

Richardson Center Corporation

By Gary Phillips

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What is the agency's website and contact information?

Website: <http://www.richardson-olmsted.com/>

Contact Information: Monica Pellegrino Faix, the Richardson Center Corporation's (RCC) Project Coordinator, may be contacted via mail at c/o The Buffalo News, One News Plaza, P.O. Box 100, Buffalo, New York 14240; phone (716) 849-6070; fax (716) 849-4554; or email monica@richardson-olmsted.com.¹

What is the mission of the agency?

The mission of the RCC is to rehabilitate the Richardson Olmsted Complex, which is located in the City of Buffalo. Generally, the RCC "envision[s] the rehabilitation of the National Historic Landmark H. H. Richardson Complex (the former Buffalo State Asylum for the Insane), comprised of the H. H. Richardson-designed buildings and Frederick Law Olmsted-designed grounds, to be the crowning jewel of a mixed-use, multi-purpose civic campus of public and private activities." Additionally, the RCC plans to create "a nationally significant, 21st century, economically self-sustaining and environmentally sound Richardson Complex as a place for architectural, educational, cultural, and recreational activities for the benefit of the residents of and visitors to the Richardson Community, the Museum District, the Elmwood Village, and the entire Buffalo Niagara Region."²

Who runs the agency?

The RCC is a not for profit 501(c)(3) organization. Accordingly, it is run by its Board of Directors:

1. *Stanford Lipsey* (Chairman), Publisher, The Buffalo News
2. *Howard Zemsky* (Vice Chairman), President, Taurus Capital Partners, LLC
3. *Christopher Greene* (Secretary), Partner, Damon & Morey, LLP
4. *Paul Hojnacki* (Treasurer), President, Curtis Screw Company
5. *Carol Ash*, Commissioner, NYS Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation
6. *Clinton Brown*, President, Clinton Brown Co. Architecture, PC
7. *Paul Ciminelli*, President & CEO, Ciminelli Development Company
8. *Eva Hassett*, Clover Management

9. *Dr. Muriel Howard*, President, Buffalo State College
10. *Richard Tobe*, Buffalo Resident³

How are the directors appointed?

The Board of the RCC was appointed in July, 2006 by then New York State Governor George Pataki.⁴ The Board has bylaws and the Directors are elected on an annual basis.⁵

How is the agency staffed?

The RCC currently has only one staff member, Monica Pellegrino Faix, who is the Project Coordinator.⁶

How is the agency funded?

1. Original Funding—Former New York State Governor George Pataki dedicated \$100 million in funds to rehabilitate the Richardson Complex. “Of the \$100 million, some of the funding was used to complete two other institutions; \$16.5 million was used to build the new Burchfield Penney Art Center and \$7 million was allocated to the Frank Lloyd Wright Darwin Martin House Visitor Center. Of the remaining \$76.5 million, \$20 million will go towards the Architecture and Visitor Center which will be located in the Richardson Complex.”⁷
2. Annual New York State Budgeting—The funds that the RCC uses are located within the State University of New York budget. The portion of the \$76.5 million fund that remains after yearly spending is re-approved on an annual basis. There is no indication that the allocation will be diverted.⁸
3. RCC Access to Fund—The RCC accesses the allocated funds through Empire State Development,⁹ which is “New York State’s lead economic development agency.”¹⁰ Specifically, the RCC applies to ESD for grants for specific projects. If approved by the ESD, the RCC spends funds on the specific project.¹¹

What are some examples of the agency’s projects?

1. Urban Land Institute Advisory Report—In May 2007, the RCC invited the Urban land institute to study the Richardson Complex and to issue recommendations regarding its reuse.¹²
2. Historic Structures Report—In August 2007, the RCC retained Goody Clancy, an architecture and engineering firm “to provide detailed documentary, graphic, and physical information about the property’s history and existing condition and serve as a guide for rehabilitation as plans for reuse proceed.”¹³
3. Cultural Landscape Report—The RCC utilized the services of Heritage Landscapes, Preservation Landscape Architects & Planners, who prepared the Cultural Landscape Report—“the principal tool to document the history, significance and preservation treatment of the historic landscape designed by Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux in 1871.”¹⁴
4. Stabilization—The RCC has spent funds to stabilize the Richardson Complex by repairing roof leaks, shoring up vulnerable areas, and upgrading security and alarm systems.¹⁵
5. Master Plan—The RCC is developing a Master Plan to “assess the Richardson Olmsted buildings and site, adjacent neighborhoods and, with a public process,

create a plan for long term development of the historic buildings and grounds.” This process will take place throughout 2008 and conclude with the final report in early April 2009.

