

NIAGARA FALLS HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION
BRETT DOSTER, CHAIRMAN
KRISTIAN RUGGIERO, VICE-CHAIRMAN

REGULAR MEETING
Minutes for May 2, 2024

A regular meeting of the City of Niagara Falls Historic Preservation Commission was held on Thursday, May 3, 2024, at 6 p.m. in the Council Chambers, City Hall, 745 Main Street, Niagara Falls, N.Y.

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m.

CALL TO ORDER & ROLL CALL

COMMISSION MEMBERS PRESENT:

Brett Doster, Chairman
Kristian Ruggiero, Vice Chairman
Jessica Collins
Jessica Berry
Georgia Robinson-Bradberry
Noah Munoz

STAFF PRESENT:
Mike Pesarchick, Planner II/HPS

ABSENT MEMBERS:

Saladin Allah

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited and a moment of silence was observed.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA — FOR THIS MEETING

A motion to approve the agenda was made by **MR. RUGGIERO** and seconded by **MS. ROBINSON-BRADBERRY**.

MOTION APPROVED

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A motion to approve the minutes from the regular meeting held March 7, 2024 was made by **MR. RUGGIERO** and seconded by **MS. BERRY**

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Brett Doster	YES
Kristian Ruggiero	YES
Jessica Berry	YES
Georgia Robinson-Bradberry	YES
Jessica Collins	YES

Mr. Munoz arrived to the meeting.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION *(All Non-Agenda Topics)*

There was no public participation.

ACTION ITEMS

1. Historic Preservation Commission Recommendation: to send a letter to Empire State Development regarding the redevelopment of 360 Rainbow Boulevard and to encourage nomination to the State and National Register of Historic Places.

Mr. Pesarchick said that the Director of Planning recommended holding off on sending the letter to make sure the correct person will receive it. He also said that it was his understanding that the project grant had not finalized, so it was not close to starting. . Mr. Pesarchick said that The Niagara Gazette reported that redevelopment was going to be paid for with a Restore New York Grant.

Mr. Doster asked how the story broke. Mr. Pesarchick said he did not know if it was at the USA Niagara meeting or if there was a press release.

Mr. Doster asked if the letter would go to the subject property's addresses, 350 Rainbow Boulevard, the Niagara County Center for Economic Development, Empire State Development, Western New York and the City Council that recommends the grant.

Mr. Doster asked if the Council deliberated about the agenda or if they postponed it. Mr. Pesarchick said he did not see those minutes. Mr. Ruggiero noted that he was there and it was "quite a meeting."

Mr. Doster asked if everyone had a chance to read the agenda. Ms. Berry asked if the agenda was in the packet. Mr. Pesarchick said it was not and apologized. Ms. Berry responded that she had not read it.

Mr. Doster said the building is the [former] Occidental Chemical Headquarters, the "Glass Cube." Mr. Pesarchick corrected Mr. Doster and said the nickname was the "Flash Cube." Mr. Doster said he believed the building is 50 years old and was built in 1971 by Cannon Design. The Cannon Family was local to Niagara Falls until they relocated their headquarters to Grand Island.

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Mr. Doster said that 360 Rainbow Boulevard has a “double skin façade system” which was the first of its kind and works like a mini greenhouse. In the summer the sun shines into the layers of glass, heating the air it rises out and pulls cool air up from below and uses that to cool the building and in the winter it heats itself. Mr. Doster reiterated that the design was ahead of its time.

Mr. Doster said that there were louvers in the windows. When Occidental Chemical emptied the building, the louvers either failed or were removed, so the system does not function correctly and causes condensation between the glass. He said the Gazette article mentioned minimal details about the proposed project and new glass.

Mr. Doster said that the proposed letter will explain the importance of this building because of the double skin façade system and it being the only one like it in this region. Ms. Berry asked if there are more in the world. Mr. Doster answered yes, but there were very few, and then continued that 360 Rainbow Boulevard is eligible for Local, National and State Historic Register which can open it up for tax credits to improve the building by offering a hand of support. Mr. Doster stated he also believed a class at the University of Waterloo is detailing the history of the building and how the site works.

