



City of Rochester

Neighborhood and Business Development
City Hall Room 125B, 30 Church Street
Rochester, New York 14614-1290
www.cityofrochester.gov



Bureau of Planning
and Zoning

August 17, 2010

Dear Concerned Citizen:

Thank you for your interest in the Erie Harbor project. As you know, this project, as it was originally designed, was the subject of a draft environmental impact statement (EIS) released in spring 2008. The benefit of the EIS process is the incorporation of the public in the review process to the greatest extent practicable. Throughout the EIS process for the project, there were numerous opportunities for comment. During the initial public comment period on the draft EIS (April 23, 2008 – June 6, 2008), we received comments from 120 individuals, many of which contained criticisms of the proposed site and building designs. To address the public and agency outcry for a different design, we sought expert assistance to provide design direction. The attached information was provided to guide the applicant, Conifer Realty. Recognizing the site constraints of a 30 foot wide water-main utility easement along the Mt. Hope Avenue frontage of the property and the developer's financial limitations that required the reuse of existing foundation slabs, there were inherent limitations on any design. The current design, which was revealed in the final EIS, heeded the design direction provided to Conifer. The new design was considered to be a substantive response to the issues that had instigated so much criticism of the initial design.

Admittedly, the new design is a very different and contemporary approach. One of the recommendations of the City-wide Rochester Housing Market Study (p.35) states, *"As a 'City of Design', Rochester should set an innovative example in promoting housing designs that blend with the context yet provide a contemporary and optimistic viewpoint of the City's future. Creativity will be expected and architectural experimentation should be encouraged and appreciated."*

The public was included to a great extent during the design process for this project. A 45 day comment period, including a public hearing, was conducted during April and May 2008 for public review of the draft EIS. In response to criticisms of the original design received during the comment period, a new design was developed for the overall project. The new design was presented to SWPC in September 2008 and it was included in an article, complete with illustrations, in the October-November issue of *The Wedge* neighborhood newsletter. The new design was, reportedly, well received by the neighborhood at the time with only a few letters, received by the City, which criticized the design.

In November 2008, the City Planning Commission conducted a public informational meeting for the proposed rezoning based on the modifications to the project. Although approximately 140 households received a post card notification in the mail, no one attended the meeting to oppose the project. As a result, the Planning Commission recommended approval of the rezoning. When the final EIS was issued in December 2008, it included pictures and narrative relating to the new design. All persons who expressed an interest in the draft EIS during the public comment period received notification of the final EIS. Additionally, the final EIS was posted on the City Website and copy of the final EIS document was provided to SWPC. The Rochester Environmental Commission, a citizen-based advisory body to the City, reviewed the final EIS and provided a recommendation in December 2008 to approve the project. City Council conducted a public hearing at their December 2008 meeting for the rezoning proposal and approved the application unanimously, in response to the findings contained in the final EIS. There was no opposition presented at that Council meeting. In short, a public process, with numerous opportunities for public input, was conducted. A redesign of this project is not possible.



Erie Harbor
Page 2

The project is currently in the final site plan approval process. The project is being reviewed by the Division of Zoning for conformance with the design presented in the final EIS. The City is very optimistic that the process will result in a noteworthy project that will benefit the South Wedge and the entire community for years to come.

I hope this information helps to alleviate your concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marcia Barry". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Marcia Barry
Manager of Zoning

Erie Harbor

Design References

City of Rochester, Bureau of Buildings and Zoning June 17, 2008

One of the major challenges with this site is, due to several constraints, is that it does not directly relate to either the Mt. Hope Avenue street frontage or the Genesee Riverway Trail frontage. The building footprints “float” in the center of the site, surrounded by parking lots on the east side and open green space on the west side. This dual frontage is another challenge—there is no clearly apparent “front” or “back” to the site. The site has two very public fronts: Mt. Hope Avenue and the river park and trail.

Because of this, the building form and style is less able to draw on traditional Rochester forms: the single family detached house, the rowhouse, the low-rise apartment building, the main street mixed use building. These all relate directly and clearly to the street they are situated on, at least in their historical context.

