



Restoring Rutger Park: With sale, Landmarks Society hopes to create museums, park

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Observer-Dispatch

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UTICA — It took 34 years for the Landmarks Society of Greater Utica to realize one of its greatest quests.

On Thursday, the society finalized its purchase of the historic mansions at 1 and 3 Rutger Park, officials announced Friday at City Hall.

The society hopes to restore the 19th-century buildings – one of which was home to powerful 1870s U.S. Sen. Roscoe Conkling – to a house museum or park site. The project will take at least three years, landmarks society President Michael Bosak said.

But the immediate goal is to evaluate and then stabilize the buildings, including major roof, heating and electrical work, Bosak said.

“We did this because we strongly believe that this was absolutely the best option to protect, preserve and eventually promote these architectural and historic treasures for this and future generations,” Bosak said during the news conference.

Over the past year, landmarks society members fought in state Supreme Court along with the city of Utica and the Preservation League of New York State for upkeep of the remaining Rutger Park properties.

But Friday, they celebrated.

The pride of landmarks society members and their supporters nearly paralleled that of the early American political giants who once walked the grounds of Rutger Park.

Funding the purchase

The nonprofit preservation group spent \$325,000 to become the newest neighbor on Rutger Street. It purchased the property from the estate of Anna Dowling, and now owns the two mansions, the surrounding grounds, outbuildings and land where 2 Rutger Park once stood before it was demolished in 1994.

The society received funding from three sources:

* The Community Foundation of Herkimer & Oneida Counties provided a \$125,000 grant from the Ted and Melva Max Fund, the Bull Family Fund and the Rosamond Childs Fund. It is one of the largest grants the foundation has awarded in its 40-year history.

* The Preservation League of New York disbursed one of the first loans from its new Endangered Properties Intervention Program in the amount of \$150,000.

* The City of Utica provided gap financing in the form of a \$50,000 loan of federal funds from the Department of Urban and Economic Development.

Utica Mayor David Roefaro said he’s learned many details about Rutger Park’s history throughout the process.

“You can’t build a city by tearing things down,” Roefaro said. “You’ve got to preserve them and rebuild them.”

What led to lawsuit

WHAT'S NEXT
1 and 3 Rutger Park will not be open to the public anytime soon, landmarks society President Michael Bosak said. Here’s what’s planned:
* A report must be developed to best outline a restoration plan.
* The buildings must be stabilized and evaluated.
* They also will undergo major roof, heating and electrical work.
* Private and public dollars will be sought.
* Project will take at least three years to complete.
* The landmarks society plans to host a picnic this fall in Rutger Park.
To learn more: For more about Rutger Park, visit www.uticalandmarks.org .

The Landmarks Society was founded in 1974 partially as a response to threats of demolition of homes in the Rutger-Steuben neighborhood.

Former society President Michael Rizzo led the group for four consecutive years and pushed to purchase the homes. He resigned as president earlier this year.

Rizzo lives across the street from Rutger Park's weather-beaten homes. He was passionate and relentless in his mission to see the homes purchased by the society or at least kept up by William Dowling, executor of the estate. But that didn't happen.

Rizzo in 2007 joined the city's lawsuit on behalf of the society and personally.

"It's the darkest chapter in those properties' 150-year history, Rizzo said."

Obsessed with Rutger Park

Rizzo bluntly says he became obsessed with saving Rutger Park, but points to several key other individuals including William Hurst, attorney for the Preservation League of New York State, and former Mayor Timothy Julian, who allowed the city to fight the issue in court.

Bosak specifically recognized Rizzo and Pamela Jardieu, fundraising chairwoman for the society. He said their recognition cannot be overstated.

"These two great Uticans have been the driving forces behind this," Bosak said. Jardieu said her grandmother used to say you could achieve anything with "vision, faith and a little bit of money."

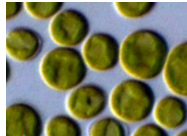

She called the Stanley Center for the Arts the "poster child" for preservation as a catalyst for economic development, and hopes Rutger Park can do the same.

"These buildings are too important to be private," she said. "They don't just tell one person's story — they tell the story of our collective past."

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Just wondering

3 years ago
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The article failed to state how the Landmarks Society plans to raise the money that will be required to pay off the \$200,000 in loans, plus interest, plus the maintenance costs on these houses, which presumably will be substantial.

