

# The Richardson Olmsted Complex

Buffalo, NY



Master Plan  
August 2009



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*This booklet is based on a Master Plan created by  
Chan Krieger Steniewicz, Architecture & Urban Design, Cambridge MA.*

# The Richardson Olmsted Complex

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**T**he Richardson Olmsted Complex, or the Buffalo State Asylum for the Insane, as it was originally called, started construction in 1870 and was completed almost 20 years later.

It was a state-of-the-art facility when it was built, incorporating the most modern ideas in psychiatric treatment by Doctor Thomas Kirkbride. The design of the buildings by noted American architect H. H. Richardson as well as the grounds, designed by famed landscape designers Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux, were intended to provide restorative and humane treatment of mental illness.

These notable creators partnered to establish a Buffalo icon. At the time Richardson was commissioned to design the complex he was still relatively unknown, but he was later to become the first American architect to achieve international fame. The complex was ultimately the largest building of his career and the first to display his characteristic style - what came to be known as Richardsonian Romanesque – and is internationally regarded as one of the best examples of its kind. Among many others, his genius also yielded the New York State Capital, the Albany City Hall, Trinity Church in Boston, and the Glessner House in Chicago. Olmsted, Vaux and Co. shaped the civic life of Buffalo through the design of the interconnected park and parkway system.

Olmsted contributed to the American landscape with the U.S. Capital Grounds, New York’s Central Park, and the Niagara Falls Reservation.

This historic former mental hospital, with its signature Gothic towers, is part of Buffalo’s reputation as an architectural powerhouse. Internationally regarded as a treasure, the buildings and grounds will be rehabilitated as a civic campus of public and private activities.

Rehabilitating the H.H. Richardson designed buildings, creating an Architecture and Visitor Center and reviving the Olmsted and Vaux landscape of the original Buffalo State Asylum for the Insane is more than just saving an historic landmark. It will facilitate and spur tourism, particularly for architectural and cultural tourists who spend a great deal more money and time than the average visitor in the area, thereby generating significant economic spin-off to benefit Buffalo’s economy. It will also help to strengthen neighborhood assets and direct economic development activity to the surrounding area.

*“ The combination of social mission and architectural significance makes this monumental cluster of austere buildings probably one of the most important surviving examples of nineteenth-century asylum design and one of the most important examples of nineteenth-century public architecture in the country.”*

*Goody Clancy, Historic Structures Report*

The 19th century Richardson Olmsted Complex is a National Historic Landmark. Its reuse is powered by \$76.5 million in New York State funds that are being used to leverage private development.

The board of the Richardson Center Corporation (RCC) – was appointed in 2006 by then New York State Governor George Pataki. Rehabilitation of the Complex is the mission of the Richardson Center Corporation, a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) organization.

The Richardson Architecture Center, Inc. board, also a not-for-profit 501(c)(3), oversees the development of the Architecture Center and historic mental health exhibits.

Armed with strong local and national boards, an Urban Land Institute report, an Historic Structures Report, a Cultural Landscape Report, Architecture and Visitor Center Visualized Concept and Feasibility Studies, and now this Master Plan, the Richardson Center Corporation can finally proceed to put these architectural masterpieces back to productive use.



*For the purposes of the Master Plan, the site of the Richardson Olmsted Complex is defined by Rockwell Road, Elmwood Avenue, Forest Avenue, and Rees Street. These four streets enclose the complex, and define gateways to it, from a very diverse collection of neighborhoods.*

## Board of Directors Richardson Center Corporation (RCC)

- \* **Stanford Lipsey** – Chairman – Publisher, The Buffalo News
- \* **Howard Zemsky** – Vice Chairman – President, Taurus Capital Partners, LLC.
- \* **Christopher Greene** – Secretary - Partner, Damon & Morey, LLP
- \* **Paul Hojnacki** – Treasurer – President, Curtis Screw Company
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- Paul Ciminelli** – President & CEO, Ciminelli Development Company
- Eva Hassett** – Executive Director, International Institute of Buffalo
- Muriel Howard**, Ph.D. – President, Buffalo State College
- \* **Richard Tobe**, Attorney at Law

## Richardson Architecture Center, Inc. (RAC)

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- Lynn Osmond** – President, Chicago Architecture Foundation
- Chase Rynd** – Executive Director, National Building Museum
- \* **Richard Tobe**, Attorney at Law

*\* indicates member of both Richardson Center Corporation Board and Richardson Architecture Center Board*

*“ We envision the rehabilitation of this National Historic Landmark . . .  
to be the crowning jewel of a mixed-use, multi-purpose  
civic campus of public and private activities.”*

*Vision Statement of the Richardson Center Corporation*

*Buffalo State Asylum for the Insane, circa 1900,  
Courtesy of the Buffalo Psychiatric Center*



## Description of the Master Plan

The Master Plan assesses the Richardson Olmsted buildings and site, adjacent neighborhoods and - together with an inclusive public process – creates a plan for near and long term development of the historic buildings and grounds. A Generic Environmental Impact Statement (GEIS) process runs concurrently to the planning process and the final document is the Master Plan and the GEIS.

## Plan Ambitions

The Richardson Olmsted Complex Master Plan must commit to conservation/rehabilitation, to revitalization/reuse and to economic viability. This requires a wise, innovative, and fiscally responsible approach towards its reinvention.

