

Business First of Buffalo - January 20, 2010
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UB options open on law school

Business First of Buffalo - by [James Fink](#)

The University at Buffalo may eventually relocate its Law School into a downtown Buffalo location, but the site may not necessarily be at the Statler Towers.

Rep. Brian Higgins, D-Buffalo, who this past weekend urged UB to move its law school to the Statler Towers, said following a Jan. 19 meeting with UB President John Simpson that he hopes he has laid a foundation for the graduate school to end up somewhere in Buffalo. UB is planning to move its 740-student law school from its Amherst campus to Buffalo as part of its sweeping UB 2020 master plan. No time frame has been set for when the law school will relocate.

"I'm just asking the university to be flexible and creative," Higgins said during a Wednesday morning meeting hosted by **Buffalo Place Inc.**

The recently mothballed Statler has been the subject of much speculation since the 18-story, nearly 800,000-square-foot building was placed into involuntary Chapter 11 protection and subsequently ordered closed after one potential purchaser fell through on their offer.

Higgins said it makes sense to move the law school to the Statler given its proximity to the state, federal and local courts and most of the region's law firms.

But, the congressman acknowledges the cost of the Statler redevelopment effort may be too much for UB and any other singular entity to absorb. Redevelopment costs are pegged at \$100 million, by most real estate and construction insiders.

"UB can't be expected to take on the Statler and fix it by themselves," Higgins said. "UB feels it is not their problem to solve."

Both Higgins and Simpson, in a prepared statement, didn't entirely close the door on the Statler as one possible location for the law school.

"(Today's) dialogue also left open the concept of locating the Law School in downtown Buffalo, within the context of UB's overall master planning," the Jan. 19 joint statement read. "It also opened the door to the university's involvement in the community's planning about the best future use of the Statler Towers."

UB's Law School was on W. Eagle Street in downtown Buffalo until the early 1970s when it move to the Amherst campus. The university said relocating it to Buffalo is one of the central elements of its UB 2020 master plan, although no specific location was mentioned. Many had assumed the school would eventually shift to UB's South Campus.

As for the Statler, it has attracted the interest of several out-of-town investors although none have stepped forward with a development contract or offer to court appointed trustee Morris Horwitz or his special counsel, **Hodgson Russ LLP** partner Garry Graber.

Earlier this week, Preservation Buffalo Niagara said it was recommending the building be placed on the **National Trust for Historic Preservation's** annual list of "11 Endangered" buildings. That designation is expected to be announced this spring.

Also, during the Buffalo Place meeting, Paul Ciminelli, president of **Ciminelli Development Co.**, suggested the Statler be placed in the hands of the public sector as a means for finding a new owner for the building.

Ciminelli said the public sector could issue and request for proposal from developers and investors.

"We've got to look and find the highest, best possible use," Ciminelli said. "The building is in the worst shape now than it has ever been."

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