



**Heritage Preservation Commission Agenda**  
**Rochester Boards & Commissions - Heritage Preservation Commission**  
**November 28, 2023**  
**5:00 p.m.**

**Attending and Viewing the Meeting**

Attend the meeting in person - come to Government Center Council Chamber, 151 4th Street SE  
A recording is made available after the meeting at the [City's website](#).

**1. Open Public Comment Period**

*This is an opportunity for the public to provide comments to the Commission regarding items not on the agenda. The public has up to four minutes to provide comments. The Commission will not discuss or take action on them.*

**2. Call to Order/Roll Call**

**3. Order of Agenda**

**4. Consent Agenda**

**4.A. Minutes of October 24, 2023**

Accepting the minutes and video of the October 24, 2023, Heritage Preservation Commission meeting as the official record of the Heritage Preservation Commission.

**5. Reports and Recommendations**

**6. Public Hearings**

**6.A. Reid, Murdoch & Co./ Libby, McNeil & Libby/Seneca Foods Canning Co., (Ear of Corn) Water Tower - Landmark Designation**

Recommending to the City Council, Historic Landmark Designation of the Ear of Corn Water Tower, based on findings for historic significance and historic integrity detailed in the eligibility report.

**7. Other Business**

**7.A. Updates & Future Meetings**

No action recommended; informational only.

**8. Adjournment**



## **REQUEST FOR ACTION**

Minutes of October 24, 2023

**MEETING DATE:**  
November 28, 2023

**ORIGINATING DEPT:**  
Community Development

**AGENDA SECTION:**  
Consent Agenda

**PRESENTER:**  
Molly Patterson-Lundgren

### **Action Requested:**

Accepting the minutes and video of the October 24, 2023, Heritage Preservation Commission meeting as the official record of the Heritage Preservation Commission.

### **Report Narrative:**

The minutes and video are the official record of the Heritage Preservation Commission.

### **Prepared By:**

Justin Thirstrup

### **Attachments:**

[Minutes - October 24, 2023](#)



**CITY OF ROCHESTER, MINNESOTA  
Heritage Preservation Commission MINUTES**

**1) [Open Public Comment Period](#)**

The following individuals spoke:

1. Kevin Lund
2. Barb Hudson
3. John Kruesel

**2) [Call to Order/Roll Call](#)**

| <b>Attendee Name</b> | <b>Status</b> |
|----------------------|---------------|
| Shawn Fagan          | Present       |
| Aden W Homard        | Present       |
| Mark S Hubly         | Present       |
| Thomas Meilander     | Present       |
| Andrew Napier        | Present       |
| Jennifer M Shabel    | Present       |
| Barry Skolnick       | Present       |
| Nancy D Bergner      | Absent        |
| Adaheid L Mestad     | Absent        |

**3) [Order of Agenda](#)**

Motion to approve the Order of Agenda.

**MOVER:** Barry Skolnick

**SECONDER:** Andrew Napier

**AYES:** Shawn Fagan, Aden W Homard, Mark S Hubly, Thomas Meilander, Andrew Napier, Jennifer M Shabel, Barry Skolnick

**ABSENT:** Nancy D Bergner, Adaheid L Mestad

**RESULT:** **APPROVED [UNANIMOUS]**

**4) [Consent Agenda](#)**

***Minutes of September 26, 2023***

**Official Act:** Accepting the minutes and video of the September 26, 2023, Heritage Preservation Commission meeting as the official record of the Heritage Preservation Commission.

[Cover Page](#) 

[Minutes - September 26, 2023](#) 

Motion to approve the minutes and video of the September 26, 2023, Heritage Preservation Commission meeting as the official record of the Heritage Preservation Commission.

**MOVER:** Andrew Napier  
**SECONDER:** Shawn Fagan  
**AYES:** Shawn Fagan, Aden W Homard, Mark S Hubly, Thomas Meilander, Andrew Napier, Jennifer M Shabel  
**NAYS:** Barry Skolnick  
**ABSENT:** Nancy D Bergner, Adaheid L Mestad  
**RESULT:** **APPROVED [6 - 1 - 2]**

## 5) [Reports and Recommendations](#)

Motion to suspend the rules and review emails from the public that have been submitted on this topic.

