

# Traffic, environmental reviews delay student housing project at Buffalo State

*Demolition and building of multi-phase student housing plan at Buffalo State forced to wait until September as developer seeks municipal approvals*

By [Jonathan D. Epstein](#) | News Business Reporter  
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Design above shows Greenleaf student housing at Grant Street and Rockwell Road. The proposed mixed-use development will include neighborhood retail and residential space to accommodate 300 students in three and four-bedroom apartments.

Hoping to move forward with its planned new multi-phase student housing project for Buffalo State College, Greenleaf Development is still pursuing a series of municipal approvals, despite some setbacks in the process that will force it to wait until September.

Greenleaf, run by James Swiezy, is seeking to create a “transformational” residential and retail community aimed at students, on a city block bordered by Grant, Rees, Letchworth and Bradley streets.

The ambitious Campus Walk One project on 3.55 acres at 643 Grant St. is designed not only to serve the housing needs of nearby Buff State, but also to tie in to “other pockets of development” around it, such as on Grant, Swiezy said.

“We’re providing student housing for Buffalo State, but we’re also looking to transform the entrance to the school,” Swiezy said during a Planning Board meeting last week. “We think that by filling the student housing project with the retail, we will effectively help to build the density and help to make this a true walking neighborhood.”

The firm sought permission last week from the city’s Preservation Board to demolish 17 two-story, two-family homes that sit on the West Side land targeted for the project, but board members wanted to visit the site and see the homes for themselves first. Its requests for Zoning Board of Appeals and Planning Board approvals were also tabled while it waits for traffic and environmental reviews. Even so, Swiezy remains hopeful that the project can advance quickly, after it submits additional information, although he will now have to wait a month, as the various boards take off for the month of August.

“I was hoping they would act,” Swiezy said. “Buildings need to come down.”

Plans by Kideney Architects call for the firm to build two five-story student apartment buildings toward the north end of the block, with about 80 units of “Class A” housing, for approximately 300 students in three- and four-bedroom apartments. There would also be about 5,000 square feet of amenities and 5,500 square feet of retail space on the first floors, plus 60 parking spaces in the center of the block. The firm is also making arrangements with the college to allow permitted parking in school lots across the street and down Rockwell.

Specifically, the Grant Building, with 71,633 square feet, would include 41 apartments with 149 beds, plus four retail shops on the first floor, facing Grant Street.

On the other side, the Rees Building would have 71,726 square feet, with 39 apartments and 159 beds. The Rees Building would also include a management office, fitness center, a lounge and collaborative study space.

The buildings’ exterior would feature brick, insulated metal panel, aluminum storefronts and windows, and fiber cement siding, with a protruding facade. The top floor is pushed back, with slightly different materials and windows, to reduce the appearance of the building’s scale.

Designers also sought to create a more “vibrant” street on Grant, modeling the wider sidewalk area on Grant after what exists in parts of Allentown and the Elmwood Village, so that it would include benches and bike racks, the walking path itself, and an inner area that could be occupied by stores or restaurants for sidewalk sales or seating.

“We think this project has the ability to transform the Grant Street side of the Buff State campus,” said attorney Doug Dimitroff of Phillips Lytle LLP, who is representing Greenleaf.

That also meets the goals of Buff State officials, who have been working with Greenleaf for about two years. “One of our initiatives on the campus is to reinvigorate the Grant Street entrance of our campus,” said Michael F. LeVine, vice president of finance and management at Buff State.

“We’ve heard it named many different things over the years and we want to help change that image. We want to be part of the revitalization of the Grant Street side of the campus.”

LeVine noted that the school currently puts some students into leases with Canisius College or into hotels, but “this is an ideal location for our students.”

Greenleaf, through Buffalo West Side Properties LLC, already owned the majority of the block, consisting of the homes, and swapped some additional land with Buff State to gain the rest, as the first stage in the project.

Besides the demolition permits and zoning variance for the height, the project also needs Planning Board approval and a rezoning by the Buffalo Common Council. Details of the rest of the project, on the southern end of the block, have not been finalized.

If all approvals are granted for the \$25 million phase, construction could begin in late summer, with the facilities opening for students by fall of 2016 or spring 2017. Buff State is also planning an alumni house and visitor center complex adjacent to the project site, to provide information for visitors, as well as meeting or conference space, he said.

Greenleaf already held a public hearing at the Rees Street Community Center earlier in the month, hosted by Common Councilmember Golombek, with about 80 to 100 people in attendance. “There was a lot of support,” Dimitroff said. “There were some people who had some questions and concerns, but overall, we thought it was a very good, helpful, productive discussion.”