The Whole Truth And Nothing But The Truth

3 years ago
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I believe when there is project as large as saving these homes, somebody will step forward and see that is done through grants, fund raising and public donation. It's good to preserve some of the area's history because it has nothing else.

Thanks

3 years ago
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Wonderful news! The Landmarks Society is to be applauded. Perhaps this will offset the recent abominations at St. Elizebeth, the corner of the Parkway and Oneida and at the Stanley where no thought was given to history or taste.

hmmmm

3 years ago
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Are they going to put up a new flashing sign on these houses like they did to the Stanley and Parkway? It seems that the people who are supposed to be in charge of restoring the past have the flashing light syndrome to the present. The marquee on the Stanley is a travesty. It is all about advertising money, not preservation. Good job with the \$20 million.

BJM
3 years ago
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Ok, now letsee if I got this correct, The Landmarks Society gots the props now.....they want to make a museum and park (in Cornhill) mebe we could do a gang-banger theme sort of a history of cornhill violence, you know dead bodies left in burned buildings that sort of thing.....will there be free parking.....it would be nice also to have a cafeteria with an outside deck so we can have our canoli while smelling the Rutger Street Gas fumes, watching the hookers in the pale moon light nd hearing the 'pop' 'pop' of the glocks.....oh, one more thing.....are these properties now OFF the tax rolls? will they get a special 'Roefaro' deal (I am assuming one of his nieces or nephews would have to be the caretaker in order for that to happen)

I know.....OWCH.....but sometimes the truth hurts. AINT IT SO DAVE

hmmmm
3 years ago
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BJM, I think you are on to something here. Perhaps we could open the Naional Crack Museum. We could apply for rediculous amounts of 'FREE' government money to get this done. The only downside is that the roads are so bad that people will have to walk there from outside the city limits to protect their vehicles. CITY HALL - LETS GET OUT HEADS OUT OF OUR A** AND FIX THE DAMN STREETS!!!! The road to nowhere leads to Utica.

eastutican
3 years ago
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apparently there are some people you cant please any time. 'BJM' and 'hmmmmm' purport to be experts on crime in Utica, specifically Corn Hill. I doubt either has walked Rutger Street. There are no gangbangers, no dead bodies, no hookers and no glocks. these are fantasies of those with a pretty bad case of stereotyping. The road to nowhere leads to the 'minds' of these commentors. Hopefully it ends there. Here is a story of positive private and governmental cooperation over a long time to preserve buildings with a heritage and the only thing these fools can do is try to score cheap points, unimaginative points, at the expense of what is happening. Perhaps all those involved should tender their apologies to 'BJM' and 'hmmmm' for trying to better things. After all, isnt it better to just complain, whine and repeat tired, old complaints from armchair citizens ?

And, again, commentors use a perfectly fine story for their own bigotted, tawdry prattle. THAT is what is not new and THAT is what makes this area hard to live in.

hmmmm
3 years ago
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In reference to eastuticans post 'And, again, commentors use a perfectly fine story for their own bigotted, tawdry prattle. THAT is what is not new and THAT is what makes this area hard to live in.' Which side of Mayor Roefaro's family are you from, or perhaps where in the city government do you work?

If a single

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dollar comes from Oneida County taxpayers for this frivolous project, there will be a revolt within the Republican Party. There is no money available for this project. Its time to draw the line.

Thomas Petronio

3 years ago

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Great news to save such an historic area. All cities have problems with guns and drugs the feds need to end the war and fund the cleanup of innercities.

Former Resident

3 years ago

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Good for the Landmark Society! They have been working on ways to save these buildings for a long time. I hope it works out the way they thought it would.

Proud Utican

3 years ago

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This is exactly what our city needs. Don't listen to small-minded people who only see failure because that is all they have ever achieved in their lives.