**MOVER:** Barry Skolnick  
**SECONDER:** None  
**RESULT:** **The motion failed due to the lack of a second**

Motion to establish a policy that any materials that are received from the public prior to a meeting be submitted to Commissioners as soon as the items are received.

**MOVER:** Barry Skolnick  
**SECONDER:** None  
**RESULT:** **The motion failed due to the lack of a second**

### 5.A) [Request to Remove Properties from Historic Inventory - 309, 311, 313, 315, 317 South Broadway Ave](#)

**Official Act:** Considering the request to remove 309, 311, 313, 315, and 317 South Broadway Ave from the historic inventory.

[Cover Page](#) 

[UDC Section 60.500.050D & Table 500.01-1](#) 

[Letter - Request for Removal from Inventory](#) 

[Building Locations](#) 

[2019-01-22 HPC Minutes Potential Designation](#) 

[2019 Rochester Downtown Commercial Historic District - extracted pages](#) 

Molly Patterson-Lundgren presented the staff report.  
Bill Blanski and Hal Henderson presented on behalf of the Applicant.  
Discussion ensued between Commissioners, Staff, and the Applicant.

Motion to deny the request to remove 309, 311, 313, 315, and 317 South Broadway Ave from the historic inventory citing the evidence provided in the staff report that the properties meet criteria 1 and 3 for landmark designation.

**MOVER:** Barry Skolnick  
**SECONDER:** Aden W Homard  
**AYES:** Aden W Homard, Mark S Hubly, Andrew Napier, Jennifer M Shabel, Barry Skolnick  
**NAYS:** Shawn Fagan  
**ABSTAIN:** Thomas Meilander  
**ABSENT:** Nancy D Bergner, Adaheid L Mestad  
**RESULT:** **APPROVED [5 - 1 - 1 - 2]**

## 6) [Other Business](#)

6.A) Updates to Ongoing Projects

**Official Act:** No Action Recommended.

[Cover Page](#) 

[Staff presented updates on the Downtown Historic District.](#)

[Staff presented updates on Pill Hill.](#)

Motion to suspend the rules to allow for public comment from Nita Khosla regarding Pill Hill.

**MOVER:** Barry Skolnick  
**SECONDER:** Thomas Meilander  
**AYES:** Shawn Fagan, Aden W Homard, Mark S Hubly, Thomas Meilander, Andrew Napier, Jennifer M Shabel, Barry Skolnick  
**ABSENT:** Nancy D Bergner, Adaheid L Mestad  
**RESULT:** **APPROVED [UNANIMOUS]**

[Nita Khosla addressed commissioners.](#)

[Staff presented updates on Soldiers Field Memorial Park.](#)

[Commissioners asked Staff questions.](#)

## 7) [Adjournment](#)

Motion to adjourn.

**MOVER:** Shawn Fagan  
**SECONDER:** Andrew Napier  
**AYES:**

Shawn Fagan, Aden W Homard, Mark S Hubly, Thomas Meilander, Andrew Napier, Jennifer M Shabel, Barry Skolnick

**ABSENT:** Nancy D Bergner, Adaheid L Mestad

**RESULT:** **APPROVED [UNANIMOUS]**



## **REQUEST FOR ACTION**

**Reid, Murdoch & Co./ Libby, McNeil & Libby/Seneca  
Foods Canning Co., (Ear of Corn) Water Tower -  
Landmark Designation**

**MEETING DATE:**

**November 28, 2023**

**ORIGINATING DEPT:**

**Community Development**

**AGENDA SECTION:**

**Public Hearings**

**PRESENTER:**

**Molly Patterson-Lundgren,  
Heritage Preservation &  
Urban Design Coordinator**

### **Action Requested:**

Recommending to the City Council, Historic Landmark Designation of the Ear of Corn Water Tower, based on findings for historic significance and historic integrity detailed in the eligibility report.

### **Report Narrative:**

The Reid, Murdoch & Co./ Libby, McNeil & Libby/Seneca Foods Canning Co., Water Tower (also called the Ear of Corn Water Tower) was placed on the historic inventory (previously called the potential landmark list) on January 21, 2019. The Heritage Preservation Commission's (HPC's) review of the property at this time, is part of the ongoing work Community Development and the HPC are undertaking to decide on landmark eligibility for all properties on the inventory.

