

**Official Minutes
City of Niagara Falls Planning Board
July 19, 2023**

A regular meeting of the City of Niagara Falls Planning Board was held on Wednesday, July 19, 2023 at 6:00 p.m. in Council Chambers, City Hall, 745 Main Street, Niagara Falls, N.Y.

CALL TO ORDER & ROLL CALL

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:

Tony Palmer
Charles MacDougall
Joyce Williams
Timothy Polka
Shurron Cowart

STAFF PRESENT:

Kevin Forma, Director of Planning
Mike Pesarchick, Planner II

BOARD MEMBERS EXCUSED:

Ken Nossavage
Ryan Dallavia
John Spanbauer
Beverly Callen

ATTENDEES PRESENT:

Steve Dojka
La'Dia Hutchen, NeighborWorks
Diane Tattersall
Laura Pennington
Christine Sanborn
Jockline Pryor
Elizabeth Flynn
Judy Kurasiewicz
Matt Long, Long Associates
Matt Bird, John Bartolomei &
Associates

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

APPROVAL OF AGENDA – FOR THIS MEETING

A motion to approve the agenda was made by **MR. POLKA** and seconded by **MR. MACDOUGALL**.

MOTION: MAJORITY APPROVED

APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM June 27, 2023

A motion to approve the meeting minutes from June 27, 2023, was made by **MR. MACDOUGALL** and seconded by **MS. WILLIAMS**.

MOTION: MAJORITY APPROVED

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PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

JOCKLINE PRYOR rose to speak about a parcel at 426 Ferry Avenue. MR. PALMER declined to hear MS. PRYOR and stated that she had brought the item up numerous times before at previous Planning Board meetings. MR. PALMER advised MS. PRYOR that the Planning Board had nothing to do with the parcel and advised MS. PRYOR to contact Corporation Council if she wished to purchase it.

MS. PRYOR stated that she had mailed a letter to MR. PALMER regarding the property. MR. PALMER said he had not received a letter and advised her that the Planning Board could not make any determination on the property until it was relinquished by the City. MS. PRYOR said she had mailed a check to the City for the property. MR. PALMER advised MS. PRYOR to contact the Mayor's office regarding the matter.

No one else spoke during the public participation period.

PUBLIC HEARING

1. Site Plan Approval: For the purpose of renovating the existing Presti Apartments building and the construction of a new two-story, 14-unit building for residential and community space at 1605 Ferry Avenue, S.B.L. # 159.32-2-19, on behalf of the applicant Long Associates for owner NeighborWorks Community Partners.

MR. PALMER opened the public hearing at 6:07 p.m. MR. PALMER read the description and asked if anyone was there to speak on behalf of the project NeighborWorks Community Partners.

La'Dia Hutchen introduced herself as the Regional Director of Assets and Property Management for NeighborWorks. MS. HUTCHEN said that NeighborWorks was formerly the Niagara Falls Housing Services and introduced the project goal of completely rehabbing the 34-unit Joseph Presti Senior Apartments and construct an additional 15-unit structure on the same plot of land. MS. HUTCHEN said that the project was conceived to "align with the NeighborWorks Community Partners Mission" to create and sustain affordable housing and community facilities and resources for residents.

MS. HUTCHEN said that the current Presti Apartments needed about \$8 million in repairs and stated there was a strong desire to preserve the complex, formerly the Ferry Avenue School which became apartments in 1990. Partial funding was provided by a \$2.6 million loan from New York State. She stated that the extra income generated by building additional units was needed to help cover the costs of the rehab.

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MS. HUTCHEN said that there were 30 current residents that needed safe and affordable housing in addition to other residents in Niagara Falls. She concluded by stating that NeighborWorks has made several adjustments to the project to better fit the needs of the community and that NeighborWorks and current tenants alike were excited for the project.

MATT LONG introduced himself from Long Associates Architects and said he'd been working on the project for two years. He asked the Planning Board to identify as Lead Agency under the New York State Environmental Quality Review Act for the project.

MR. LONG introduced the site plan for the project. He stated that the main building hosted 34 units with an additional four units in the former gym. MR. LONG said that multiple community meetings were held as well as two public input meetings in October 2022 and February 2023. Other community meetings were held with local community leaders and small groups. MR. LONG said that New York State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) also asked that the gym be preserved instead of demolished, and the plan changed to reflect this.

MR. LONG said that a proposed townhome building was removed from the site plan as well as proposed family units, so the structure will remain entirely senior housing. There will be 52 units total, 50 of which will be one-bedroom units. MR. LONG said that NeighborWorks was pursuing nine percent New York State Home and Community Renewal funds, which were previously used for the project. The gym will be community space and additional units.