You have done a wonderful thing. Good job Landmarks Society! something postive in to negative

3 years ago

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No matter how some people will try to improve things for others, there will always be the complainers. Will these complainers step up to the plate and give a better solution? Or to possibly help volunteer their time or energy if needed. Probably not, they rather sit back and just state all the wrong reasons and the alternative motives at that the ones are doing something have. They'll be the first with the 'rocks and sticks', that will be for sure. Too bad it took so long to realize how we do have these places worth saving. It's not something we only get to see on television or books. We have living history in 'our own backyard.' 'Keep Moving Forward!!'

proud utican

3 years ago

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Great job to landmarks and the roefaro team. lets ignore these hateful negative poasters and continue moving our city forward.we can make it happen.

nitchawk64

3 years ago

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GREAT JOB Landmarks Society !!!! As a genealogist, and Utican, with an ancestor that worked with Roscoe Conkling I am proud and relieved to see these wonderful edifices finally get the restoration that they so desperately need. Without the history you just have a bunch of stories. I think that the citizens should get off their soap boxes, stop whinning and start cleaning up the city. It only takes a little bit from each one of us to make this city a better place to live.

I applaude your accomplishments Landmarks Society !!!!

Joey B.

3 years ago

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Roefaro said "You can't build a city by tearing things down." Isn't his administration like a tornado in a trailer park. Which Roefaro relative will be living in 1 Rutger Park when it's done.

Dan Mc Former Utica Resident

3 years ago

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Congratulations to the Landmark Society on a great job. They stepped up and took a long hard stand and won. Yes, Rutger Street may not be a key destination now but with some work it will be.

Back in 1978 when they wanted to tear down Union Station, because of the run down condition, I was one of many that fought to preserve it. Look at the building now. With some out of the box thinking the area around the train station could become an urban village with shops and condos and lofts.

Urban redevelopment does not mean coming into an area and tearing down everything like the did in the 1960's in Utica. Rutger Street can be redeveloped and with good community support it too could be come a lively historic area.

Historic tourism is a reality and very profitable to a community in many ways. Utica and the Mohawk Valley has the potential to be a great historic tourist area and can be saved one building at a time.

Yet, I am still amazed at all the negativity and hostility that some residents left in Utica have for the city. No mater what is done and tried it is never good enough for them. It is easier just to sit and complain. To these people I would ask them to volunteer a few hours at the Landmark Society and make Utica a good place to visit and a better place to call home.

Just Asking

3 years ago

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There are two follow up questions I wish Renee Gamela had asked: 1) Has the City of Utica already committed additional money to the project, above and beyond the \$50,000 figure cited, and if so, what amounts? 2) Has Mike Rizzo been promised or will he seek consulting contracts in connection with this project, and if so, what dollar amounts?

Bankruptcy Coming

3 years ago

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The Historical Society will need lots and lots of money to do anything with these homes. The question is going to be pave the streets or decorate the houses? Congressman Arcuri has already stated that he will not support putting Federal Funds into these homes since they cannot stand on their own for tourism purposes. By the way, isnt this right down the street from the Rescue Mission and a drug rehab facility? Shootings take place her quite often as well.

Landmarks Charter member

3 years ago

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When I came to Utica to interview for a job back in the early 70s, the young clerk at the old Holiday Inn next door to the Stanley asked in disbelief, 'Why would you want to move HERE?' This attitude is so old, so tiresome and - as expressed by some of the current commentators - so mean-spirited.

As for criticizing the Stanley marquee, I confess I'm not convinced, either. It's not original, but is that all you can say about this fabulous restoration and improvement project? And, oh, by the way, did you contribute anything to the Stanley restoration fund-raising? If you do, you're entitled to a complaint; if not, well, it's like people who don't vote and then whine about politicians. Anyway, what does it have to with Rutger Park?

Regarding Cornhill and the inner city in general, anyone who has worked there for any length of time has seen urban decay, met some real low-lives, observed illegal street commerce, and even heard the sound of gunfire in broad daylight. But there are countless solid citizens in the inner city as well, who work hard, maintain their properties, and try to bring their children up right. Don't tar these people with the same brush you use to criticize the bad actors.

As for financing the restoration of Rutger Park, I expect that Landmarks will do it the same way other groups have: private donations of all sizes, government and foundation grants, fund-raising events, etc. Financing a big project like this can be compared to eating an elephant; you take many bites and chew each one thoroughly.

Congratulations and thanks to the Community Foundation for taking the lead with a \$125,000 grant (not a loan). Interesting to note that it is reported to be their largest single grant to date. The same was true when they gave \$100,000 to the Oneida County Historical Society for their building restoration some years ago. It's heartening to see the CF's ongoing commitment to preserving the history and heritage of Utica and the Mohawk Valley.