Mr. Doster then asked if the Commission wanted to authorize Mr. Pesarchick to send the letter in light of what Mr. Forma requested. Ms. Berry said to wait for Mr. Forma and Mr. Pesarchick said Mr. Forma wants to check the status of the project, as well as confirm the actual person to send the letter to because he has not heard of anything happening soon.

Mr. Doster replied it is realized that Historic Preservation is now at a point where things that look very modern can be considered historic and the letter is not pushing the landmark it is just stating the importance of the building.

Ms. Berry asked if Empire State Development knew what their responsibilities are to express to the Counsel and others. Mr. Doster responded that this is the impetus of the letter, stating this building is eligible for state and federal historic tax credits because of what it is.

Mr. Ruggiero said this is still a relatively new process, because the Commission only had The Turtle for reference. He asked if it was the same or different with the recommendations. Mr. Doster replied that The Turtle was a formal Local Landmark recommendation. This is just a letter from the Historic Preservation Commission saying the building is very important, here is why it is important, it has historic tax credits available and the Historic Preservation Commission are here as a resource to you. Mr. Ruggiero asked if that would be towards the City Counsel and towards the building owner. Mr. Doster replied he thought the IDA owned the building.

Mr. Ruggiero stated they have been doing some work in the building, at one time the World Weather Center wanted to use 360 Rainbow Boulevard and then it was occupied by an amusement company for a golf simulator and arcade. Mr. Doster asked if that is what it is being

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used for. Mr. Pesarchick responded that he thought it was a food court. Mr. Ruggiero replied Empire State Development doesn't actually own the building, they are just tenants.

Mr. Ruggiero stated this is just an attempt to say, "We think you can make this work with some funds, the Niagara Falls Historic Preservation Commission can be a resource and funds may become available to you."

Mr. Doster said that people are not aware of what the building is and the letter addresses this and lets them know it is a commodity. Mr. Ruggiero asked if they showed interest in historic designation and thought we would be a good resource. Mr. Doster answered yes.

Mr. Ruggiero asked if getting the letter out or would change anything or would waiting change some things, and would extending the offer to Empire State Development whether there is going to be movement on it in the near future. Mr. Pesarchick said the Planning Department has not seen anything on this project and haven't completed the grant yet, so it is undetermined whether or not there is going to be a project.

Mr. Doster stated that this is a unique building. Ms. Berry asked if there was an article relating to this. Mr. Doster replied the article only states that the windows will be replaced, and they need the money through the grant to figure out the design.

Mr. Ruggiero asked could there be something that helped the process if they are on the verge and not knowing which way it is going to go. Mr. Doster answered yes, they're looking for funding for historic tax credits which The City of Niagara Falls doesn't have, however; the National and State Historic Registers do, and with this condition they will give you the money because they are far less restrictive than the City's land marking process. When a project uses Federal or State money, work has to be done per the Secretary of the Interior standards.

Mr. Berry asked if the letter should be sent. Mr. Doster replied they should vote on it.

Mr. Ruggiero then asked if there was a timeline that Mr. Forma was suggesting, or to just wait and see. Mr. Pesarchick replied that his understanding was that he asked you to postpone it a month, refine the letter, send it out to the right place and then vote again next month on it. Mr. Ruggiero asked if Mr. Pesarchick meant the correct address, Mr. Pesarchick replied the correct owner, whether it is Empire State Development, USA Niagara or whomever. Ms. Berry stated she thought the owner was affiliated with the golf tenant's family. Mr. Pesarchick replied currently the owner is listed as the IDA. Mr. Doster asked Ms. Berry if she was thinking of Mr. Parlato. She replied yes. Mr. Doster answered Mr. Parlato gave it up in tax abatement.

Mr. Doster said the owner listed on the Niagara County Property Viewer is the IDA. Mr. Ruggiero stated he would be happy to inquire about it.

Ms. Berry asked if there is a motion to move forward, the letter doesn't have to go out tomorrow, it can be held for time and corrections, correct. Mr. Pesarchick and Mr. Doster replied simultaneously, yes. Mr. Doster responded that all parties listed on the letter are going to be

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involved, regardless of who owns the building. The article was silent on who initiated the project, just stating The IDA was aiding.

