

High expectations for Frontier House

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Exterior

Fittante referenced a picture of the Frontier House that's part of the Orrin E. Dunlap Collection at the Niagara Falls Public Library. Prior to the meetings, he said, "That's kind of what we're going to try to replicate – the old vintage photo."

He noted, "We're going to bring back that existing vintage sign for the Frontier House. And if you look at what we submitted, (it's) also rebuilding of the rear porch, along with adding an elevator tower on the backside of the building."

Included as part of the proposed "new" look of the Frontier House is a thin, black iron railing on the reconstructed front porch – this is not an original feature, but one required for safety purposes. It will be recessed behind the existing white pillar column line. A railing on the second-floor balcony and another at roof level will also be installed.

Plans call for cleaning and re-pointing existing stone and mortar – as required by local, state and national historic preservation boards – and plank siding and trim to match historic photos.

The front door will be restored. Windows will be fixed – at least one is missing (above the former "backward drive-thru") and will need to be replaced. Trim will be cleaned and repaired. The black

window shutters will be removed, with the exception of the original middle pairs.

An elevator will be installed in the back of the main building, so as to make the upper rooms Americans with Disabilities Act-accessible. The split-face stone-designed shaft will be nestled tightly between window wells, "So we (can) mess as little as possible with the stone," Fittante said.

Adjacent to that, "We are going to restore that back porch that was torn off," he said.

In addition, the former outdoor playground area will be converted into a courtyard.

Interior

"We're trying to restore this as much as possible," Fittante said.

Per the submitted drawings:

✓ The second floor has four units – two, two-bedroom spots and a pair of one-bedroom models. The sizes would range from a little under 600 square-feet to almost 1,300 square-feet.

✓ The third-floor will have five dwelling areas: two one-bedroom spaces and three studio units. The sizes here would range from 266 square-feet up to a little more than 600 square-feet.

✓ The fourth floor – what is now an attic – would have one two-bedroom unit measuring a little more than 1,000 square-feet.

"We're looking to do a really neat reveal in there" exposing some of the original timber rafters and providing entry points



Orrin E. Dunlap Collection
Niagara Falls Public Library
Local History Department
Niagara Falls, New York

A Frontier House photo that's part of the Orrin E. Dunlap Collection at the Niagara Falls Public Library is the inspiration for the building's renovation. (Image provided by Fittante Architecture)

for natural light, Fittante said.

It's not yet known if these quarters will be apartments or temporary lodging.

"They're going to be multiuse. So, depending on which way we're going to be going in the future – I mean, that's going to be really up to Bill if it's going to be more of an extended stay or Airbnb-type boutique hotel," Fittante said. "They're going to watch the market and see what drives that. But they're going to be adaptable for multiuses. We could go either way."

Paladino recently spoke with NFP and acknowledged discussions about a restaurant on the first floor, and/or devoting space to the Lewiston Council on the Arts – which is currently a neighbor in the International Peace Garden quad.

He said, "All those are options we are reviewing right now (as far as) best fit.

"The restaurant is definitely a viable idea that we wanted; unfortunately, every restaurant has just been hammered during this pandemic. So, any decision on that is not to be made in the near future.

"If something else does come along, we have some other ideas,

which we are looking at. We might proceed in some different manners."

Next Steps

Fittante said the interior will need "some shoring and bracing of the floors. Of course, we've got to bring back the original stairwell; we're going to try to restore that or replicate the original grand stairwell.

"Other than that, I mean, the building's pretty good structurally, other than a lot of repointing and mortar, which is all going to have to meet the historical guidelines. And they're gonna have to do samples, so they can match the mortar.

"The exterior of the building is going to be the biggest rehab."

Fittante said roof work and additional mortar pointing and grouting would begin within the next 60 days.

He explained, "We need approval through the village so then we can get the approval through the State Historical SHPO preservation board. So, we're going to have a little bit more detailed drawings to submit to SHPO, after we get the approval through the village. They're going to have more of a say on exactly what's going to be done; but we've had

preliminary conversations with them. We have a pretty good handle on what we're going to be doing on the interior as well."

Fittante noted the property owners will apply for historic tax credits.

Following his presentations, the HPC granted the proposal a certificate of appropriateness, while the Planning Board voted to approve the building application.

The proposal was expected to go before the Niagara County Planning Board, as the structure is on a state-owned roadway. However, the village was informed Tuesday this isn't necessary, as the project is restoration-based and not a new build.

Village trustees will likely vote on the plan next Monday.

High Expectations

The Frontier House has been closed to the public since McDonald's ended its lease with former owner Hastings Lewiston and moved out in December 2004.

HPC Chairwoman Loretta Frankovitch told Fittante, "I can't tell you how excited we are that you are here for this."

"It's been a long time coming," Fittante said.

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