

**INTERPRETIVE CENTER OF UNDERGROUND RAILROAD EDUCATION CENTER –  
- CASE FOR SUPPORT -**

***IT'S MORE THAN A PRETTY BUILDING***

Just as our communal ancestors worked for justice, Underground Railroad Education Center carries on in their footsteps being committed to using what it has for the empowerment of all people to be agents of change toward an equitable and just society.

In order for Underground Railroad Education Center to continue to expand its outreach and share its empowering reinterpretation of underground railroad history and its relevance with us today, UREC needs a facility fully dedicated to programs, events, exhibits, film production and viewing, research, work force development, children's engagement, and the arts, and that will serve as a Resilience Hub for the community. This facility will be the Interpretive Center of Underground Railroad Education Center.

The Interpretive Center's design places it in a category of one in all of NYS in that it is the only building in NYS that combines net-zero features with CORE Living Building Challenge environmental standards with a Dutch barn timber frame in a severely distressed community. This is an investment in a severely distressed community challenged by the legacy of the institution of slavery in NYS and the nation, and by redlining, urban renewal and disinvestment.

UREC already owns the parcels on which the Interpretive Center is to be built. Architectural plans from schematic design through construction drawings have been completed. In working with Albany's Planning Department and presenting before Planning Board meetings, UREC has made sure it is complying with all zoning regulations. The work has required rezoning of the properties, which has been approved by the Planning Department and by Albany Common Council. We are presently engaged in the NEPA Section 106 process, which includes the NYS SEQR and FEAF components, having hired Hartgen Archeological Associate to conduct necessary investigations to bring that process to conclusion in October 2024. The Underground Filtration Gallery is a uniquely designed underground water retention facility with the purpose of managing storm water overflow entirely on the Interpretive Center properties. The Gallery will prevent polluted stormwater from entering the city's combined sewer and storm water system. Fabric, stone and soil will filter the storm water into the Gallery from which clean

water will be gradually released back into the soil. Designed to be a public building and possess a sense of permeability, the IC is designed so that when people are inside, they can still have a sense of relationship to the outside. Marketing of this project has been ongoing since its inception in July 2022. Publicity of this building has occurred across numerous radio, television, and print media sources. UREC has also taken this building and its story to local neighborhood associations and churches and community gatherings through tabling, speaking, offering workshops, engaging with folks around the state and around the country. Please see <https://undergroundrailroadhistory.org/interpretive-center-lp/> and <https://www.hamlindesigngroup.com/myers-center> . Bast Hatfield, a well-respected construction company serving the northeast since 1977, has contracted with UREC for the building of the Interpretive Center. The company VP has indicated that “Bast Hatfield is thrilled to be part of this project.” UREC is working with B/H to host a job fair at The Myers Residence Campus in order to reach out to more MWBE contractors, inform them about the project and to bring on more than the state required percent of MWBE certified contractors. This Interpretive Center is being built as a complementary building to the award-winning, documented Underground Railroad site known as The Stephen and Harriet Myers Residence which engages with 8000 people a year.

To date UREC has successfully managed the application of \$525,000 in grant funding to predevelopment needs of the Interpretive Center. UREC has expended \$150,000 toward the identification, purchase, dismantling, and storing of a pre-Revolutionary War Dutch barn timber frame that will be boldly integrated into the Interpretive Center assembly hall. Because of its age, the timber frame as salvaged material contributes to the net-zero feature of this building. As a piece of NYS history, it is being retained in NYS rather than being sold out of state as has befallen many NYS Dutch barn timber frames. It also allows UREC to address the issue of the institution of enslavement in NYS and the nation, as this timber frame was located on a farm that was worked by enslaved individuals, while also talking about the repurposing of the timber frame to address issues of emancipation and democracy.

The building is a replicable model of innovation as a net zero facility with CORE Living Building Challenge Certification. It is a model of environmental responsibility with use of salvaged, recycled timbers, a high-performance building envelope which is thermally treated to destroy the sugars and resins used as food sources by bugs and fungi resulting in a pest and mold resistant product without the use of chemicals, geo-thermal heating and cooling which will reduce the building’s energy use by 75%, 120 solar photovoltaic cells, energy efficient water usage strategies, and energy efficient lighting strategies that include 70% of lighting needs being

met by natural light. Cross Laminated Timber, harvested from a sustainable forest, will replace steel which in its production emits a vast amount of carbon. Biophilic features will include a lighting motif that mimics fireflies, a ceiling feature that appears to be rolling clouds, and a rain chain that will be part of a larger rain garden.