As indicated in the attached eligibility report, the water tower has historic significance under two criteria. The structure is significant under criteria 5, for its embodiment of distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style or treatment. The water tower style is "programmatic" or "mimetic", which is a novelty type of architecture. The sculptural form and paint design were used to communicate the tower's original purpose as part of the canning factory and served as advertising for the business. It also is significant under criteria 8, because of its location, scale, and other physical characteristics which have been established as a familiar feature to the neighborhood and City. It has become recognizable as a Rochester location beyond those who reside here, as evidenced by posts on social media. But the tower was recognized as a visible landmark for the City much earlier; it appeared in printed media about Rochester as early as the 1950s on postcards of the canning factory.

This property is being recommended for landmark designation as a structure that meets the criteria identified above. It is only the water tower structure that would become a landmark in this designation, not the remaining property on which the canning factory once stood. The historic integrity of the water tower is strong, with all but one of the 7 aspects of historic integrity being good or excellent.

As required under Minnesota state statute, this information has been provided to the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) for their review. A letter of support from them is attached.

### **Prior Legislative Actions & Community Engagement:**

January 21, 2019 - Placement by the HPC on the historic inventory/potential landmark list

**Prepared By:**

Molly Patterson-Lundgren

**Attachments:**

[Designation Study - Water Tower](#)

[SHPO Comments](#)





# EAR OF CORN WATER TOWER – REID MURDOCH & CO/ SENECA FOODS

Rochester Historic Landmark Eligibility

DRAFT November 20, 2023

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Historic Property Name: Seneca Ear of Corn Water Tower  
Rochester Historic Landmark Eligibility

Property Identification & Description

| Identification          |  |
|-------------------------|--|
| Historic Name           | Reid, Murdoch & Co./ Libby, McNeil & Libby/Seneca Foods Canning Co., Water Tower |
| Current Name            | Ear of Corn Water Tower  |
| Address                 | 1217 3 Ave SE  |
| City/Twp                | Rochester  |
| County                  | Olmsted  |
| Legal Descript          | City Lands 106-14-11   |
| USGS Quad               | Twp 106/ Range 14, NE/NE, Sec. 11  |
| Property ID (PIN)       | 641111079469   |
| SHPO Inventory Number   | Undefined  |
| Previous Determinations | National Register – No<br>Phase 1 Survey – The 106 Group 10/17/14                |



Water Tower Location, Map Source<sup>i</sup>

The proposed landmark designation is for the water tower structure alone (indicated by the red arrow) and does not include the remainder of the land parcel on which it is located (indicated by the yellow line).

Historic Property Name: Seneca Ear of Corn Water Tower  
 Rochester Historic Landmark Eligibility

Property Description

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <b>Builder/Designer</b>                | Unknown/Rudolph Betcher (commercial painter)   |
| <b>Style</b>                           | Mimetic/Programmatic Architecture  |
| <b>Construction Date</b>               | 1931   |
| <b>Original Use</b>                    | Water tower  |
| <b>Current Use</b>                     | Visual locational landmark   |
| <b>Associated Properties/Districts</b> | 1232 3 <sup>rd</sup> Ave SE (Workshop Food Hall), was associated with the canning factory as a maintenance workshop. |

Resource Type

|                                   | Buildings | Structures | Sites | Objects |
|-----------------------------------|-----------|------------|-------|---------|
| <b>Contributing Resources</b>     | • 0       | • 1        | • 0   | • 0     |
| <b>Non-Contributing Resources</b> | • 0       | • 0        | • 0   | • 0     |

History of Property

The canning factory that previously located on the property where the water tower sits, was opened in 1929 by the Reid Murdoch Company. They established this location, after moving operations to Rochester from Wadena Minnesota. This produce company had been formed in 1853 in Buffalo New York. Moving to the Midwest and expanding into a broader grocery business, the company would, in 1899, construct a warehouse and office building in Chicago and then in 1914, move to a new facility, in that same city. That building still stands today.<sup>ii</sup>



