

Business First

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Commercial Real Estate

Preservationists fight to save these 3 WNY buildings



The Turtle building in Niagara Falls

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There's no shortage of historic buildings for Bernice Radle to try to save.

Western New York is full of old and historically significant structures, many with of which are dilapidated. Some have been slated for demolition.

Radle's been the executive director of Preservation Buffalo Niagara for just under a year, and already has her plate full of restoration campaigns.



Bernice Radle, executive director, Preservation Buffalo Niagara .

JOED VIERA

Buffalo Business First asked Radle to define some of the biggest preservation efforts happening now in Western New York. Here are her three top picks:

The Turtle, 25 Rainbow Blvd., Niagara Falls

The Turtle, a former Native American museum and cultural center named for its unusual shape, has become a hot-button topic in Niagara Falls.

There's no specific demolition plan on the table, but owner Niagara Falls Redevelopment has discussed knocking down the 67,000-square-foot, three-story building to make room for future development.

Preservation Buffalo Niagara is working with a group of advocates to try to save the building, which is shaped like a turtle and includes a geodesic dome "shell" on the roof.

"Never in my life have I seen a building like this," Radle said.

PBN's effort suffered a setback this month when the Niagara Falls City Council voted against granting the building local landmark status.

Radle and the team at PBN are now working to see if the building can qualify for historic tax credits, while other supporters of the building are working to form a nonprofit.

The building was constructed as the Native American Center for the Living Arts, which opened in 1981. The museum remained open for 14 years, closing in 1995 due to financial difficulties. Niagara Falls Redevelopment has owned the property since 1997.

Radle grew up in Niagara Falls, and visited the center when it was open.

"I really, really hope that the Turtle sees better days," she said. "I knew how special it was at the time, and how special it can be again."

Niagara Falls Redevelopment declined Business First's request for comment, but sent a copy of documents the company submitted to the town arguing against the building's landmark status.

According to NFR, the Turtle should not be listed as a historical landmark because it is only 43 years old and was only open for 14 years.

NFR has looked into developing the building into a museum or hotel, but has not been able to do so, according to the company.

"We have always been open to working with the indigenous community in Niagara Falls on cultural preservation efforts and remain so," NFR Executive Vice President Roger Trevino wrote to the town. "Yet no financially viable group has ever stepped forward with a serious proposal for the successful operation of the Turtle facility in any way."