This Master Plan seeks ways to re-use the remaining significant buildings on the site (totaling 487,000 GSF including basements), and aspires to integrate additional facilities in a manner complimentary to the original spirit of the site plan and supportive of the new vision. The relationship between the site's rehabilitation and its surroundings must be mutually reinforcing. Redevelopment of the historic structure and of the grounds must respect the scale and character of their historic development and accommodate contemporary users and uses.

The Master Plan is guided by an ethic to tread lightly, connect efficiently, choose wisely, and build with a keen eye towards local suitability and economic sustainability.

With the right combination of uses, a landmark facility like the Richardson Olmsted Complex has sufficient scale and magnitude to become an economic destination of more-than-local significance. The most successful mixed-use projects are those in which the collective impact of the mix of uses creates a new market dynamic, resulting in an economically healthy development project and a unique “place” that becomes a destination on its own and as such expands its market reach.

The overall development of the Richardson Olmsted Complex will occur over a period of time and must be flexible enough to anticipate and accommodate changes in market conditions and the availability of both public and private financing. Therefore, the Master Plan has developed short term, intermediate term and long term visions for the site.

The Master Plan is a road map and starting point, however, over time, new attractive opportunities not now envisioned may become available and should be pursued in adherence to the spirit, but not necessarily the strict letter, of this plan.



*“ Buffalo is an ideal testing ground... Its architectural heritage embodies an America that thought boldly about the future, but believed deeply in the city as a democratic forum. What is needed now is to revive that experimental tradition.”*

*Nicolai Ouroussoff, “Reinventing America’s Cities: The Time Is Now”; The New York Times, March 29, 2009*



*Historical photos of  
Buffalo State Hospital,  
Courtesy of the  
Buffalo Psychiatric Center*

## Guiding Principles of the Master Plan

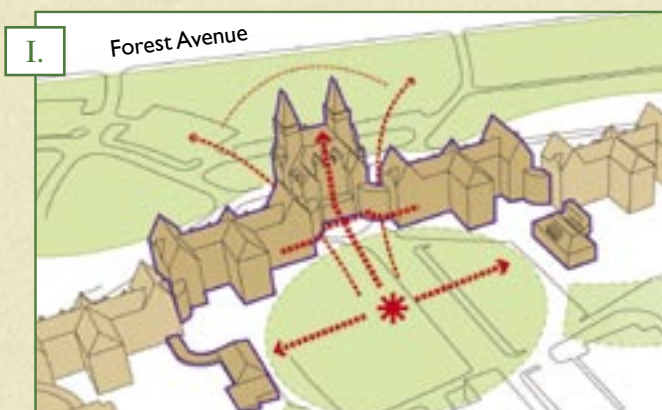
**W**ith an eye towards implementation and sound stewardship, the framework for planning is built on five principles. These principles, taken collectively, address each edge of the Richardson Olmsted Complex and help to integrate the complex into its surroundings.

### **I. Create a New Identity for “the ROC” Through the Reuse of Existing Structures**

The highest priority of the Master Plan is the reuse of the historic structures and grounds. Revitalizing the complex can be accomplished by repurposing it as a mixed-use destination. The iconic towers of the Administration Building can serve as a unifying identity. This shared identity, which the Master Plan deems “the ROC” (for Richardson Olmsted Complex), can support both initial core programs and subsequent expansions.

### **II. Rehabilitate the South Lawn**

The Master Plan places priority on the stabilization and rehabilitation of the lawn between the structure and its historic approach from Forest Avenue. Rehabilitation of the South Lawn requires the removal of the invasive circulation and parking patterns that have eroded the continuity of the space over time. Reinstating the loop road on the south side of the complex and heavily replanting the area will initiate the rehabilitation of the site.



### III. Center Building 45

Reorienting the complex so that north side of Building 45 can also become a “front” accomplishes a number of important objectives:

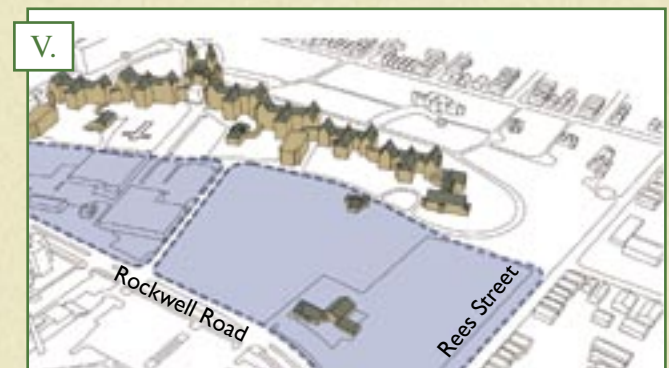
1. It preserves the bucolic character of the South Lawn;
2. It allows for a greater intensity of use and access to the complex from the north without diminishing the importance of the historic south entrance; and,
3. It diminishes the visual presence of the modern Strozzi Building when entering from the north.

### IV. Extend the Olmsted Parks System

The close proximity of Delaware Park offers a remarkable possibility to capture and extend Buffalo’s open space system. Strengthening the connection between the Richardson Olmsted Complex and Olmsted’s network reestablishes a relationship that has been diminished over time, through new pedestrian and vehicular connections, open space interventions and art.

