

Historic region to change at hands of UB student architects

Senior architecture students at UB are working on a project that will potentially lead to vast improvements in the Niagara Falls area. Professor Hiro Hata of the Department of Architecture was approached by the city of Niagara Falls to have his students brainstorm ideas that will be implemented into the city's plan for redevelopment.

The goal of these projects is to bring in business to the community by rebuilding parts of the city. Students met with local residents, business leaders, City of Buffalo mayor Byron Brown, and the head of the Niagara Regional Parks Department.

"We just basically thought that the economy was going to come back in this area and needed to be stabilized from the local community and supported by tourism," said Brandon Walsh, a senior architecture major. "By doing that, it would hopefully give this area of Niagara falls an identity."

The Robert Moses Parkway, which runs along the Niagara Gorge, is one area the students agreed was in need of change. Residents of Niagara Falls have been known to refer to it as the "Berlin Wall," as it cuts residents off from the natural beauty that surrounds them.

The dismantling of the parkway, which may take as long as five to 10 years, will give way to renovations on Main Street, where students hope to bring business from the casino downtown.

"It's trying to develop this area to make the city become unified...to bring Niagara University students into the city more," said Michael Muldoon a senior architecture major. "To connect the urban side of the city to the natural resources of the gorge's nature and the waterfront."

Students are looking at the Elmwood Strip area near downtown Buffalo for inspiration, hoping to create vitality in Niagara Falls that lasts all day and throughout night.

"We haven't really focused on one thing," Muldoon said, explaining the group is working on urban aspects as well as the area's parks. "[It will] transition the urban and the natural beauty of the gorge so it's really the whole scope of this area."

Students are working on the transformation of an undeveloped lot into a park, which, along with the removal of the Robert Moses Parkway, they hope will unify the city.

Parallels can be drawn between the economic decline of Niagara Falls and Buffalo. Since the mid-1900s jobs have been leaving the area, causing residents to leave as well. This makes it hard for new building projects to develop, let alone get funded, Muldoon explained.

Through this project, students are able to make numerous connections, gain real-world experience, and help revitalize a city in need.

"I'm just really looking forward to seeing something built," Muldoon said.

