MAIN-FERRY PROJECT MOVES AHEAD

After what seemed to some an interminable wait, in the last week of July structural steel began to rise at Main and Ferry, the site of the future Home for HOME. For the surrounding community that had waited decades for that day, it was a sight for sore eyes.

Inside Game

Until the new steel outlined the shape of the new three-story addition, most of the work had occurred inside the historic structure at 1542 Main. Under the direction of Project Superintendent Tom Knapp, workers from Lamparelli Construction had done extensive interior demolition—removing deteriorated partition walls and debris which accumulated since the fire 35 years ago drove families and commercial tenants from the building.

After remediation of lead and asbestos and obtaining interim environmental clearance, first floor joists were braced with structural steel and new wooden timbers. A cast iron column on the Main Street façade—crooked as the result of a long-ago traffic accident—has been put back into proper configuration, and buttressed by new steel columns. The southwest corner of the building was jacked up, braced by new steel, and repaired by Lamparelli masons. A new elevator shaft and stairwell now rises from the basement to the third floor.

Once uneven floors have been leveled and interior framing is complete on the first and second floors. By the end of October all framing will be complete, mechanical systems and drywall will be in, there will be a new roof and new windows along the Ferry and Main Street facades.

Straightforward Addition

While coping with the intricacy of 19th Century construction has proven a challenge for architect Charlie Gordon and his team, work on the new addition will be comparatively simpler. Once welding of structural steel is complete, framers will move into build walls, floors and ceilings. Subcontractors will install plumbing, electric lines and HVAC.

Architect Gordon is meticulously selecting a rose-colored brick for the addition, which will compliment the dark red brick of the existing façade. Although unforeseen delays in financing and steel have prolonged this project (increasing costs and delaying payments), none of the principals are cutting corners which might compromise the result. This will be a building used and admired by generations to come.

Timetable Toward Completion

The project team has met biweekly since April as construction moved forward. On the eve of Labor Day weekend, General Contractor Paul Lamparelli estimated the buildings will be complete by the end of January 2012, although HOME’s offices may be finished a bit sooner.

The following week Janet Meiselman (project consultant and mastermind), veteran property manager Susan Fayle and Scott Gehl (president of the Main-Ferry Housing Development Fund Company) met to discuss marketing and rent-up of the 10 units of affordable housing which will occupy the second and third floors of the Main-Ferry development.

Even before the first chapter (planning and financing) and the second chapter (construction) are complete, a third chapter has begun.

To report discrimination, call 716-854-1400.
From the Director:

WHEN DOLLARS DON’T MAKE SENSE

by Scott W. Gehl

Budgets are boring documents, indecipherable to arithmaphobes and uninteresting to almost everyone else.

But for non-profits, budgets are all important: defining both revenue targets and the scope of public good an agency can do. As we have read in the papers, agencies that get either side of this equation wrong face hard times or an untimely end.

One year ago, HOME’s Board of Directors adopted a $769,157 budget for the 12 months which began on September 1st, 2010. That budget provided for 10.6 full-time equivalent staff. Within that budget was approximately $242,800 for the work of the Community Housing Center, whose time was divided between HOME’s nationally recognized housing mobility program, and providing homelessness prevention services for the City of Buffalo Homeless Outreach Program.

The Good News

After three years from invaluable support of the John R. Oishei Foundation, the 12-year old incredibly successful Greater Buffalo Community Housing Center still lacked a government supporter for its work combating entrenched segregation and creating more diverse communities one family at a time.

At the urging of the Rev. Ellen Montgomery, the Josephine Goodyear Foundation made a $10,000 grant in support of the CHC’s work with female-headed families. In addition, Karla Gadley championed a $15,000 grant from HSBC Bank in support of the program.

In the last week of August, the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo again saved the day—granting $28,000 for the program. HOME’s Board of Directors also committed an additional $55,000 from the unrestricted fund balance to keep the program going.

Bigger Picture

Although the Community Housing Center—which, since 1999, has helped more than 3,500 families obtain housing—managed to survive with a little help from our friends, HOME’s other programs were also buffeted by a struggling economy and reduced levels of government support. While both the Town of Hamburg and the Erie County CDBG Consortium maintained their support for fair housing programs, other local governments reduced their support between 15 and 25 percent. These reductions combined with uncertainty about future support for homelessness prevention to create an untenable situation for HOME’s Board of Directors.

Even though HOME’s Board ultimately approved spending $75,000 from our unrestricted fund balance (the agency’s working capital), the Consolidated Budget for the year beginning in September 2011 totals only $620,065—a 19.4 percent reduction from last year.

The budget effectively eliminates 2.1 positions—through the elimination of jobs, reduction of hours of part-time staff, and by asking salaried staff to take salary cuts of as much as ten percent. On the morning after its adoption, I met with each affected member of our staff in order to apologize for this budget, which we believe necessary to maintain core skill sets. HOME must survive to fight again another day.

I began this column saying that budgets define how much public good an agency can do. By this measure, HOME can do less good in the year ahead.

Change in the Masthead

A member of HOME for the better part of 30 years, Mark Evans has always been a close reader of Insight, never reticent about offering suggestions to make it better. Fifteen months ago, Mark consented to become our very part-time editor.