### V. Preserve Long-Term Development Options

If any long range development at the north and northwest portion of the site does occur, it shall be used to enhance and complement the adjoining historic buildings and neighborhoods. As can be witnessed from revitalization of other Kirkbride complexes across the nation, additional new development may be required to help subsidize the high cost of rehabilitation and maintenance. Any new development will continue the existing land use ratios to provide major landscaped open space and complement the historic buildings in form and use.



# The Baseline Priorities

**T**he Baseline Priorities allocate the limited resources that are available to help to shape the future of the Richardson Olmsted Complex. The objective is to direct the money available to achieve the broadest impact in the near term and be a catalyst for future investment. It identifies short-term, incremental projects that build upon one another to enable the long-term Master Plan to become feasible. Much of the focus of the Baseline Priorities involves organization, stabilization, and cleanup, in an effort not only to prepare the facility for future investment, but to also increase public access and awareness of the project. The Master Plan addresses these five elements of the Baseline Priorities:

## **I. Rationalize the Site**

Richardson, Olmsted and Kirkbride's original vision for the site has largely been depleted over time. Rationalizing the site attempts to remedy site circulation to create a more cohesive site and ameliorate perceived divisions in the property.

## **II. Prioritize Landscape Investment**

Within the Baseline Priorities, the significance of the South Lawn as a space of gathering and recreation is recaptured. As a first priority, the drives to the south of the Towers Administration Bldg. (Building 45) are reconfigured, parking is relocated, paths are constructed and new trees are planted to reinstate the once pervasive canopy. To the north, a new east-west road provides access and creates an address for the buildings, and a new arrival loop improves access.

## **III. Building Reuse & Preparation**

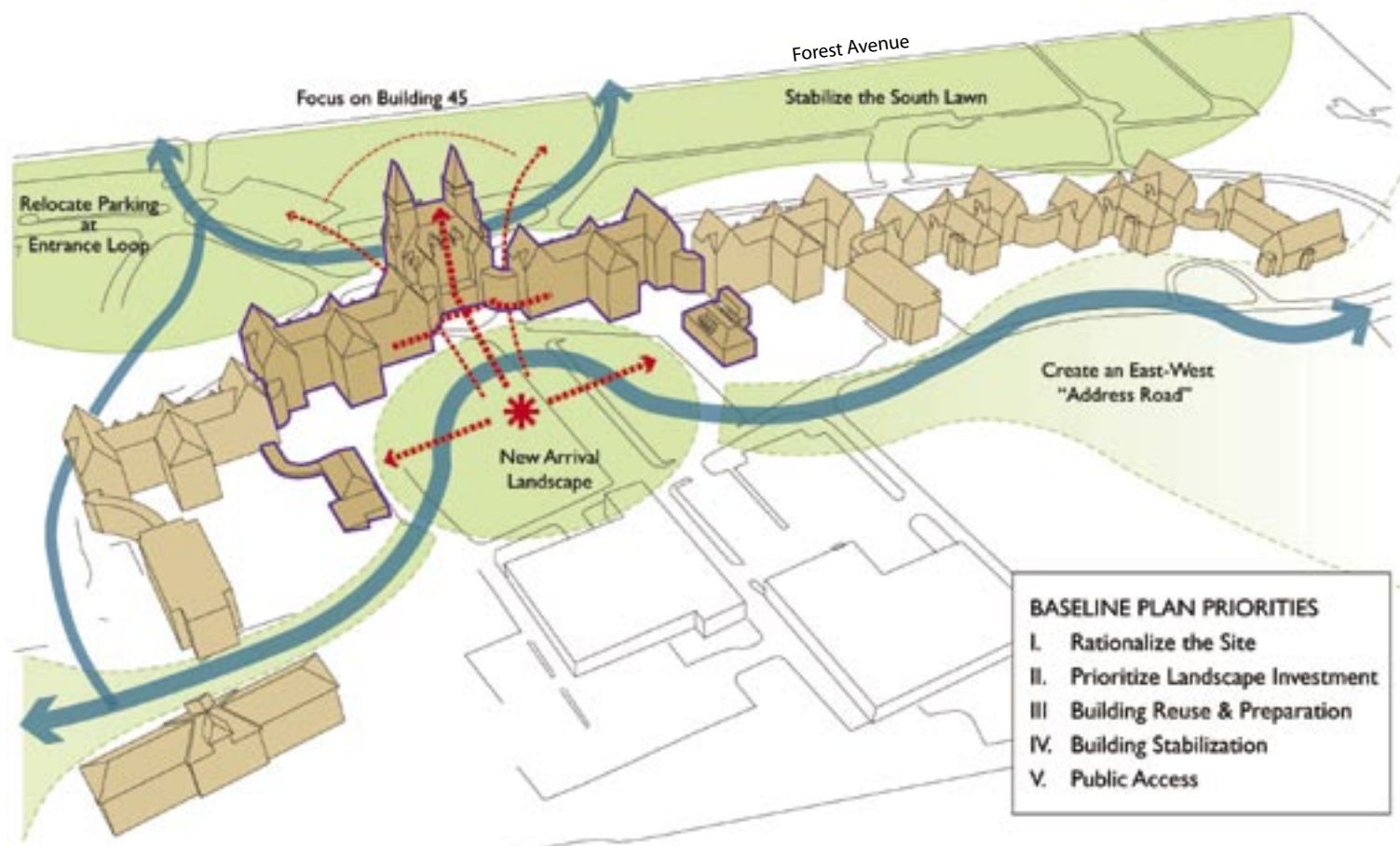
Stabilization of the buildings and grounds are just the first step towards the rehabilitation of the complex. Following building stabilization, identifying appropriate uses to occupy the buildings requires an innovative and market-based approach that maximizes synergies between uses.