Utilizing historic, traditional, street-related building forms on a building site that must, due to constraints, float in the middle of the site, may not be the best design solution. As an alternative, the applicant should explore less historically based forms. For example, rather than attempting to use historic domestic style architecture, the building style might draw on contemporary or industrial precedents. This may be effective at this location, given its history of shipping and industrial uses. Such an approach may also relate better to the existing high rise tower and nearby historic industrial architecture, such as 1 Mt. Hope and 250 South Avenue.

Because of the narrow building footprint, and to activate the area, ground related units are recommended, rather than units served by interior hallways and elevators. The “stacked townhouse” form, so far not found in Rochester, but widespread in places like Toronto, may be a good reference.

Attached are examples from Rochester and other North American cities that may serve as useful references for the Erie Harbor development. These examples often draw on historical forms, but utilize contemporary styles and finishes.

Rochester, New York

Rochester has some good examples of recent (past 30 years) residential projects that use contemporary design that fits in well with the context but does not copy or mimic historic architecture. However, virtually all of these are not at the size and scale of what is envisioned for Erie Harbor. Also, these projects are very much related to the streets they are situated on, whereas the Erie Harbor development “floats” in the center of its site.



Left Selden St.: This is a contemporary interpretation of the rowhouse form



Above Gibbs St.: This is a contemporary interpretation of the rowhouse form; the treatment of the projecting bays are well done.



Left Broadway: This is a contemporary interpretation of the rowhouse form that has stronger, but not overwhelming, historical references.



Above Troup St.: This is a contemporary interpretation of the rowhouse form.



Above South Ave. - though not residential, this building illustrates use of a very simple basic building form that respects the context but does not overly employ historicist details.

Buffalo, New York



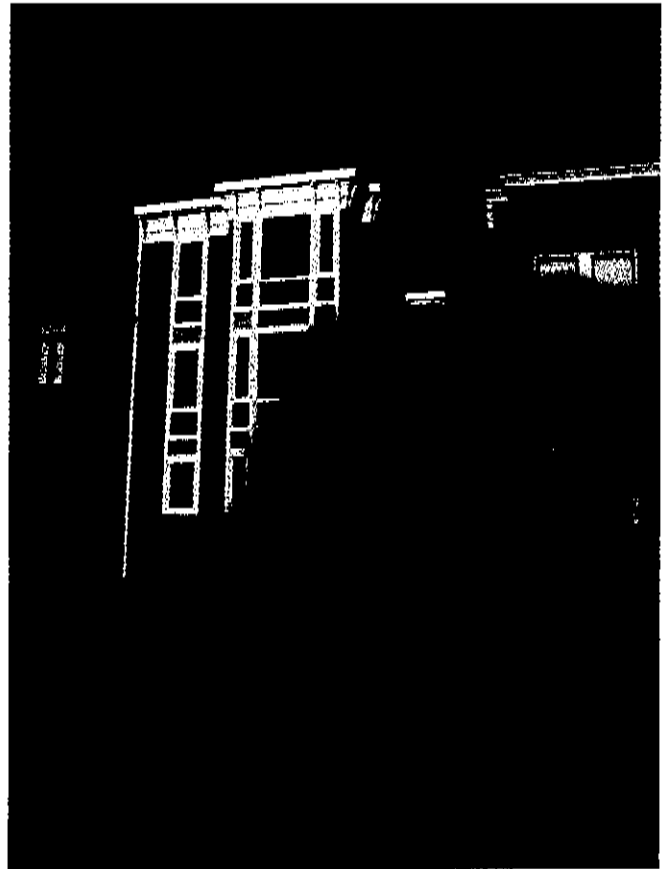
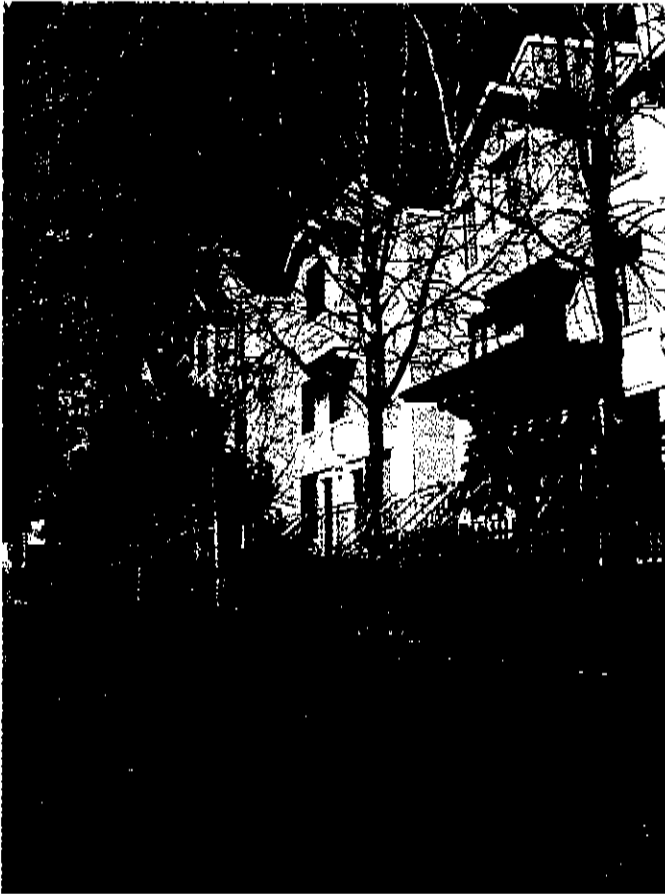
The brick façade illustrates how residential architecture at Erie Harbor could utilize very simple, modern, almost industrial forms.