6. Architecture & Visitor Center—The RCC is planning to build an Architecture & Visitor Center, which will permit the public to see the Richardson Complex itself, display how psychiatric patients used to live, and provide information and direction to the architectural and cultural assets of the Buffalo Niagara Region. The RCC retained Ralph Appelbaum Associates to develop a Visualized Concept Study, which will be used proceed with design plans for the Architecture & Visitor Center.¹⁶ The Study should be complete in November 2008.¹⁷ Approximately \$20 million will go towards the Architecture and Visitor Center.¹⁸

How is the agency working with its neighbors?

The Richardson Complex is located near Buffalo State College and the Buffalo Psychiatric Center, which does not currently plan to move. The RCC is planning with both of its institutional neighbors: it is working with the Buffalo Psychiatric Center on parking, circulation, and aesthetic issues; and it is discussing with Buffalo State College possible uses by the College of the Complex.¹⁹

How does the agency measure its success?

One of the measures of success as defined by the RCC is to develop a realistic Master Plan for the Richardson Complex that is “embraced and accepted” by the community. Also, the RCC has outlined a Baseline Plan, which is the minimum piece of the Master Plan needed to realize success. The Baseline Plan includes:

1. Rationalizing the Richardson Complex—making the entire site a cohesive space with parking, access, and circulation that makes sense.
2. Landscape Plan—making the physical and natural environmental aspects of the site aesthetically pleasing.
3. Stabilization—ensuring that the buildings are structurally sound.
4. Master Plan–Architecture & Visitor Center Interface—ensuring that the Architecture & Visitor Center fits in with the Master Plan.
5. Adaptive Reuse—ensuring that the buildings within the Richardson Complex are reused.
6. Public Access—ensuring that the public has access to the Richardson Complex.²⁰

How does the agency report to the public?

The RCC reports to the public via public meetings.²¹

How can I contribute input to the agency’s decisions?

The RCC actively solicits input from the community at-large through its website. Indeed, the RCC welcomes the public’s input “now, at the next public meeting, and throughout the planning process.” Comments may be directed to comments@richardson-olmsted.com. At this time, the RCC is asking for the public’s reaction to the following questions:

1. “What will make the master plan a success?”
2. “How can we best involve the public in the planning process?”

3. “What important community issues need to be addressed by the plan?”
4. “What types of uses would you like to see on the complex?”
5. “What are your suggestions for short term and long term uses at the site?”
6. “What types of uses would bring people to the complex?”²²

Can I attend the agency’s meetings?

Yes. Members of the public can attend public meetings of the RCC. “The next public meeting will be in January, 2009 and provide an opportunity to review the master plan alternatives.”²³

How do I learn more about this agency?

The RCC’s website—<http://www.richardson-olmsted.com/>—is a fantastic resource to learn more about the RCC. Particularly informative, the “Reports” webpage of the RCC’s website provides links to copies of the “Historic Structures Report,” the “Cultural Landscape Report,” and the “Urban Land Institute Advisory Panel Final Report.” These reports detail the history, cultural significance, and proposed recommendations regarding the reuse of the Richardson Complex.²⁴ Additionally, members of the public may join the RCC’s mailing list to stay apprised of developments by signing up at <http://www.richardson-olmsted.com/contact.php>.²⁵

What community groups are interested or involved in this agency’s work?

