



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Timothy M. Kennedy

Senator Kennedy Pushes for Historic Designation, Rehabilitation Tax Credits for Buffalo's Old First Ward

TIMOTHY M. KENNEDY March 15, 2013

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Kennedy announces the beginnings of commission to pursue historic designation – and the rehabilitation tax credits that come with it – for the Old First Ward.

Community leaders join Kennedy to encourage residents, local preservationists to participate in the effort.

Kennedy: Buffalo's First Ward is a relic to the hard work, sweat and endurance that our region is known for. It's going to take similar determination to secure historic designation, but this extensive

process begins today as we start forming our ‘green-ribbon commission’.

BUFFALO, N.Y. – Senator Tim Kennedy, D-Buffalo, today announced the launch of efforts to help the Old First Ward secure its rightful designation on the National Register for Historic Places. Kennedy wants this designation for Buffalo’s First Ward to help homeowners and community leaders gain access to historic rehabilitation tax credits that will restore and preserve the neighborhood’s rich history for generations to come.

As he urged new preservation efforts, Kennedy stressed the significance of the First Ward neighborhood in the history and industrial development of Buffalo and Western New York. Community leaders and local preservationists backed the push to secure historic designation for the Old First Ward and its surrounding industrial areas. Kennedy envisions a neighborhood revitalization in Buffalo’s First Ward similar to the community revival taking place in the Elmwood West Historic District – which recently earned its historic designation.

“The Old First Ward neighborhood was populated by hardworking, blue-collar families who came to the United States with the dream of prosperity and the work ethic to achieve it,” **Senator Kennedy** said. “Buffalo has a long legacy of hard work and perseverance, but the foundation of this proud legacy was first built in the Old First Ward. This neighborhood is a relic to the hard work, sweat and endurance that our region is known for. It’s going to take the similar level of focus and determination to ensure this neighborhood is preserved for generations to come, but it starts today. I encourage the community to join us in this effort to preserve the structures, streets and stories that connect us to the industries that built our city here in the Old First Ward.”

Kennedy and the local leaders announced they are forming a commission to pursue this historic designation – and the rehabilitation tax credits that come with it – for Buffalo’s Old First Ward and the greater industrial sites and neighborhoods near it. They asked

community residents interested in preserving the neighborhood's history and rehabilitating their homes to join them in this effort.

Kennedy called it a "green-ribbon commission" – to reflect the neighborhood's Irish roots as well as the upcoming St. Patrick's Day holiday – that will work to get Buffalo's First Ward and surrounding areas designated as a historic district, so eligible property owners can gain access to the rehabilitation tax credits that will be necessary to properly preserve its history.

Laura Kelly, Executive Director of the Old First Ward Community Center and fierce advocate for the neighborhood, said, "The Old First Ward has some of the oldest original workman's housing in Buffalo and plays an important role in Buffalo's rich industrial history. Designation as a historic preservation district will allow for residents to make needed improvements to aging homes, while still preserving the character of the house and neighborhood. The Old First Ward Community Center has been extremely active in assisting residents with improvements to their homes, and we are excited to work with Senator Kennedy and our neighbors in getting this designation from New York State."

"With the Old First Ward, you have a historic neighborhood that's much more than just buildings. Buildings without context mean nothing. The rich industrial history and the people who live, lived and work in the Old First Ward are what make it worth preserving." said **Dr. Kerry Traynor, an associate professor at the University at Buffalo who lead a team of architecture students in an award-winning study entitled *Against the Grain: A New Direction for the Old First Ward*.** "The Old First Ward and surrounding neighborhoods along the Buffalo River are perhaps the most unique historical neighborhoods in Buffalo because they have survived the suburban exodus. Families in these neighborhoods have remained intact for generations, and celebrating this rich cultural, industrial and residential history is an extremely worthwhile endeavor. I am thrilled that Senator Kennedy and the Old First Ward Community Center will be starting this commission and championing this important effort"

Jason Wilson, Director of Operations at Preservation Buffalo Niagara, said, “Buffalo is a city rich with history and culture, and the Old First Ward is a prime example of that. The important industrial heritage of Buffalo is reflected in the homes and buildings of this historic neighborhood, and preserving the unique beauty of this area will foster pride and further investment. Becoming a National Register Historic District is a lengthy, but worthwhile process. This neighborhood deserves to be recognized for its noteworthy role in defining the Queen City. Preservation Buffalo Niagara has assisted other communities in obtaining this distinction, and we look forward to partnering with Senator Kennedy and the residents in this endeavor.”

Buffalo author Tim Bohen, whose recently-released book “Against the Grain: The History of Buffalo’s First Ward” details the historical significance of the neighborhood, said, “The First Ward is a thriving neighborhood and the ancestral home to tens of thousands of Irish, German, Polish and Italian Western New Yorkers. As the origin of Buffalo's industrial past, and a historic and recreational destination, it deserves to be preserved for future generations.”

Community leaders cautioned that this is an extensive undertaking that will require grassroots support and lasting commitment. Historic designation won’t come overnight, but successful follow through in this effort will pay dividends for neighborhood residents and local preservationists, they said. If historic district designation is secured, most properties in the area will be eligible for historic rehabilitation tax credits, with the exception of those properties that have been dramatically altered from their original state or are relatively new builds.

The vast majority of houses in the neighborhood were constructed before 1900 with most built between 1840 and 1890. These historic houses are well built for the most part, but are in need of updating and restoration.

Senator Kennedy's office contacted the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) to inquire about the feasibility of securing a historic district designation for the Old First Ward. SHPO indicated their interest in expanding the historic home preservation program to neighborhoods that are populated by smaller homes and structures that reflect the state's industrial past. They also expressed a willingness to work with the neighborhood to pursue the designation.

The commission will be tasked the overall mission of applying for designation as a historic district, which includes several smaller tasks such as surveying homes, assembling community partners, drafting documents and other undertakings. Commission members will also determine the boundaries of the historic district, which is likely to extend from the First Ward into the Valley to indicate the historical significance and connections of the entire Buffalo River community. Some of this work has already been started by the UB students who completed an extensive, award-winning study of the Old First Ward neighborhood and surrounding industrial heritage district.

Senator Kennedy wants residents, preservationists and local advocates to join this cause. Anyone interested in being a part of the commission is asked to contact Senator Kennedy's office at 716-826-2683 or via email at kennedy@nysenate.gov.

For years, Senator Kennedy has been interested in preserving history in the Old First Ward and throughout Buffalo and Western New York. As a county legislator, he began work to install a permanent monument to the Fenian Invasion of 1866. The Fenian Invasion is an event of international significance – it built momentum for independence in Canada and Ireland – but there was no lasting marker commemorating this freedom-seeking mission, which was launched in Buffalo. That changed when the monument to the Fenian Invasion was dedicated last year. In 1866, prior to crossing the Niagara River at Tow Path Park, hundreds of members of the Irish-American Fenian Brotherhood assembled in the Old First

Ward to discuss plans for the invasion. It's this type of cultural history that Senator Kennedy is seeking to preserve.

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Senator Timothy M. Kennedy represents the New York State Senate's 63rd District, which is comprised of the town of Cheektowaga, the city of Lackawanna and nearly all of the city of Buffalo. More information is available at <http://kennedy.nysenate.gov>.