Good work, Landmarks!

Lou Kritski

3 years ago

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Maybe they can fill the building with low income tenants to help with maintainance costs. I mean, poor people won't destroy the building, right? It should never have to be cleaned and rats and roaches won't be a problem ever...

Vicky

3 years ago
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As a former Utican, I congratulate the Landmarks Society. I remember admiring the buildings in Rutger Park, many, many years ago as I walked to and from Utica Free Academy. This location is worth preserving not only for its history but for its beauty.

Concerned Citizen

3 years ago
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OK. We get the point, historic preservation appeals to many people. That was the same line that was sold to us in the development of the Hotel Utica and all too many other projects. My question is a simple one. What does the City of Utica expect this project to cost in City of Utica taxpayer dollars, CDBG included? Aren't we entitled to know before hand. Ms. Gamela, please ask the question.

Wish I was Former Utican

3 years ago
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Its easy to congratulate the Historical Society when you live out of town. The City does not need anymore parks. It needs less parks.

Oh and about the Stanley, the Marquee looks like crap and everyone knows it. Why can't the members of the Historical Society ever admit that they drop the ball or make politically motivated decisions? Oh thanks for protetcting downtown by approving the Antiques Plus Sign. You guys did a great job on that.

With the high cost

3 years ago
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of heating oil, gasoline and groceries, it is agonizing to see our government throw our money behind a project that will serve no useful purpose. Yes the buildings will be preserved, but why and at what cost? Where does it end? Catalyst for economic development? How? Too many questions here that need to be asked. If this can be done completely with private funds, then fantastic, but if not, well it is just more frivolous spending that serves only a small segment of our society. We will be watching.

Fed Up
3 years ago
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Too bad that all the energy that is going to be spent on restoring fallen down, rotten wood and out dated electrical wiring and heating could have been spent on brining new business into this area so people can work and support their families. Is there any street in Utica that doesn't have pot holes? If so, please let us know where such a street is as I haven't found one yet.

Sam
3 years ago
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The main question has to be, 'What will the upkeep cost'? Where is the money going to come from to keep the place up and pay the gas/electric bill?

Paul Crumrine
3 years ago
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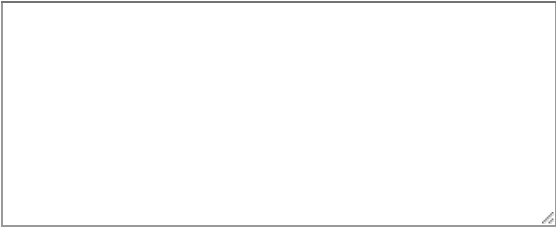
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I left the area many years ago but saw these buildings on a visit 3 years ago on a visit. If the Society can only spend the money needed to stabilize and secure the buildings for the next several years while more fundraising and planning goes on it will be worth it. The cost of renovation will be greater than the purchase price, but there are no doubt still a few deep pockets in and NEAR Utica that weren't tapped for the Stanley (ex. lots of doctors) - maybe they just haven't been asked to chip in. a history buff from remsen

3 years ago
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Report Abuse

Congratulations to the Landmark Society for a great accomplishment!! I wish them well with the project.

nicknack
3 years ago
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i'm sure they will rent them out for events and parties and hold annual fundraisers. since they will be museums/tours i am sure there will be a fee or donation. all of this will help pay the operating and maintenance costs.

nicknack
3 years ago
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the OD shouldn't let people blog on this site as it really makes utica look bad. you people are very sad.

nicknack
3 years ago
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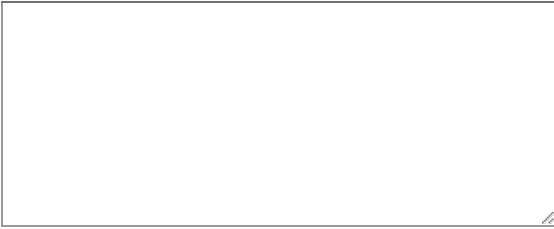


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i think the stanely looks great

nicknack
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the rescue mission and rehab center create no problems you ignorant fools and what do these projects have to do with street paving!
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