



Downtown Architectural and Public Art Walking Tour

Date: May 17, 2023

Time: 5pm-6:30pm

Location: Downtown, commencing at the Parson Main statue

Target Audience: Residents, downtown business owners, Historic District Commission members

Purpose: Provide residents and other stakeholders with the opportunity to learn about the master plan chapter and contribute input and ideas that will help shape the chapter's content and recommendations.

Attendance: 27, not including city staff and consultants.

Rochester's Ethnic Heritage

The Irish came in the 1850's and settled in a neighborhood known as Dublin, situated in the vicinity of Hancock Street. Twenty-five years later, French Canadians arrived in great numbers. They settled in Frenchtown (the tree streets). Each of these two communities supported its own church and parochial school. Some tour attendees were familiar with these (former) ethnic enclaves, but many were not. The 1883 Holy Rosary Church is seen to the right, at the entrance to Frenchtown.



Nashua was cited as an example of a post-industrial city that embraces its ethnic heritage and celebrates it with public art, murals, and outdoor music and cultural events. Perhaps Rochester's arts community may find some inspiration in Nashua's approach.

Public Art

Would you like to see more such installations? Ideas for locations? The following responses were noted:

- Like the vinyl on murals so that they don't fade and don't require maintenance.
- Would like to see more sculptures, different artists.
- Like the effort to get more art from the museum into the library.
- One person mentioned that she didn't love some of the artwork but liked the concept of murals.
- Would like to expand presence of sculptures out of town.

A discussion ensued on preferred themes for public art. Industrial heritage? Immigration? Celebration of diversity in contemporary Rochester? Seen here is Rachel Carpenter's mural on the Hartigan Block.



Modern Buildings

One participant commented on a controversial new building in Portsmouth, known as the Brick Market. The design is clever and imaginative, but how does it relate to the surrounding buildings? Would such a structure be appropriate in Rochester's historic district. Opinion was mixed. Reagan Ruedig, an architectural historian who also serves as vice chair on Portsmouth's HDC, joined the tour, and she was asked to weigh in on this question. Much discussion ensued. Opinions were decidedly mixed.

The discussion on modern architecture resumed when the group approached the Hoffman Block. This building is under construction and is taller than any seen in Rochester since the early 1900's. Is it too big? Response was mixed. The consultant commented that density is required in order to keep housing costs down, and to foster a vibrant, walkable downtown.

Solar Panels on Rooftops

No one voiced opposition, but it was suggested that efforts should be made to minimize the visibility of the panels from the public way.

Hidden Clues in Plain Sight

Don't forget to look up! The tour guide showed participants how to examine little noticed details on old buildings. For example the commercial structure at 44 North Main appears at first glance to date to the mid-20th century. Going around to the rear of the building, we spied a c. 1840 window sash up in the attic (shown here to the right). This type of detective work was well received by participants.

Slate Roofs

How many slate roofs are in downtown, and why are they special? Answer: They last forever and have a unique aesthetic appeal. Unfortunately, it is easy to lose these roofs because few roofers have the knowledge to make minor repairs. The group then spotted half a dozen slate roofs, most of which they had not noticed before.

Masonry Walls

We inspected several repointing jobs. Some were respectful of the historic buildings, others were not. The HDC should ensure that owners of masonry buildings understand proper repointing techniques.



Classical Orders

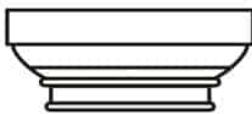
Rochester's economy peaked in the period from 1890 to 1920, and that prosperity is reflected in the large buildings erected downtown during that era. Attendees learned to distinguish between the various classical orders, and the reasons that Rochester's economic elite favored classical architecture during this period.



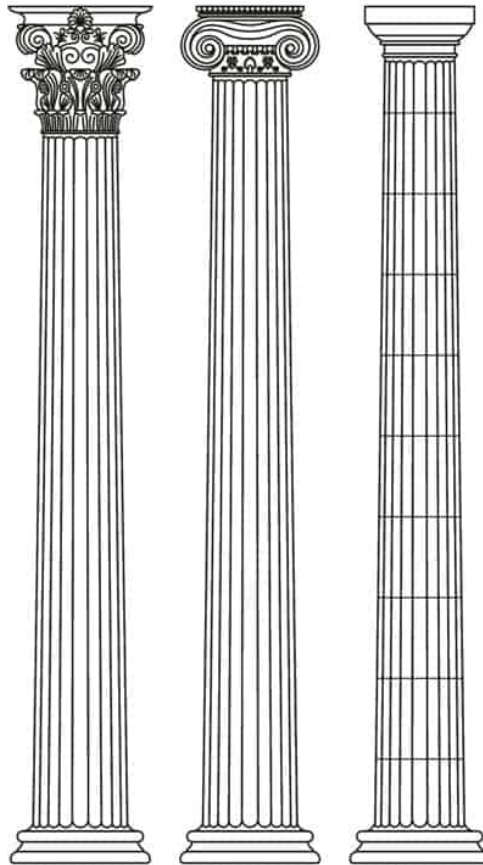
Corinthian



Ionik



Doric



Historic Plaque Commemorating the Scenic Theater

Should we install more such plaques in Rochester. Opinion was unanimously in favor.

Wyandotte Mill

The history of industry in Rochester was discussed, and in particular, the central role of water power provided by the Cocheco and Salmon Falls rivers. One participant pointed out that much of the old power plant remains inside the Wyandotte.

Should we reclaim the riverfront for public recreation? Opinion strongly favored doing so.