

## 'The Turtle is a sacred building': Efforts to save historic building in Niagara Falls

"It's very important to our culture to learn who we are."

Members of the "Friends of the Turtle Group" and others are teaming up to save 'The Turtle', a historic building in Niagara Falls.

By: [Yoselin Person](#)

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NIAGARA FALLS, N.Y. (WKBW) — Members of the "Friends of the Turtle Group" and others are teaming up to save "The Turtle," a historic building in Niagara Falls.

The building is the former home of The Native American Center For The Living Arts. The center opened in 1981 as a place to exhibit the history and culture of our indigenous communities before closing in 1995. The three-story building has been vacant ever since.

Those coming together to save the building in the heart of Downtown Niagara Falls to be designated as a local landmark.

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The "Turtle" in Niagara Falls is the former site of the Native American Center for the Living Arts.

Emma Santos is a high school junior. She's also part native. She shares her thoughts on preserving the building.



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"I think it is kind of messed up that they're looking to change into another hotel another parking lot especially Niagara Falls doesn't need," she says. "I feel like The Turtle could bring us tourist economy that we need to push us forward."

"It used to have Native American artifacts, dancers would go there and dance and sing," Santos adds. "I know that it got whitewashed after and got painted plainly white, so no one doesn't really know what it is unless you look at it from an overhead view."

A member of the "Friends of the Turtle Group" explains to 7 News reporter Yoselin Person how beneficial it would be to invest in the building.

"Millions of visitors come to the falls every year, and they walk right past The Turtle and the opportunities that we're missing by not having that opened and fixed up to its former glory," says Ally Spongr DeGon. "And being able to show off the stories and cultures that are here in the City of Niagara Falls."



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The executive director of the Native American Community Services for Erie and Niagara Counties, Michael Martin, says in 1995 the building closed and the City of Niagara Falls took ownership.



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"Who then sold it to Niagara Falls Redevelopment who then sold it to the owners in New York City," Martin says.

The hope now is to awaken The Turtle and bring this prime piece of property back to life.

"I think we're looking for partners to put a plan together with us. We have a lot of ideas, and if council can be part of that and help preserve and save it," he expresses. "So that we can put these plans into action and have the realization of The Turtle coming back to life. Come into reality."

The city council of Niagara Falls is holding a public meeting this Wednesday to vote on securing a local landmark designation on The Turtle.

The meeting will take place at 6 pm at City Hall, located at 745 Main Street in Niagara Falls.