## **IV. Building Stabilization**

There are three phases of building stabilization. These phases build on the work the Richardson Center Corporation has done over the last two years (Package 1 Stabilization). Package 2 revolves both around emergency work and permanent activities to prevent further deterioration of the building. Package 3 stabilization efforts will provide a safe, intact and clean building shell, preparing the spaces for reuse.

## **V. Public Access**

Gaining access to the buildings and grounds of the complex has been cited as one of the most important early stage objectives by the surrounding community. In the near future, there are a number of means by which that may be possible including partial building tours, temporary exhibits and art installations.



# RICHARDSON OLMSTED COMPLEX

Landscape Northern Lands  
and possible  
compatible development

Create New East-West  
“Address Road”

Stabilize Brick Buildings &  
Mothball Pending Future Use

Eventually relocate Buffalo State College/  
Buffalo Psychiatric Center Maintenance  
Buildings which currently obstruct views  
and clutters the North entrance

THE EXPANDED CORE PROJECT  
in Buildings 42, 9, 13, 15: “the ROC”

- Arts & Cultural Uses
- Buffalo State & Academic-Related Uses
- Limited Residential Development

# MASTER PLAN 2009

New North Entrance  
Loop & ROC Drop-Off

Explore Academic or Other  
Complementary Uses  
for Bldgs 9, 12, 13, 15

Extend the Character of the  
Olmsted Parks System

Integrate Psychiatric Center  
Uses & Recreation Space

Relocate Existing Parking  
and  
Create South Entrance Loop

Rehabilitate the South Lawn  
as Community Open Space

**THE CORE PROJECT** (“the ROC”) in Buildings 45, 44 & 10, (+12, 43)

- Architecture Center
- Boutique Hotel
- Visitors Center
- Conference/Event Space



## NEAR-TERM COSTS\*

<b>FUNDS ALREADY COMMITTED</b> _____	<b>COST</b>
Emergency Stabilization - Phase 1	\$2.10m
Studies, Planning, Operating Costs	\$1.90m
<b>STABILIZATION AND PUBLIC ACCESS</b> _____	
Emergency Stabilization	\$7.84m
Stabilization for Core Project	\$11.36m
Mothball Remaining Buildings	\$5.90m
Landscape Emergency Stabilization	\$2.00m
Parking Relocation	\$1.40m
<b>CORE PROJECT FRAMEWORK</b> _____	
Circulation Systems	\$1.86m
Architecture & Visitor Center - Exhibit	\$5.90m
Architecture Center - Bldg 45 addition	\$4.00m
Landscape Rehabilitation (partial)	\$9.50m
<b>SUBTOTAL</b> _____	<b>\$53.66m</b>

## OTHER PROJECTED COSTS

<b>PROPERTY-WIDE PLANNING</b> _____	
Maintenance Building Relocations	\$20.9m
Landscape Rehabilitation (site-wide)	\$9.5m
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Core Project Building Fit-Out	
RCC investment (gap)	\$13.0m
Core Project Build-out:	
Architecture & Visitor Center	\$11.0m
Available Tax Credits	(\$17.3m)
<b>CORE PROJECT ESTIMATED TOTAL</b> _____	<b>\$90.7m</b>

*\*Construction costs only. Not included: Soft costs including design, investigation and testing fees, owner's contingency, use-specific mechanical, electrical, plumbing, fire protection, egress, life safety compliance. Basements included; attics not included.*



## A Mix of Uses

A core set of uses has been identified for a development project at the complex. It is critical that these uses be given equal importance in the design process. For example, an Architecture Center should not be viewed as the “main use,” to the detriment of a hotel or conference center, and vice versa. This integrated model creates an active and diverse set of program relationships that is beneficial to the success of the development, but also allows the project to capture maximum tax incentives.

Perhaps the most visible example of this integration is the recommendation to provide a central entrance and gathering space that mixes visitors from the various uses in one space before moving each into their own circulation system. This can provide a unique introduction to the Richardson Olmsted Complex and reduce the time when the entrance space for each user may have little or no activity.

Branded as “The ROC”, this central mixed-use space of gathering can unify the overall development project, and have the ability to anchor future development. If located in the iconic towers of Building 45 (the former Administration Building), The ROC becomes an identity for the entire complex that is shared amongst all of the programs housed within it, rather than associated with a single use.

## Four Development Actions

After careful consideration of the many important issues to the success and sustainability of a development project, a set of development actions was created. These scenarios each begin with the Baseline Priorities, expanding upon them to present four futures of the complex, and of the relationship of the Richardson Center Corporation with future development. The series presents one possibility for phasing, though the scenarios as presented are not necessarily sequential. The focus of all development actions is the rehabilitation and reoccupation of the historic structures and site.