Milwaukee, Wisconsin



All these examples from Milwaukee show how contemporary architecture can be used in a residential project.

San Francisco, California

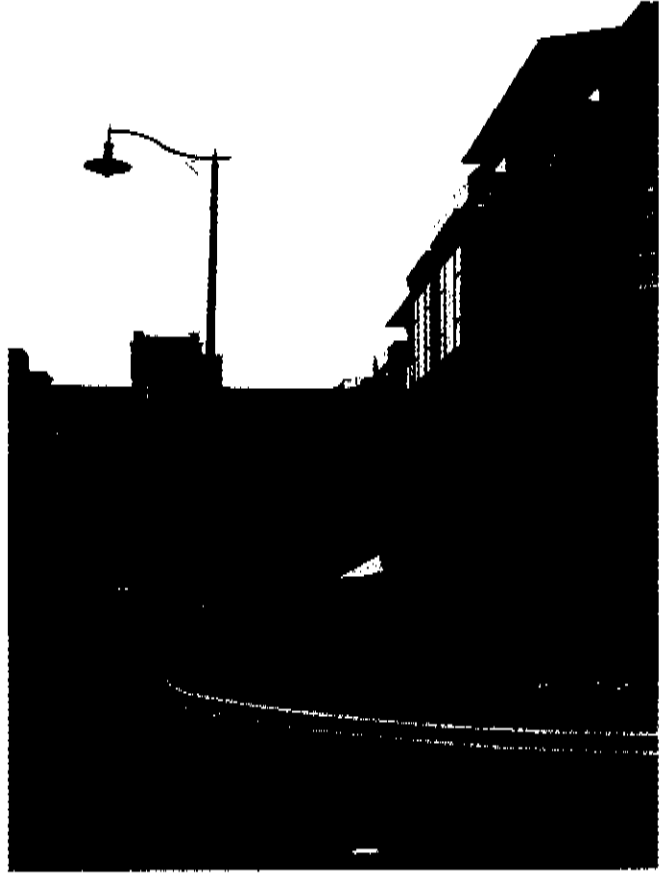


Above These townhouses demonstrates how the historical form, the San Francisco Italianate house, is interpreted in a contemporary manner that respects the context but does not employ a lot of fussy, historicist detailing. Note: Although traditional in San Francisco, the ground floor garage facing the street is not something that should be replicated in Rochester.



Left This project illustrates how a three story residential structure might relate to the street.

Vancouver, British Columbia

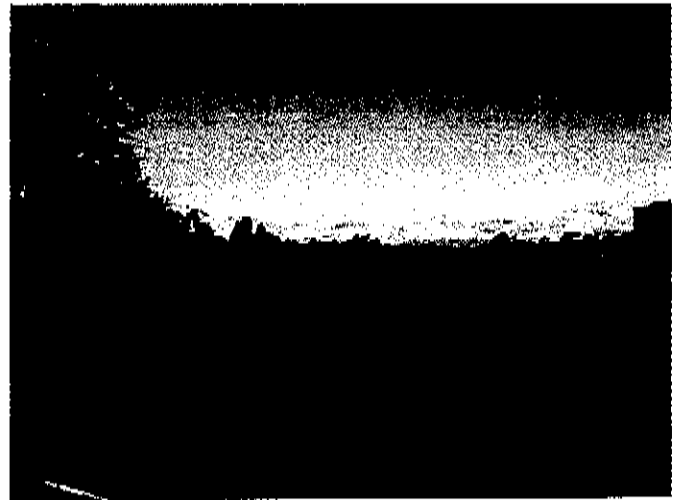


Above These photos show the traditional rowhouse form using contemporary architecture.