MR. DOSTER asked for a motion to approve the Historic Preservation Commission recommendation to send a letter to Empire State Development regarding the redevelopment of 360 Rainbow Boulevard and to encourage nomination to the State and National Register of Historic Places.

Motion to approve the recommendation, with conditions to send the letter after the owner was confirmed, to send it within two months regardless of the confirmation of the owner, and that Mr. Pesarchick gave updates to the Commission, was made by **MR. DOSTER** and seconded by **MR. RUGGIERO**

Brett Doster	YES
Kristian Ruggiero	YES
Georgia Robinson-Bradberry	YES
Noah Munoz	YES
Jessica Berry	YES
Jessica Collins	YES

MOTION: UNANIMOUSLY APPROVED

After the Motion, the Commission further discussed the owners of 360 Rainbow Boulevard and the importance of the proper repairs for the glass to keep the integrity of the building functioning as designed. Mr. Doster also related a personal story of his experience with the building.

OLD BUSINESS

1. Tatler Club: Update on Tatler Club (6 4th Street) nomination to State and National Registers of Historic Places.

Mr. Pesarchick stated that the Planning Department received a letter last week that the Tatler Club had officially been listed on the State Register of Historic Places and was moving towards a National Historic Register appointment. The Commission was pleased at this news.

NEW BUSINESS

1. CLG Grant: Discussion of CLG Grant cycle which closes on May 31.

Mr. Pesarchick said the State Historic Preservation Conference in Rochester from April 15th – 17th, 2024 was very enlightening. There was a lot of information that the Commission can take to

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improve our policy, both with municipal training and for the public training as well. The CLG grant cycle closes May 31st. Mr. Forma wants to speak to the grant writer next week because there are a lot of grants available that need ideas to move forward.

Mr. Pesarchick quoted a conference speaker: “Preservation policy without outreach is no policy at all”. which is what is extremely lacking in the City of Niagara Falls, both with the experiences on The Turtle process and learning from other municipalities, a very successful initial education campaigns step was to simply send out mailers to everyone on the national and local Historic Register explaining what the designation means and who the City’s preservation commissioners are.

Mr. Pesarchick said that the Historic Preservation Commission can use a CLG grant to pay for postcards or mailers, just to reintroduce ourselves and the preservation legislation. The postcards are approximately \$0.89 a postcard and a designer would also be needed, unless anyone wanted to design something who has experience in design.

Mr. Ruggiero agreed with Mr. Pesarchick and Ms. Berry stated that people have no idea of what preservation means and how it is going to affect them. The hope is to get all of the block clubs to meet to get the public’s standpoint.

Mr. Doster asked which club it would be. Ms. Berry responded that the block club is a conglomerate of Hyde Park, Michigan and up to the golf course. Mr. Pesarchick agreed that would be wonderful to have a public standpoint because he felt that, during The Turtle preservation process, public knew little about preservation. He also stated that the PBN offers municipal trainings that could get the public to come to a formal session just to have people understand exactly what the Niagara Falls Historic Preservation Commission does.

Mr. Pesarchick and Mr. Doster discussed whether or not a motion was needed to look up and apply for grants. It was decided that Mr. Pesarchick would be authorized as the Preservation Specialist and would directly reach out to apply for a grant as well as an extension from the new SHPO CLG Coordinator Francis Stern

MR. DOSTER asked for a motion to approve the Planning Department to direct a representative to investigate and apply for CLG grants for mailers to local and national landmarks and a public education campaign.

Motion to approve the recommendation was made by **MR. DOSTER** and seconded by **MS. ROBINSON-BRADBERRY**.

Brett Doster	YES
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Georgia Robinson-Bradberry	YES

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Noah Munoz	YES
Jessica Berry	YES
Jessica Collins	YES

MOTION: UNANIMOUSLY APPROVED.

2. Public Education Campaign: Discussion of potential public education campaign on historic preservation efforts in the City.

Mr. Pesarchick stated that it is heavily suggested that the public education campaigns had a lot of success downstate with Instagram, showcasing buildings and historic figures. He said there is social media training he had attended one before and would like to start a social media presence online. Mr. Pesarchick noted that partnering with Heritage Corridors or USA Niagara would be beneficial, especially for getting public opinion, however, some of the other social media bodies out there would be a lot of work to manage properly and cautioned that if everyone involved has access for management of the website is not such a good idea.