### The Four Development Actions are:

- Core Project
- Expanded Core Project
- Full Reuse of Historic Structures
- Development Landholding

## 1. The Core Project

The Core Project initiates the rehabilitation of the historic complex by locating new uses in the primary iconic building of the complex - the Towers Administration Building (Bldg. 45) – and the adjacent two wards. The Core Project consists of the following uses:

- ARCHITECTURE CENTER
- VISITORS CENTER
- BOUTIQUE HOTEL
- CONFERENCE/EVENTS SPACE

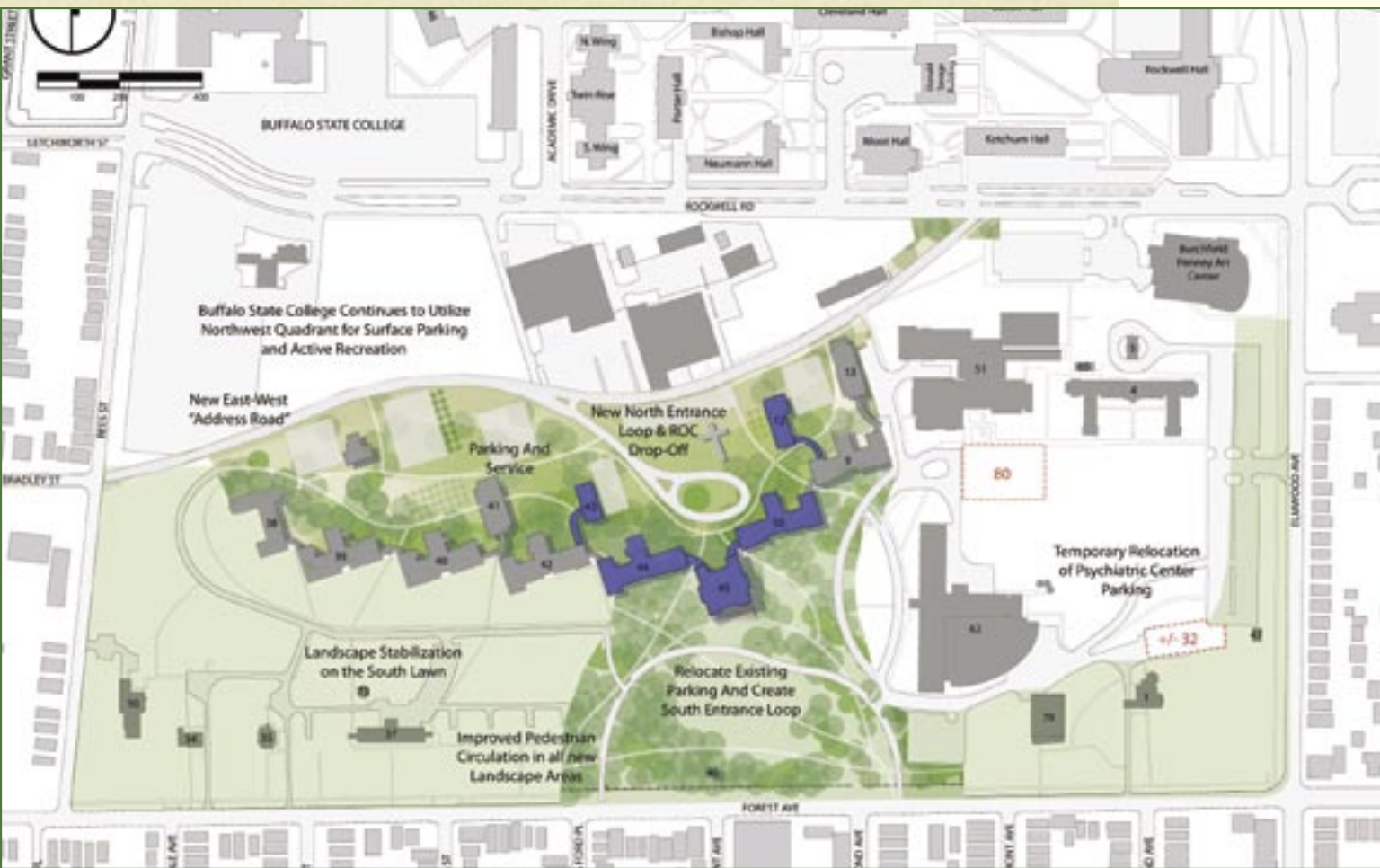
The buildings are accessed jointly via a new central entrance at the north side of Building 45. The development plan creates an integrated, multi-use real estate project with the Towers at its heart, allowing the four key uses to identify equally with Building 45 as the iconic central element of the project. In addition, the financial viability of each use is enhanced by the availability of additional tax credits in a large, mixed-use project. The south entrance to Building 45 will remain largely unchanged and will serve as the ceremonial entrance, complemented by a new entrance loop reminiscent of the historical alignment Olmsted intended.

A northern approach to the complex served by an east/west road and addition to the northern face of Building 45 will address the demands of large group access, heavier traffic flows including tour buses, and service delivery.



