

**National Trust for Historic Preservation  
Leadership Training Institute  
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**TURNING THE TIDE FOR THE LINDEN HOTEL**

**A Study In Stubborn Buildings**

Like many historic structures, the Linden Hotel has filled a long list of uses in the life of Fort Collins. Originally, the Linden Hotel was built in 1882 as the home for the Poudre Valley Bank with stores on the second floor and the Masonic Lodge leasing the third floor in 1885. By the early 1900's, the second floor was converted to a hotel and today the community continues to refer to the building as the Linden Hotel despite the wide variety of past building uses. Other uses have included: a post office, tavern, VFW bar, combination residential efficiency and single room occupancy (SRO) units, and thrift shops.

Located at 201 Linden St., the Linden is currently a vacant building with structural deterioration and extensive interior finish damage due to years of neglect. In addition, the structure has obsolete mechanical systems. The Linden has waited for a new life since 1985 when a Boulder, Colorado development partnership closed the building and performed exploratory demolition.

The Linden Hotel is significant to the City of Fort Collins. The building is individually designated as an historic landmark by the City of Fort Collins and it is a contributing structure in the Old Town Local Landmark Historic District. In addition, it is cited as a contributing structure within the Old Town National Register Historic District.

The Linden also has a strong visual presence in the Old Town area and throughout downtown. Strategically located at the corner of Linden and Walnut Streets, the three-story 16,000 square foot structure is a major architectural feature adding varied height, unique detailing and a unifying dimensions to the area. The diagonal corner section is the most significant part of the building, featuring an ornamental double oriel window and a witches' hat tower with a fanlight.

The lack of action on the Linden is not due to lack of interest. According to a memo by Chip Steiner, Executive Director of the Downtown Development Authority, there have been several failed proposals since the mid 1980's. Proposed projects were to revitalize the Linden for a variety of uses. To date each proposal has hit an impasse: finances, regulatory requirements, changing preservation tax credits, prohibitive costs, weak rental market and/or tight lending regulations. Several past newspaper articles

have proudly proclaimed the start of a Linden Hotel renovation, only to have the project evaporate in subsequent months.

Revitalization projects have been accomplished in Fort Collins. In 1984 the Old Town Square project renovated 7 historic structures, and built 5 new infill buildings to create a cohesive retail plaza. In 1990 an investor completed the renovation of the Opera Galleria space a block and a half away from the Linden on College Ave. The Opera Galleria is a 75,000 square foot renovated commercial space contiguous to the Old Town area. But renovation is not without its risks. The original cost of the Old Town Square complex was \$18.5 million. The project went into foreclosure and the new investors paid less than two million dollars. The Opera Galleria has had a difficult time leasing its renovated spaces. It too went into foreclosure and recently has been valued at considerably less than half its original \$8 million price tag.

Need for action for the Linden Hotel grows more urgent with each passing month. The Poudre Valley Fire Authority considers the Linden Hotel an increasing fire risk in the downtown area. Damage from vagrants and the elements wear on the hotel's structural integrity and jeopardize its future. Time is no longer a friend to the Linden Hotel.

Within a stone's throw of the Linden Hotel at the corner of College Avenue and Walnut Street is another historic hotel in need of attention. The 45,000 square foot Northern Hotel was built in the late 1900's and has been renovated a number of times. In 1975, two floors burned. A resident of the hotel died in the fire. The fire damage has never been repaired; nor has the hotel ever reached its potential as a valuable and viable community asset.

In its heyday, the Northern was the center of commercial, railroad and agricultural activities for the region. The lobby has ornate plaster work with a colorful stained glass ceiling. The hotel restaurant has an equally beautiful stained glass dome. In many ways, the reality for the Linden Hotel is the reality for the Northern Hotel. Because of this, the Trust's Leadership Training Institute may prove doubly useful to the Fort Collins community.

## TEAM PROJECTS

The team projects focus on two aspects of the Linden Hotel: determining potentially viable uses and community issues.

### Team #1: Analyzing traditional commercial use

What would happen if we took the Linden Hotel full circle to its original use as a commercial structure? Analyze the possibility of the hotel being revitalized as commercial space. Options include retail and office space, banking or bistros. Review community reports and statistics to determine the potential success of a commercial venture. Develop a preliminary plan by brainstorming potential commercial uses, selecting a commercial venture and determining the scope of the venture using the work sheet as a base for evaluation.

### Team #2: Living at the Linden

Today the residential market is hot in Fort Collins. Residential rental vacancies have held between one and three percent for the last two years. Due to favorable loan rates and an increased demand for homes, the housing sales market is also tight. But the real estate market is a fickle market. Evaluate the potential to use the Linden for residential concerns. What options for subsidized housing or a free-market product exist? What type of housing do you recommend?

Use the work sheet to guide you through the multi-faceted nature of analyzing project options. As a final analysis, present your review for the Linden Hotel as a residential property.

### Team #3: "I'm visiting Fort Collins and staying at the Linden Hotel"

The Linden has had several stints as lodging accommodations. Can the downtown area support a hotel or other form of lodging? Options include a bed and breakfast, European styled pension or a specialty hotel. Analyze the considerations for such a venture. What is the competition? Hotels are more complicated these days than when the original Linden Hotel was established. There are codes, ADA, health and safety regulations and more. What do you see as issues in returning the Linden to a life of lodging accommodations? Work through the multi-faceted issues for building use and give us your opinion of this option.

Team #4: A break from the past: the Linden as a cultural center for art, entertainment or education

Perhaps what the Linden Hotel needs is a totally different use. Brainstorm about the different options as a cultural center either public or private. The shortage of space at Colorado State University has generated talk about a satellite space, perhaps for a university center or institute. Another option was an academic village for emeriti professors. A public or private museum could be housed at the Linden Hotel. The community is interested in creating a river walk; are there possible tie-ins there? What other options are open? Work through the evaluation sheet and determine the feasibility of this option.

Team #5: The Linden's community involvement

The Linden Hotel affects the block, street, and community by its vitality or vacancy. A key ingredient in most historic preservation projects is the community support (or lack thereof) for the project. Assess the public support for the Linden. What avenues do you see that could strengthen the Linden's community support? How do proponents of the Linden Hotel in specific, and historic preservation in general, gather tangible financial and other support for projects of this type?

How can the Linden Hotel be used as a springboard to create stronger community support for historic preservation? Although there are currently 57 community groups loosely tied to history and historic preservation, there is no leading community based organization. Detail activities that could be dovetailed into the development of the Linden to strengthen and further preservation efforts in Fort Collins. Include plans for the government sector, private sector, and general public.