MR. LONG said that the existing parking will be changed to be more functional and "flow better" as well as allow for more activities in outside space. The proposed parking will use one curb cut rather than two curb cuts for a better traffic flow and natural traffic calming. MR. LONG said that the final site plan scale fit better with the surrounding neighborhood. The final site plan has been "blessed" by consultants and SHPO.

MR. PALMER asked if a SEQR review had been done. MR. LONG said SEQR documents were filed with the site plan application and said he believed it was classified as an unlisted action meaning it was at Planning Board discretion to begin a review. MR. LONG said that hopefully the process would not take long.

MR. PALMER asked if they needed to vote on lead agency. MR. POLKA said they would after the public hearing was finished. MR. PALMER asked if anyone from the audience wished to speak regarding 1605 Ferry Avenue.

STEVE DOJKA introduced himself as a member of the local NeighborWorks Board. He stated that he had some concerns about the original version of the project and that NeighborWorks held several meetings with the local board and tenants both at Presti Apartments and in the surrounding neighborhood for feedback and suggestions. MR. DOJKA said he was pleased with the project and was hopeful that the Planning Board would approve it.

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DIANE TATTERSALL introduced herself as a resident of the surrounding neighborhood. She stated she attended Ferry Avenue School and presented copies of an award the Presti Apartments received from the Preservation League of New York in 1993. MS. TATTERSALL said that if the property was worthy of an award back then, it was certainly worth investing in now and offered support for the project.

LAURA PENNINGTON introduced herself as a representative of Pinnacle Community Services, a collaborative partner with NeighborWorks. She stated that Pinnacle supported the project fully by recognizing that seniors need “dignified housing options.” MS. PENNINGTON said that Pinnacle was looking forward to working with NeighborWorks on the project.

CHRISTINE SANBORN introduced herself as the chair of the local NeighborWorks Community Partners, formerly Neighborhood Housing Services. MS. SANBORN presented pamphlets about the organization’s mission to the Board. MS. SANBORN said that Joseph Presti contributed a great deal to the community and the Presti family continues to serve Niagara Falls. MS. SANBORN said that seniors have had to leave Niagara Falls for housing, which resulted in a loss of income for the city and services such as Niagara Falls Memorial Hospital. MS. SANBORN offered her full support for the project.

No one else spoke during the public hearing. MR. PALMER closed the public hearing at 6:29 p.m.

ACTION ITEMS:

1. Planning Board Recommendation: for the purpose of adding a High Energy Overlay Zone on the I2 “Industrial” zoned parcel at 2450 Buffalo Avenue, S.B.L. # 159.15-1-19, at the request of the applicant, Tim D’Agostino, on behalf of the owner U.S. Data Technologies Group, LTD.

MR. PALMER read the description. MATT BIRD introduced himself as a representative for U.S. Data Technology from the law office of John Bartolomei & Associates.

MR. PALMER asked for a motion to approve the Planning Board recommendation.

Motion to approve the Planning Board Recommendation was made by **MR. MACDOUGALL** and seconded by **MS. COWART**.

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CHARLES MCDUGALL:	YES
TIMOTHY POLKA:	YES
SCHURRON COWART:	YES
JOYCE WILLIAMS:	YES
TONY PALMER:	YES

MR. PALMER said that the recommendation would go to City Council. MR. BIRD thanked the Board.

OLD BUSINESS:

MR. FORMA reminded the Board to submit comments regarding the Historic Preservation Commission’s proposed Historic Landmark designation for 25 Rainbow Boulevard, “The Turtle,” in order to fulfill the Historic Preservation Law.

MR. PALMER asked to clarify if the Planning Board was submitting comments as one entity. MR. FORMA said that was correct and that comments would be compiled together as one letter to be voted on later.

NEW BUSINESS:

MR. PALMER called for a motion to designate the Planning Board as Lead Agency for the SEQR review for the housing project at 1605 Ferry Avenue.

Motion to designate the Planning Board as Lead Agency for the SEQR review process was made by **MS. WILLIAMS** and seconded by **MS. COWART**.

CHARLES MCDUGALL:	YES
TIMOTHY POLKA:	YES
SCHURRON COWART:	YES
JOYCE WILLIAMS:	YES
TONY PALMER:	YES

MR. FORMA said the Planning Department would prepare letters to be signed by MR. PALMER to begin the 30-day review process.

MR. FORMA said there was no other new business.

PLANNING REPORT / COMMUNICATIONS:

MR. FORMA had no reports or communications for the Board.

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ADJOURNMENT

A motion to adjourn the meeting was made by **MS. WILLIAMS** and seconded by **MR. POLKA**.