*The Core Project advances the notion that there are scales of economy in sharing revenue-generating facilities that can be used by different groups at different times of the day.*

*The Core Project development plan creates an integrated, multi-use real estate project with the Towers at its heart, allowing the four key programs to identify equally with Building 45 as the iconic central element of the project.*

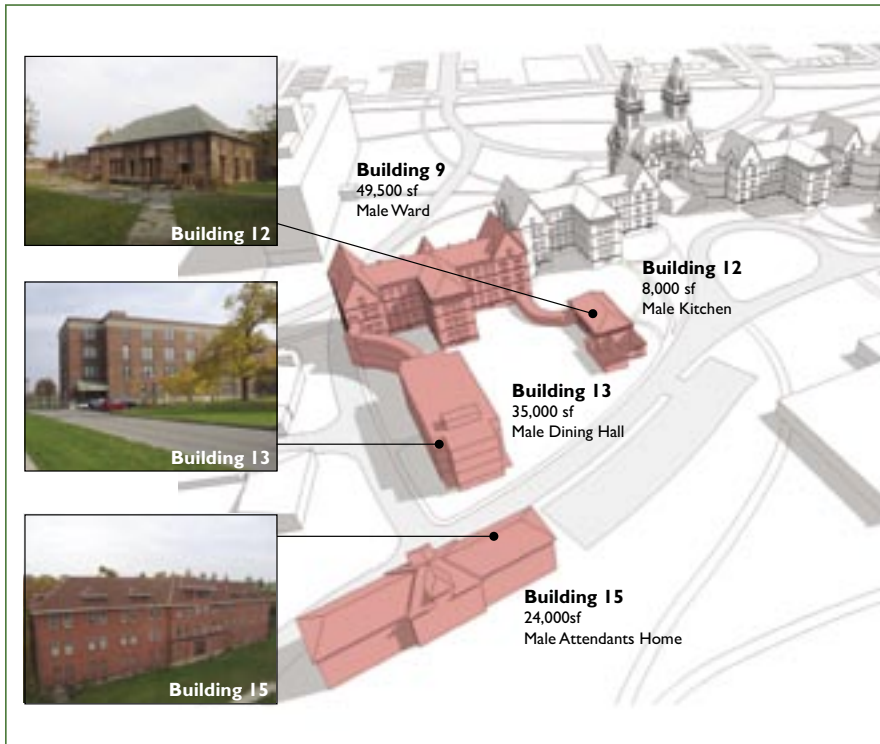


## 2. The Expanded Core Project

Building from the “Core Project”, an expansion of these programs includes complementary uses that benefit from close proximity to the Towers Administration Building (Bldg. 45) but also warrant their own identity and space. These additional uses advance the creation of a mixed-use destination at the Richardson Olmsted Complex. The presence of cultural and academic uses can benefit and increase

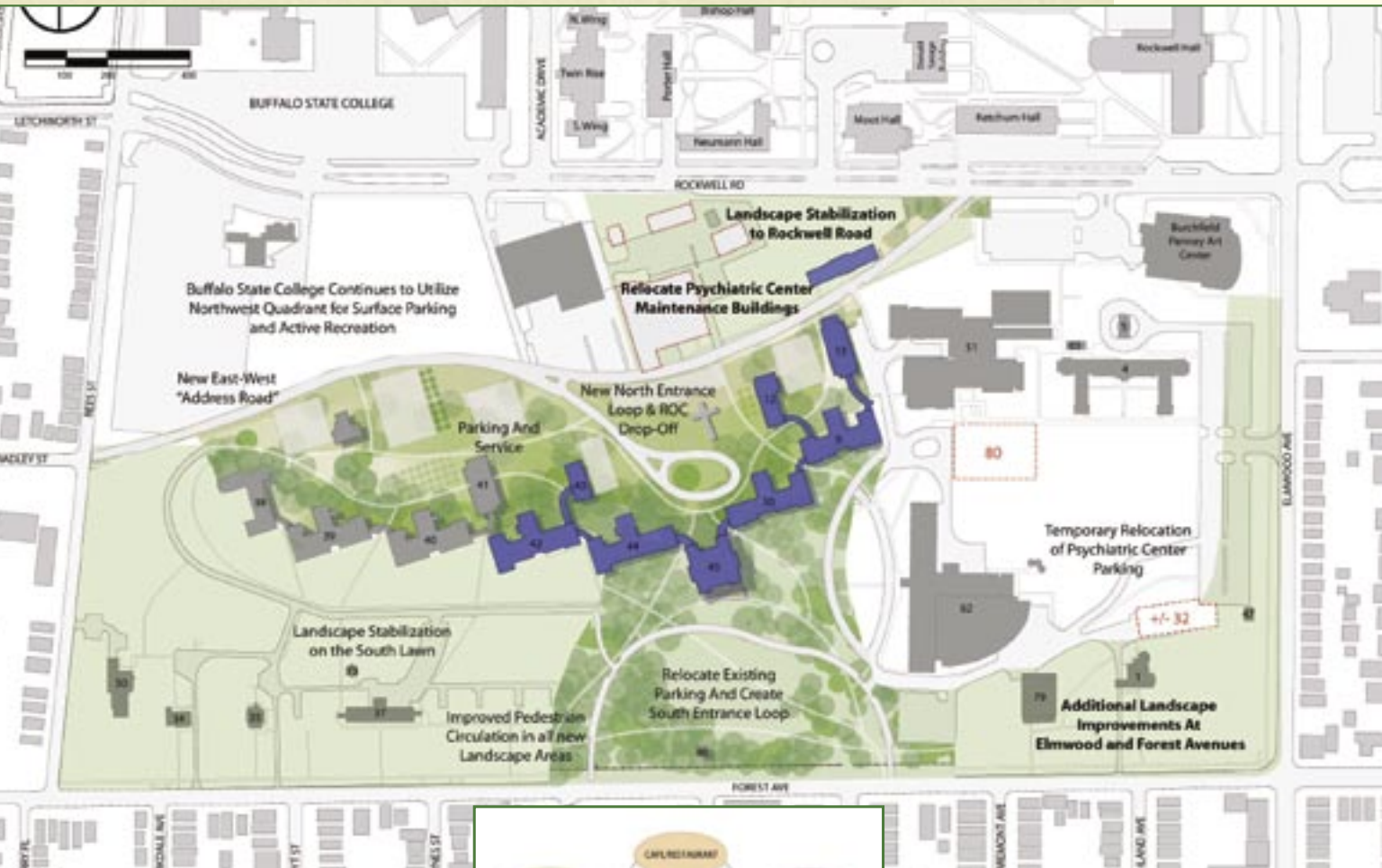
visitation of the core programs, while also enjoying the advantages of the exhibits, event space, and hotel rooms available in adjacent buildings. Expanded programs supporting the Core Project include Arts-Related space and Academic Uses, perhaps associated with Buffalo State College or the numerous other cultural and academic institutions in the surrounding neighborhoods.