At this time, and “[a]s part of the master plan [of the RCC], a Community Advisory Group has been formed and includes representatives from the adjacent neighborhoods, business districts, cultural institutions, Buffalo Psychiatric Center, Buffalo State College and historic preservation.” The Community Advisory Group has been tasked to:

1. “Advise the RCC regarding community values related to the Richardson Olmsted Complex Master Plan.”
2. “Facilitate the process of broad public engagement throughout the planning process. This includes convening of the next three large public meetings as well as routine Community Advisory Group meetings.”
3. “Review the Master Plan products as they are produced, with public comments.”²⁶

What are the biggest issues that the agency is confronting?

One issue that the RCC faces concerns coordinating and working with Buffalo State College and the Buffalo Psychiatric Center. Another issue is obtaining more money. Once the Master Plan is finished the RCC should have a better idea how much money is needed and will then lobby for and fundraise money to achieve its goals. Additionally, there are questions regarding the reuse of the Richardson Complex. The RCC has observed that the Richardson Center “does not easily lend itself to reuse” and that “[t]he economics of making the complex viable will be challenging, but that is one of the jobs of the master planning team.”²⁷ When reusing the Richardson Complex, however, it might cost less to have any potential reuse be similar to the original function.²⁸

How is the agency considering environmental issues?

The RCC wants to develop the Richardson Complex in an environmentally sound manner consistent with its historic character as an Olmsted site. However, since the RCC is only

at the planning stages it is waiting for its Master Plan to be complete before considering specific environmental building certification.²⁹

¹ <http://www.richardson-olmsted.com/contact.php>.

² <http://www.richardson-olmsted.com/about.php>.

³ <http://www.richardson-olmsted.com/about.php>.

⁴ <http://www.richardson-olmsted.com/project.php>.

⁵ Interview by Gary Phillips of Monica Pellegrino Faix, Project Coordinator, Richardson Center Corporation (Sept. 24, 2008).

⁶ Interview by Gary Phillips of Monica Pellegrino Faix, Project Coordinator, Richardson Center Corporation (Sept. 24, 2008).

⁷ <http://www.richardson-olmsted.com/projectFund.php>.

⁸ Interview by Gary Phillips of Monica Pellegrino Faix, Project Coordinator, Richardson Center Corporation (Sept. 24, 2008).

⁹ Interview by Gary Phillips of Monica Pellegrino Faix, Project Coordinator, Richardson Center Corporation (Sept. 24, 2008).

¹⁰ http://www.empire.state.ny.us/Contacts_and_About_Us/default.asp.

¹¹ Interview by Gary Phillips of Monica Pellegrino Faix, Project Coordinator, Richardson Center Corporation (Sept. 24, 2008).

¹² <http://www.richardson-olmsted.com/projectULI.php>.

¹³ <http://www.richardson-olmsted.com/projectHSR.php>.

¹⁴ <http://www.richardson-olmsted.com/projectHSR.php>.

¹⁵ <http://www.richardson-olmsted.com/projectStabili.php>.

¹⁶ <http://www.richardson-olmsted.com/projectArch.php>.

¹⁷ <http://www.richardson-olmsted.com/projectNext.php>.

¹⁸ <http://www.richardson-olmsted.com/projectFund.php>.

¹⁹ Interview by Gary Phillips of Monica Pellegrino Faix, Project Coordinator, Richardson Center Corporation (Sept. 24, 2008).

²⁰ Interview by Gary Phillips of Monica Pellegrino Faix, Project Coordinator, Richardson Center Corporation (Sept. 24, 2008).

²¹ <http://www.richardson-olmsted.com/aboutFAQ.php>.

²² <http://www.richardson-olmsted.com/community.php>.

²³ <http://www.richardson-olmsted.com/communityNext.php>.

²⁴ <http://www.richardson-olmsted.com/documentsReports.php>.

²⁵ <http://www.richardson-olmsted.com/contact.php>.

²⁶ <http://www.richardson-olmsted.com/community.php>.

²⁷ Interview by Gary Phillips of Monica Pellegrino Faix, Project Coordinator, Richardson Center Corporation (Sept. 24, 2008).

²⁸ <http://cfb.bfn.org/tt/asb/asbury.html>.

²⁹ Interview by Gary Phillips of Monica Pellegrino Faix, Project Coordinator, Richardson Center Corporation (Sept. 24, 2008).