board and batten siding, brackets under the eaves and on the square tower, balconies and verandas, and varying roof lines.

*** 3 Rutger Park:** Federal Style, designed by Philip Hooker, was built in 1830 by Judge Morris Miller and later owned by his son, Rutger Bleecker Miller. It was sold to Thomas R. Walker, Utica's mayor from 1849-1850, and in 1863 to Roscoe Conkling, a Utica attorney who served as mayor, two terms in the House of Representatives and as U.S. senator from 1867 to 1881. He was one of the most powerful Republican leaders in the nation.

*** 4 Rutger Park:** It was built in 1854 for Eobert Bagg, a civil engineer

and land surveyor, who considered it an example of the best Italian architecture. It was the third of the five mansions built. It became the Swancott Home in 1955, a care facility for elderly women. It was sold to the Rescue Mission of Utica earlier this month.

*** 5 Rutger Park:** This home was built in 1889 for Thomas Kinney, a well-known civic leader and mayor of Utica in 1885 and again in 1887. It's Romanesque revival style, and was then last of the five houses to be constructed. It was purchased by the Teamsters Union in 1955, and today houses offices for Teamsters Local 182.

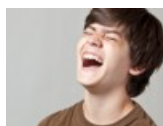
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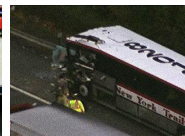
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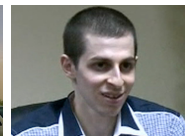
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