## Buffalo State College as a Potential Partner



*The presence of cultural and academic uses can provide benefits and increased visitation of the core programs, while also enjoying the advantages of the exhibits, event space, and hotel rooms available at their doorstep.*

*Plans relieve the land-locked Buffalo State College.*



### 3. Full Reuse of All Historically Significant Structures

This phase assumes that the Core and Expanded Projects are implemented, and that additional uses are then incorporated into the brick buildings (38, 39, 40). Uses for these buildings have not yet been determined, but it is recommended that the reuse of these facilities be compatible with the quasi-public programs of the Core and Expanded Core Projects.

Landscape investment in this alternative extends to the entire 90-acre site to create a cohesive parklike character throughout the complex. A site-wide circulation system is implemented based on an interpretation of Olmsted's historic plan.

The northern lands accommodate a range of possible landscape strategies that transform the property, including uses such as storm water swales, ponds and plantings that can treat runoff, walking trails and improved habitat to bolster the local ecology, and locations for active recreation.

Certain existing, non-preferred uses may also continue until they can be relocated. These new uses will enhance the goal of bringing people, particularly on foot, to the campus at an early stage. This phase assumes no new development on the northwestern portion of the property at this point. The northwest quadrant will be substantially devoted to landscape and grounds treatments until such time as Phase 4 is implemented.

