

## Italian-American center will transform site of vacant North Park library

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The once-vibrant brick building at the northeast corner of Delaware and Hertel avenues, former home of the North Park Branch Library, has been vacant for almost 10 years.

But now, Centro Culturale Italiano di Buffalo, or CCI, plans to give it new life by transforming it into an Italian-American Cultural Center.

"This is a monumental moment in the history of the Italian-American community in Western New York," former Mayor Anthony M. Masiello said during a ceremony at the site Monday afternoon.

A team from CCI was chosen as designated developer for the site. CCI board members and consultants will be putting together a comprehensive plan for the reuse of the building, said Mayor Byron W. Brown. "I'm looking forward to being back here ... for a ribbon-cutting ceremony," Brown said.

The new cultural center has an estimated cost of \$1 million and is expected to be open next year, said Dr. Francesco Giacobbe, president of CCI. "We will have a business plan ready soon. We will select the name for the new building and launch a fundraising program. It is a gigantic project. Everyone will be welcome."

Before Monday's announcement, city officials had been talking for years about finding a cost-effective way to redevelop the building at 2351 Delaware Ave.

The former library branch was up for sale for many years, said Common Council Member Joel P. Feroletto of the Delaware District. And the building was under threat of being demolished almost two years ago when Benderson Development Co. wanted to build a commercial-retail project on the site. The city had also received at least two other proposals for that involved razing the building.

In January, the city Preservation Board recommended that the building be granted historic landmark status, which makes it virtually impossible for a building to be demolished. However, the Council rejected the recommendation.

Preservation groups then appealed in State Supreme Court, which directed the Council to reconsider its decision because it had not provided sufficient rationale for not designating the site a landmark.

This past March, the Council granted the brick building local landmark status. At the time, Feroletto said an organization expressed an interest in opening a cultural center at the site.

The 5,592-square-foot former library branch was built in 1928 and was once a bustling community cornerstone. It was closed and its collection moved in April 2008 because of concerns about asbestos and lead paint, and it has been vacant since then.

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