

From: Lorna Peterson [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, May 13, 2024 4:05 PM
To: esd.sm.ESD
Subject: AFHC funding, Buffalo, 238 Carlton, more examination needed

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Dear Empire State Development Corporation:

AFHC funding, Buffalo, 238 Carlton, more examination needed

Dear Empire State Development Corporation:

I am the anonymous donor who purchased 238 Carlton five years ago and donated it to the African Heritage Economic Initiative for the purpose of developing the building into a food co-op. You may find the real estate transaction in the Erie County Clerk Public Search database. Feel free to contact Buffalo office ESD planner, Paul Tronolone, to verify my identity.

Please conduct a thorough, objective, and deliberate evaluation of the feasibility for a food co-op to be successfully operated on Buffalo's near East Side. The idea to have a food co-op was borne out of saving a fire damaged historic building. There was not much planning of how the building could be used. 238 Carlton suffered a fire in 2017 and was slated for demolition. My interest was to save that block from having another demolition and becoming an urban prairie. That is how all this started. The current players in 238 have had limited contact with me and all contact has been at my insistence. Although I revealed myself as the anonymous donor in the *Buffalo News* article by Mark Sommer (“Problems mount for Fruit Belt food co-op as IRS acts” March 27, 2023; A1, A6) very little attempt was made by current decision makers to work with me and the others who assisted me in landmarking the building, negotiating with the owners Borderland Advantage, and helping to find a non-profit that could take the building. For background on the purchase, see Rod Watson’s column “Donor saves Fruit Belt landmark and dream at a cost that never should have been” *Buffalo News*, June 5, 2019.

Also concerning is that the food co-op as now conceived is a fiction. The African Heritage Food Co-op in Niagara Falls never opened as a food co-op/grocery store. During COVID, AFHC in Buffalo distributed free food to the needy. Because the trucks were emblazoned with “African Heritage Food Co-op,” recipients of the free food thought that is what a food co-op is. It is not. If 238 should be a food bank, food pantry, soup kitchen, so be it. But don’t call it a [food co-op](#)—which is a business where you pay a membership and then pay for your food or sometimes work off the debt.

I have met with Karen Utz, Paul Tronolone, Kinzer Pointer, George Nicholas, and Richard Rogers regarding my concern about 238 Carlton and the possibility of \$3 million going to something that has not been thoroughly examined at the local level. I have met with them on the condition of the building (windows were exposed, high grass and weeds on the lots), and lack of true community engagement. My deep interest in 238 Carlton is well known to many. I would like to see advancement for the Fruit Belt community, but the current ideas presented are not well suited. Deep study of the local conditions is needed. I am willing to do my part to see that tax dollars are not wasted and that a very deserving community gets what it needs.

My concern about the co-op leadership under Mr. Alexander J. Wright began almost immediately. I was always upfront with him from October 2019 to August 2023, regarding his lack of communication with membership, poor recordkeeping, inadequate time management, City Planning Board presentations, and the failure to file

with the IRS. He was told by me that I was filing a complaint with the State Attorney General Charities Bureau. My interest in filing was as a taxpayer, donor, Buffalo resident, and preservationist to see the gift be used to highest benefit to a beleaguered community, and not be wasted through inaction and incompetence. Spokeswoman Laura Magee is quoted as saying ““No funds will be disbursed until the project receives board approval and ESD completes its regular systematic review,” (3/27/23).

Please ESD, conduct a complete review to measure the feasibility of the co-op idea. Truly involve the community and listen to them as to what it is they need, want, and currently understand what is a food co-op. **Please**, no more disappointments, no more broken promises.

I will continue to send in my comments. Thank you for reading this message.

Sincerely,

Lorna Peterson

sent

electronically Monday, May 13, 2024