His editorial judgment improved both the quality and look of this publication. Regrettably our 2011-12 budget ends Mark’s formal consultancy—but I hope not his valued opinions.

Responsibility for editing Insight has now been passed to Education Specialist Rayna Grossman. I think you’ll like Rayna’s work.

Late-Breaking News

As this issue goes to press, we have received the wonderful news that Kristin Luppino-Gholston and HOMER Ken Gholston have had a daughter, Ella Clair. Congratulations to the Gholstons and best wishes to HOME’s newest member.
THE FACES OF DISCRIMINATION: NOT WHO YOU MIGHT EXPECT

by Jennifer Metzger Kimura

When people ask me what area of law I practice in, I generally respond that my focus is on housing discrimination. More often than not, they immediately assume that the majority of my cases deal with race and color discrimination. However, to their surprise, in 2010 HOME processed over 200 discrimination cases – 38% involved families with children (familial status), versus the 24% which involved race and color discrimination.

Familial status discrimination can be very blatant on the internet, over the telephone and even in person, but this is not always the case. If you have ever been to the HOME office, you may have seen a large sign in the reception area that says “Housing Discrimination isn’t always this obvious . . .” I will give you two examples of familial status discrimination cases in which the discriminatory actions are more subtle in nature.

In May 2010, two separate advertisements were found on craigslist. The first stated “Ideal for seniors,” and the second stated “Highly [sought] location for UB students.” Federal and State fair housing laws hold that rental advertisements should state no discriminatory preference or limitation on account of: race, color, national origin, religion, sex, disability, familial status, marital status, age, military status and sexual orientation. In addition, housing providers are prohibited from stating preferences which may indicate discrimination.

After reviewing these suspect advertisements, HOME sent out investigators to test the availability of housing, and the presence of familial status discrimination. In the “Ideal for seniors” case, Investigators #1 and 2 (both married woman without any children) met with the agent, and were both given similar information about how the complex was not suitable for children, that it was “adult living.”

Even though neither of the women had children, the agent went on to say that, if a tenant’s children created any disturbances, not only would the landlord and other tenants get involved, but the police would be involved as well. Investigator #3 (a mother with children) was able to view the apartment, but was told that the complex was very quiet, and that mostly people in their 30s and above lived there. Investigator #3 was told that if the apartment was not big enough, there were plenty of other apartments and town houses in the area.

HOME sent investigators to test the “Highly [sought] location for UB students” advertisement as well. Investigator #1 (a mother with children) was told by the owner that the apartment was only for students, and not set up for a family. Although Investigator #1 contacted the landlord many times, she was never able to view the unit. By contrast, Investigator #2 (a student with no children), was able to view the apartment immediately.

Both cases were filed with HUD, and investigated by the New York State Division of Human Rights, which found probable cause that the Respondents had engaged in discriminatory practices on the basis of familial status. Both resulted in settlements which included damages as well as affirmative relief – such as fair housing training.

As you can tell, the discriminatory acts in the first case were not as blatant as the housing provider is the second case, who denied the right even to see the unit.

In both cases, the housing providers were describing the type of tenants that they aimed to attract, which was definitely not families with children.

Housing discrimination can impact anyone, and anyone can have an impact of housing discrimination. Landlords, owners, and managers should remember to describe the unit, and not the type of prospective tenant that they are looking for.

EVENT AT RED CROSS HIGHLIGHTS CAPITAL CAMPAIGN

by Mary Leahy

The HOME Capital Campaign gained momentum at a wine and cheese party held on Tuesday, August 23rd at Red Cross’ Clement Mansion. Nancy Blaschak, a member of HOME’s Board of Directors and Red Cross Executive Director, provided the beautiful, air-conditioned space.

The purpose of the gathering was to update supporters of civil rights on the progress of the Main-Ferry Project, while gearing up for the final stages of the Capital Campaign.

Project architect Charlie Gordon unveiled a new rendering and discussed elements of his environmentally friendly design. Associate Director Shannon Koehn, Executive Director Scott Gehl and former HOME Chair George Hezel told a remarkable series of stories about the building at 1542 Main and the project, which will provide a Home for HOME as well as 10 units of energy-efficient affordable housing.

Supporters were reminded that the $2.9 million project is not only altering the face of one of Main Street’s most visible intersections, but also rehabilitating a long-neglected architecturally significant building and serving as a catalyst for the revitalization of surrounding neighborhoods.

HOME is only $101,000 away from meeting its Capital Campaign goal.
BASEBALL EVENT HOMERUN FOR HOME

by Mary Leahy

There’s always a fun event going on for HOME members and their families.

On Friday, July 22nd over 20 HOMERS attended HOME’s Night at the Ballpark, to watch the Buffalo Bisons take on the Pawtucket Red Sox at Coca Cola Field. The night began with the first pitch thrown in by Children for Change member Egeria Koehn. Egeria, daughter of Associate Director Shannon Koehn, was accompanied to the mound by Xavier and Vashawn, grandsons of HOME Secretary Margaret Brown.

Although the Sox bested the Herd 4-2, Board Chair Gilbert Hernandez observed: “The game was a great time, with great people, doing great things, for a great organization! There are no losers on nights like these.”

In this tough economic climate, many non-profits are struggling. We are happy to report over $400 was raised for HOME.