

Neighborhood Improvement Group Report; Possible Neighborhood Block Revitalization Programs in Oneonta

March 18, 2023

“The Fulton Block Challenge is a neighborhood revitalization program that helps both homeowners and property owners recover part of the cost of their property improvements.” Homeowners are encouraged to form small groups, blocks, and submit proposals to revitalize homes in their block. The Fulton Block Builders then partially fund some of the proposals, and home improvements are made.

We met (via ZOOM) with Linda Eagan, the prime mover of the Fulton Block Challenge. It looks as though a) in order to make a program like this work one needs a strong leader who can organize residents to participate in the program, and b) a strong leader who is able to gather money from granter, contributors, *etc.* to fund the program.

Linda indicated that they were only just now starting to implement their program in areas of Fulton with larger numbers of rentals. When asked whether she thought Oneonta could have a successful program with its large number of rentals she indicated we should look at Oswego’s program, Oswego Renaissance, as she thought they have more rentals in their program.

We contacted Paul Stewart of Oswego Renaissance. In response to our concern over the large number of rentals in Oneonta, Paul responded:

I strongly recommend you approach this strategically. I think Oneonta might benefit from working with the consulting firm that helped Oswego develop our plan. Yes, there are blocks in Oswego that are dominated by rentals. Usually we don’t start there, but in the nearest blocks where there is sufficient health to gain a foothold. As we build off those stronger areas, and expand ever outwards, we have seen multiple instances of reverse conversions (rental back to owner occupancy). But that pathway there is not always to start on the hardest blocks.

It is not clear that we can find “stronger areas” in Oneonta to expand outward from. It is highly unlikely that we will see much “reverse conversion” in Oneonta, student rentals returning to homeowner properties in response to just this program.

Paul further recommended:

Charles Buki of cbz could, in my estimation, really help Oneonta. That group could do so because they could taylor specific strategies to your specific situation. I find it hard to believe that Oneonta is radically different than Oswego. I could be wrong, but many of our Upstate cities face very similar challenges.

“Charles Buki is principal of czb, a Virginia-based neighborhood planning firm specializing in deep dive analysis, strategy development, and implementation of revitalization plans.” It appears that czb is a consulting firm and most likely will be willing to help Oneonta for a fee.

It does not seem that the City of Oneonta, through a revitalization program, should be giving student rental landlords and non-student rental landlords grants to improve their property when they are most likely making a profit off the rentals. If we want to reduce rentals, we should not be subsidizing them.