Left This photo shows another contemporary interpretation of the rowhouse form, this one drawing more influences from the surrounding early 20th century neighborhood, but still employing a stripped-down contemporary quality.

Victoria, British Columbia



There are many similarities between this infill development and Erie Harbor. They are both infill development on former railyards, they are both located along waterfronts (in this case, Portage Inlet, an extension of Victoria Harbor), and both have two frontages: the street frontage and the riverfront trail frontage.

As the photo to the left illustrates, this project chose to orient some of the rowhouses towards the trail, rather than towards the street. That asphalt area is not a vehicular street but rather a walking/biking trail along the water. The units front doors then, are off the trail, probably appealing to a certain market segment that values physical activity and proximity to the trail system.

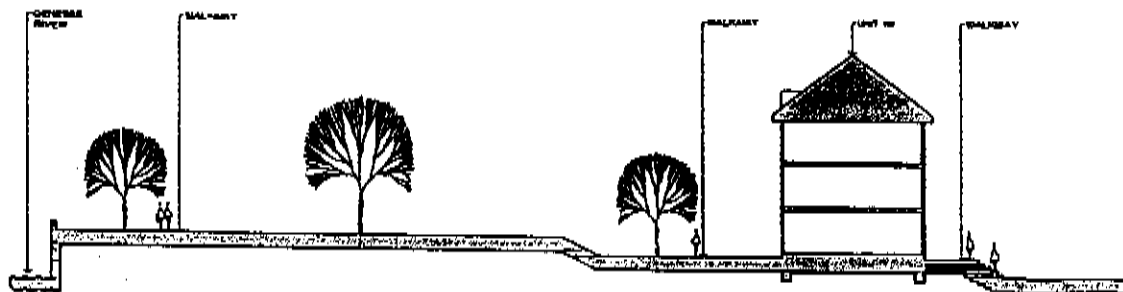


Elevation Change

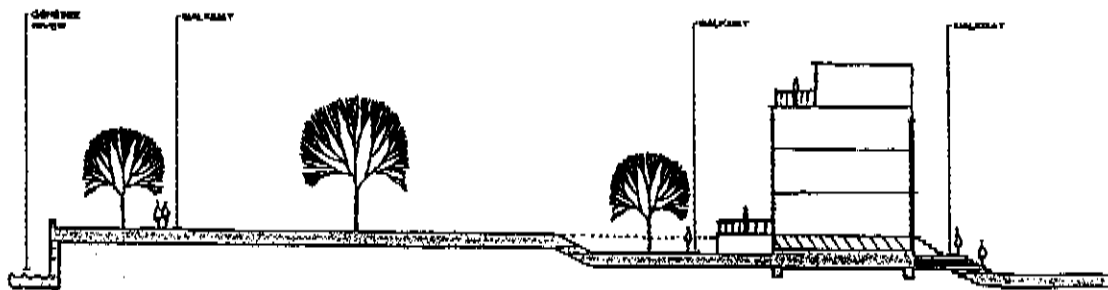
An additional challenge of riverfront development in Rochester is accommodating the floodwall along the river. Although this floodwall was largely made redundant by the construction of the Mt. Morris Dam in the early 1950s, the Army Corps of Engineers mandates that it remain in place.

To overcome the elevation difference and avoid a situation where the structures are sunken below the level of the park, a change in elevation should be accomplished between the front (street side) of the building and the rear (river side) of the building, or even within the building, as was done with the Corn Hill Landing project.

This approach also enhances the units, especially the ground level of those units, since it is generally preferable have residential floors located higher than the adjacent ground and/or public areas such as streets, sidewalks, and trails, so that passersby are not looking down into the dwelling unit. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, this approach would allow the first floors of the units to have a view westward to the river, rather than a view of the grass slope.



Currently proposed cross-section



Potential cross section with elevated buildings