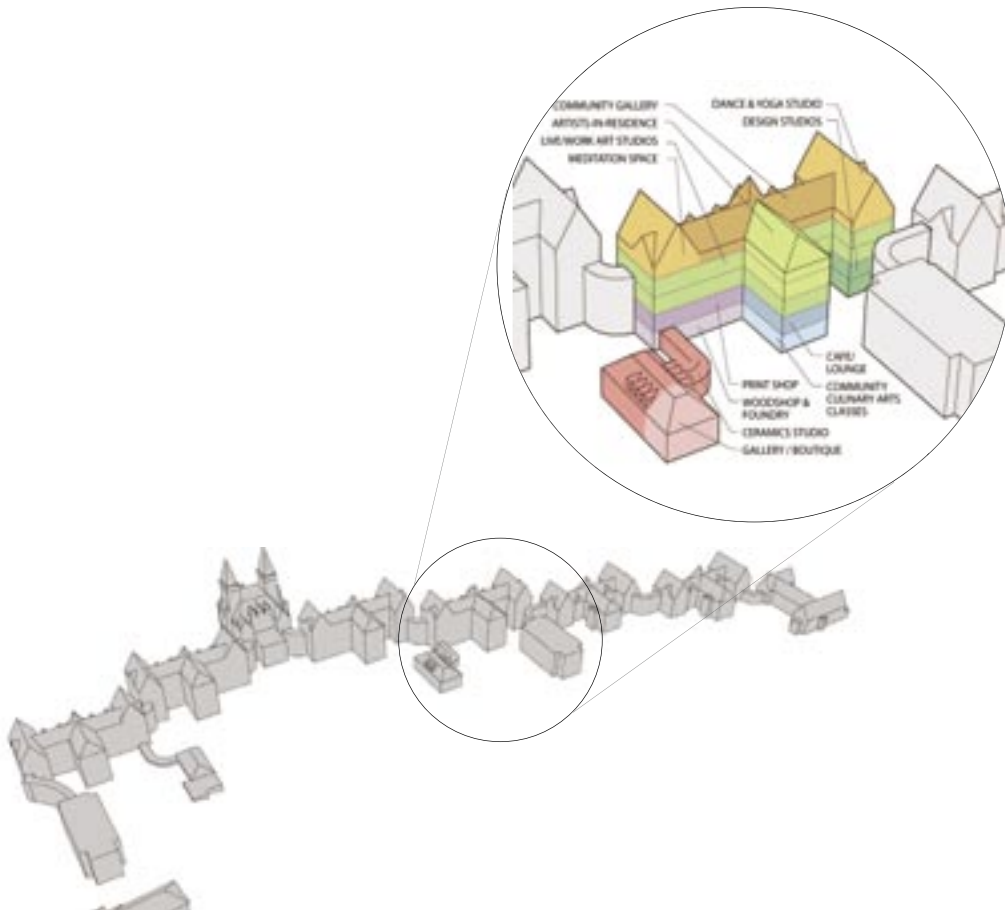




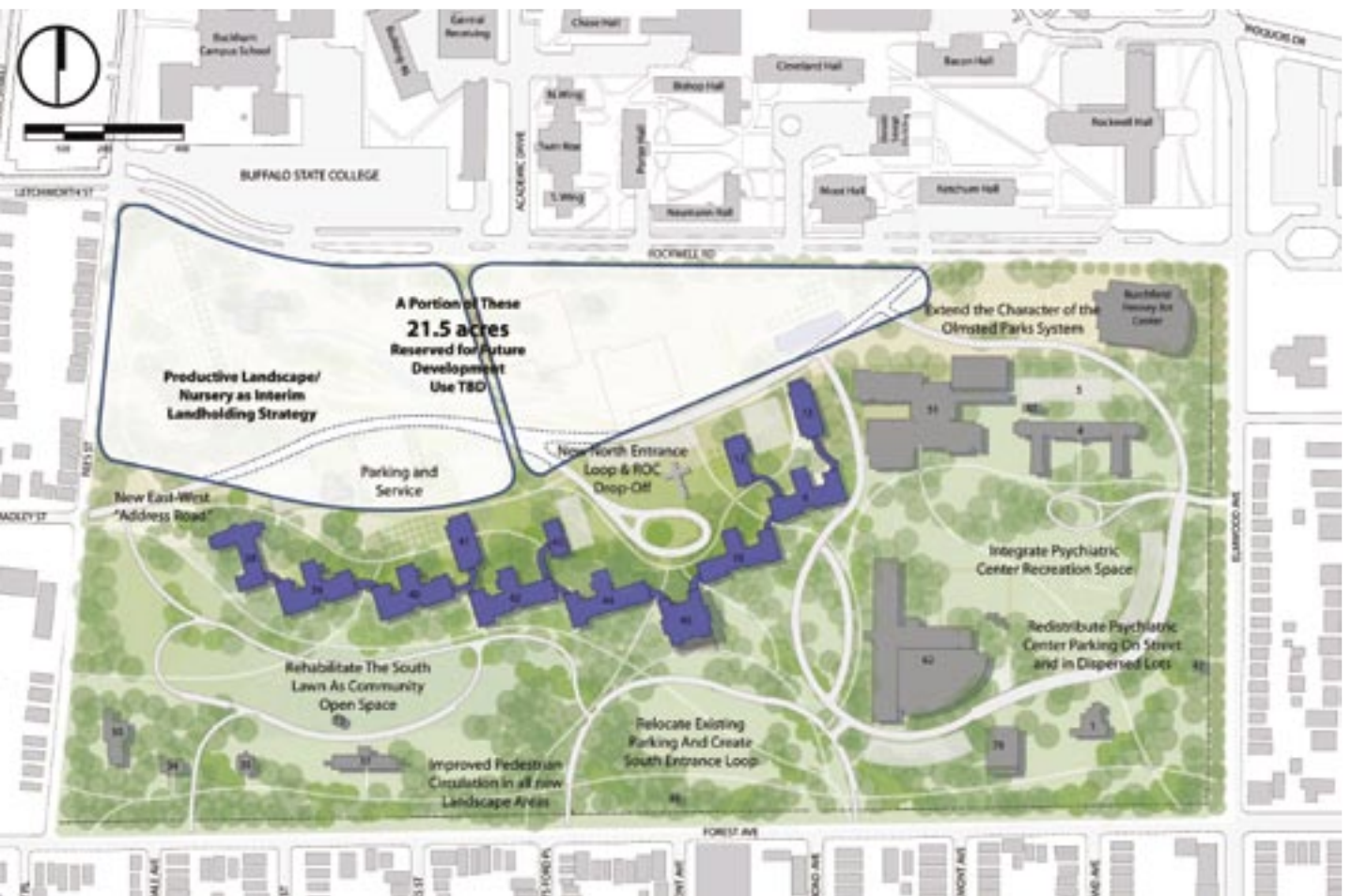
## 4. Development Landholding

The northern lands can be utilized to provide additional economic sustainability to the project and to provide appropriate economic opportunity to the area. Any new development would be compatible with the master plan, have a strong emphasis on green space with the built form approximating the existing campus in density and urban ambiance.

It would continue the existing land use ratios to provide major landscaped open space, and complement the historic buildings in form and use. However, the focus of this phase will remain subordinate to the other phases where the priority is the reuse and rehabilitation of the historic buildings and landscape. In the interim, the northern lands will be used as described in Phase 3.







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## MASTER PLAN

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Bero Architecture  
Historic Preservation  
Rochester, NY

Clarion Associates  
Economic Modeling  
Chicago, IL

Parsons Brinckerhoff  
Permitting  
Buffalo, NY

Baer & Associates  
Cost Estimating  
Buffalo, NY

## PRIOR STUDIES

Historic Structures Report  
Goody Clancy  
Boston, MA

Cultural Landscape Report  
Heritage Landscapes  
Charlotte, VT

Urban Land Institute  
Advisory Panel  
Washington, DC