Ms. Collins said there is really not much to look into online for the City of Niagara Falls Historic Preservation commission, the old website comes up and younger people only use social media. Mr. Pesarchick also said Instagram would go a long way towards getting the public knowledge and asked if this is something the commission would like to start looking into.

Mr. Doster asked what a partnership with Heritage Corridor and USA Niagara would look like. Mr. Pesarchick replied they would share our posts on their page and we would share theirs, invite people or have guest posts to establish our initial footprint. He also stated that Instagram was not mainstream in 2001, the law was not written for this kind of thing and because the Historic Preservation commission represents the City it is important that the law and guidelines be clear because they were were a government body.

Mr. Ruggiero said maybe only one or two people only having access. Mr. Doster asked if the mayor still wanted control over the official website. Mr. Pesarchick replied he did not know and it would be address when Mr. Forma has his weekly meeting with the mayor. He also stated it is a good idea to have an online presence again and is also unsure if the Public Information Officer would have to approve posts ahead of time. Mr. Doster agreed that it is worth a conversation.

Mr. Pesarchick said preservation should be fun and learned at the Conference that in Poughkeepsie they would work with building owners to do little video tours for the owner to get recognition and then they have a sense of pride.

PLANNING AND HISTORIAN REPORT (Communications)

1. NYS Preservation Conference: Discussion and review of material covered at the NYS Historic Preservation Conference held in Rochester on April 15-17.

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Mr. Pesarchick said the Preservation Buffalo Niagara awards are at the end of the month and if anyone is interested in going it is \$80.00 to attend. The money goes back to PBN. He also said that two Niagara Falls projects are on the awards list, but he was unsure which ones.

OTHER ITEMS

Mr. Pesarchick said that 422 Cedar was one of the contributing structures [to the Park Place Historic District] that was placed on the demolition list and is currently being sold to a new owner who is going to extensively rehab the building. The new owner is aware this is a historic building and has some internal tax obligations to take care of, however, it is in the final stages of the purchase process with an intent to rent out the building as housing. Mr. Pesarchick also said he knows he needs to come to the Historic Preservation Commission for a Certificate of Appropriateness.

Mr. Doster asked if he is experienced with this scope of work. Mr. Pesarchick replied that the new owner showed The Planning department what he has already done in Niagara Falls, has a good track record, with a team, money and is aware of everything involved to rehabilitate this building.

Mr. Doster asked if the owner was given the preservation law. Mr. Pesarchick answered they spoke at length and understands that he needs to come to the Historic Preservation Commission for this building. Mr. Pesarchick also said to add no vinyl siding. Mr. Doster stated it was already there because people do not like painting year after year for upkeep so they just put vinyl up because of maintenance free siding.

Mr. Pesarchick stated that the Planning Department has a new clerk and we are a full department again. Her name is Taralynn and has been her about 4 weeks. The next minutes you see will be done by her and she will need to learn the voices. Maybe expect that some names will be off.

Mr. Pesarchick also said that the City sold 2010 Main Street district to NORLIC and that is the first of the Main Street properties to be taken over by NORLIC for stabilization, it is one of the former Blue Cardinal properties and it is unknown their full extent of the rehab, however, they will not be owning it forever. Mr. Munoz corrected Mr. Pesarchick and said it was not one of the Blue Cardinal properties. It was privately sold with them listed as the buying agent.

Mr. Doster asked if NORLIC was talking to Bank on Buffalo about the rest of properties. Mr. Pesarchick replied he did not know and if discussions have happened he was not privy to them, however, will find out for the next meeting. Mr. Doster asked if they know what was paid for it. Mr. Munoz replied \$40,000, and that it is part of public knowledge. Mr. Doster stated that it is worrisome that Bank on Buffalo may attach a hefty price on the other buildings to try and recoup losses and move on.

Mr. Pesarchick asked if anyone had any questions. There were no questions.

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Mr. Doster asked for a motion to adjourn.

ADJOURNMENT

A motion to adjourn was made by **MR. DOSTER** and seconded by **MR. MUNOZ**.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:47 p.m.