

Hochul: Opera house key to Hudson revival

By John Mason and Katie Kocijanski Columbia-Greene Media | Posted: Wednesday, December 16, 2015 12:00 am

Lt. Gov. Kathy Hochul was scheduled to tour the Hudson Business District and then the Hudson Opera House, but because time was running short, she went straight from Catskill to the opera house.

Opera House Co-executive Director Gary Schiro told her about the history and current uses of the building, including a photographic collaboration with Perfect 10 and Clermont Historic Site that was on display.

He showed her the west room, most commonly used for concerts, lectures and theater pieces, the back room, used for educational and recreational programs, the former Common Council chambers and the main theater on the second floor.

"The governor and I recognize (the opera house) is an economic catalyst," Hochul said. "That's why it was awarded \$1.3 million. A building like this can be the heart and soul of a downtown area. These investments will pay dividends time and time again. It's been part of this community for such a long time."

Schiro pointed out an 1869 photo of Warren Street on the wall. "It still looks like this," he said, "an intact main street."

"A lot of places started like this," Hochul said of the photo, "then the 1970s destroyed it."

Hochul said she is on a tour of places that did well in the latest round of Regional Economic Development Council awards.

The Capital Region was awarded \$98.1 million, with Hudson receiving \$3 million, including the opera house funding and \$1.5 million for a hotel on Cross Street.



Opera House

John Mason/Columbia-Greene Media
Hudson Opera House Executive Co-Director Gary Schiro tells New York State Lt. Gov. Kathy Hochul about the history of the Opera House and the current exhibition on the lobby walls, a photographic collaboration with Perfect 10 and the Clermont Historic Site.

She said she wanted to see the “before” picture and see how it would be rehabilitated for community uses.

“I’m excited about this place,” she said, citing the more than 800 programs put on in a year and the 300-seat performance space under construction. Schiro told her about the luminaries that had appeared on the stage, including Ralph Waldo Emerson, Susan B. Anthony and Theodore Roosevelt.

“Your passion for this place is so contagious,” Hochul said. “It’s going to be a game-changer for the city of Hudson.”

Schiro told her that when they first started working on the building on lower Warren Street, “people were saying ‘you’re crazy.’”

“I’m seeing this in communities all over New York,” Hochul said. “People are bringing back theaters, in Fredonia, in Plattsburgh ... they believe it will have a ripple effect on the downtown.”

Hochul thanked assembled community members for being the “keepers of the history” during a dark time. She told how as a town council member in Hamburg, Erie County, she helped convert an abandoned waterworks building into a visitors’ center.

“That took me 12 years,” she said. “I want to thank all of you for putting your heart and soul into this. You have the honor of being the 62nd county I visited. I saved the best for last.”

Mayor William H. Hallenbeck Jr. called it “an honor and a privilege to be here to have the lieutenant governor recognize the city of Hudson and what we’re trying to accomplish. The efforts of the Hudson Opera House and its staff are pivotal to the residents and the community and what they offer to the future of the city of Hudson.”

In Catskill, the lieutenant governor toured the future home of the American Dance Institute located at 50 Water St. in Catskill.

The troupe, based in Rockville, Maryland and New York City, will be making Catskill its new home in 2018.

“This site is spectacular; it has so much going for it and has a lot of charm,” said Hochul. “It will be a major catalyst to bring back the downtown community here in Catskill.”

Hochul was shown around the former Dunn Builders and Supply complex by Adrienne Willis, the institute’s executive director, and Catskill Village President Vincent Seeley.

With a groundbreaking set for May 7, 2016, the institute was awarded a \$500,000 state grant on Dec. 10 through the consolidated funding application process.

The grant money will be used for the first phase of the building’s renovation and expansion.

The renovation is the first phase of the project for the institute. Seeley said the underutilized waterfront property will also be developed in the future.

Town Supervisor-elect Doreen Davis, Institute General Manager Cathy Teixeira and Steven Skerritt-Davis, the institute's director of external relations were all present for the tour.

"This is a transformative project for the village; it is poised to have an amazing future here," said Hochul.

Willis said a group of the institute's younger performers and employees will be moving to the area from Washington, D.C., once the venue opens its doors.

She and other members of the organization are looking forward to moving to an area with more affordable housing.

As part of the second phase, Seeley said a craft brewery will be opening further down Water Street.

Hochul said she has seen that type of business become a huge part of the revitalization of downtowns all across the state.