The project advances the region's economic development strategies, will drive economic growth and provide for job creation and innovation. This Interpretive Center will provide 35 to 45 construction jobs and 10 new full-time jobs at opening. Green job introductory workshops will be offered that will provide the tools for interested community members to participate in green job workforce development opportunities with Capital Area Urban League and apply to green job companies. The fund generating capability of the Interpretive Center will attract other businesses to locate in Arbor Hill. The expected 100% increase in visitation to the Interpretive Center will have overflow implications for amenities in nearby downtown Albany. Additionally, this project leverages unique regional assets that include African American history and culture, the local Underground Railroad story in its national and international context, and the placement of local history in the national and international narrative, all of which are aligned with Governor Hochel's Black Travel Initiative and Green Building Initiative. The IC will also provide services to the community that are currently lacking. Such services include, but are not limited to, setting up a farmers' market to mitigate the food desert conditions in the community, and providing legal clinics and job fairs. Additionally, the IC will be a Resilience Hub for the northern portion of Albany, collaborating with Trinity Alliance as the Resilience Hub serving the southern portion of Albany, in order to provide respite and refuge during community crises events.

Currently we have committed in hand or by contract for the Interpretive Center -

- \$1.1 million from NYSERDA
- \$2 million from the NYS Assembly
- \$80,000 from Albany County ARPA
- \$35,000 from The Whalen Foundation
- \$525,000 from Breslin/Fahy grants
- \$250,000 from the National Endowment for the Humanities
- \$181,135 from individuals in the community
- \$2,500 from the Kiwi Foundation

We are expecting \$674,378 in tax credits from the Inflation Reduction Act which will be applied to the project. This is the amount expected because of the environmentally important features. An additional \$90,000 is anticipated from National Grid and \$3.3 million is anticipated from EPA.

Underground Railroad Education Center (UREC) has statewide affiliation with Underground Railroad Consortium of NYS, Erie Canal Way National Heritage Area, and Hudson River Valley Greenway, national affiliation with National Park Service Network to Freedom, National Park Service Civil Rights Network, and Association of African American Museums, and international affiliation with International Coalition of Sites of Conscience. To date, UREC has managed over \$3 million in operations and capital expenditures related to The Stephen and Myers Residence, its only base of operations. The Residence, as an award-winning historic site on the National Register of Historic Places, is an economic engine for the city, the county, and even the state. It is limited in its impact because it is a historic house. UREC has outgrown this space. It needs to restore the Residence to its period of historic significance so as to retell the empowering story of Black activists working to eliminate the institution of slavery in our state and nation. It needs to enhance and expand its empowering program opportunities that can only be done through the Interpretive Center.

With \$12,000,000 UREC will, in collaboration with Bast Hatfield and Hamlin Design Group, be able to accomplish construction of the Interpretive Center by December 2025.

### **INTERPRETIVE CENTER SPACES**

- Children's center
- Exhibit and event space
- Library and research center
- Café and commercial kitchen
- Conference room
- Collections and Archival storage
- Media center
- Grand Staircase
- Outdoor patio
- Offices
- Myers Mercantile
- One apartment for grounds/security staff
- One apartment for visiting artists, scholars, researchers

**Consultants working on the Interpretive Center were asked why they are excited about working on this project and what it means to them**

As a person of color, whose family came from the south during the Great Migration, the stories of slavery and emancipation were not always openly discussed. I am pleased to be a part of a project which intends to accurately document, store and present that history for all. (Shawn Hamlin, Hamlin Design Group)

*We are excited to be involved in design of the Interpretive Center for UREC because the project will provide an important resource and become part of the fabric of the community. If we don't understand our history, we cannot learn from the past and grow to become better citizens and leaders. (Kevin Schaefer, Schaefer Engineering)*

I am excited to contribute to this worthy project which captures a critical and often overlooked part of our national history. The human condition that was experienced resulting in the Underground Railroad was grim and its utility must never be forgotten as we strive to make for a better and more perfect Union. The issues surrounding the UR are timeless and no less relevant today than then. (Kurt Bedore, KB Engineering and Consulting)

*Albany is full of history, and your mission highlights the character of Stephen and Harriet Myers and the Vigilance Committee. I cannot think of a more worthy cause. (Jack Healy, Ryan Biggs / Clark Davis)*

The story of the Underground Railroad is a story of hope, perseverance, and triumph. It is a story that brings to light one of the ugliest parts of America's history while at the same time celebrating the bravery and the heroism of those who took a stand and worked to right the terrible wrong that was slavery. It is a story that everyone needs to know so that we can continue the path to a better America and a better world. The building of the new Interpretive Center embodies the very essence of that path. (Mary Moore Wallinger, LAndArt Studio)

(09/2024)