The Rochester water tower was constructed in 1931. Designed to hold 50,000 gallons of water needed for the canning process, the company hired a commercial billboard artist to paint the tower, replicating the appearance of the ear of corn.<sup>iii</sup> The water tower, painted by Rudolph Betcher of General Outdoor Advertising Company, is likely the longest lasting example of his oversized work.<sup>iv</sup>

1931 Local Newspaper Story<sup>v</sup>

## Historic Property Name: Seneca Ear of Corn Water Tower Rochester Historic Landmark Eligibility

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The canning factory building was added on to many times by Reid Murdoch and subsequent owners. In 1948, the property was sold to Libby, McNeil, and Libby. By 1983, the plant was under the operation of Seneca foods<sup>vi</sup>; they continued to distribute product under the Libby's label. In 2018, the plant closed

Shortly after Seneca Foods announced the plants upcoming closure, a campaign to save the water tower began. The property had been identified in a 2014 survey for the city's new heritage preservation program as potentially eligible for local landmark designation. Closure brought about discussion of local designation. Even though the company informed the City of their opposition to this, it was placed on the city potential landmark list on January 20, 2019. Later that year, Olmsted County acquired the property. The plant was demolished in 2020. In 2021, the County invested a reported \$400,000 in a three month rehabilitation project including but not limited to a final surface repainting.<sup>vii</sup>

### Designation Criteria

Criteria from 60.200.040 C.5.a of City Code. X in the left-hand column indicates the property meets that criteria for designation.

**(1) Its character, interest, or value as part of the development, heritage, or cultural characteristics of the city, state or United States;**

The water tower is a visual reminder of the agricultural industrial history of the community. As a structure associated with the canning factory, the water tower provides the historical context for understanding its origins. Due to the canning factory buildings no longer being extent, the lack of historic integrity of the site does not support landmark designation of the water tower under this criteria.

**(2) Its location as a place of a significant historic event;**

There are no significant historic events known to have occurred at this site or associated with this structure.

**(3) Its location within and contribution as an element of a landmark district;**

This is not located within or contributing to any historic district.

**(4) Its identification with a person who significantly contributed to the culture and development of the city;**

There are no individuals known to have significantly contributed to the culture and development of the City, associated with this structure.

**X (5) Its embodiment of distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style, period, form, or treatment;**

The water tower style is "programmatic", also called "mimetic". This is a novelty type of architecture where a sculptural form and other design elements of the structure is used to

## Historic Property Name: Seneca Ear of Corn Water Tower Rochester Historic Landmark Eligibility

communicate its contents or purpose. Corn was one of the primary products processed at the factory for which the tower was constructed.<sup>viii</sup>

This type of architecture was typically constructed in the U.S. between 1920 and the beginning of World War II and coincided with the increased use of private automobiles being driven for leisurely travel by middle class families, referred to as “touring”. The purpose of many of these structures was to lure the traveler off of the highway to purchase or experience a roadside attraction. Ultimately, these were advertising devices. With the modernist era of the 1950’s the style had become less popular, but resurgences occur. The postmodern era saw a renewed interest in roadside architecture with preservation efforts (e.g. Route 66) and construction of new mimetic architecture (e.g. Longeaberger Basket building, Newark Ohio, 1997 construction).

The trend of oversized imagery is also seen in the way of novelty water towers as a subset of the style. Other examples of this include municipal water towers associated with the culture of the community in which they were built; Pequot Lakes’ bobber and Lindstrom’s coffee pot are two Minnesota examples of this. There are also other mimetic water towers that were constructed for industrial uses, similar to the ear of corn. These include a Brooks Catsup Bottle in Collinsville IL, and Dole Pineapple (no longer extent) in Honolulu HI. While the purpose of these corporate mimetic structures was not for direct sales, they served to remind both local residents and travelers of the local presence of that particular industry and the role the company played in the local economy.



ix



x



xi



xii

**(6) Its identification as the work of an architect or master builder whose individual efforts have influenced the development of the city or have contributed to the development of a nationally- or internationally-recognized style or movement;**

The original painting of the tower is attributed to Rudolph E. (Rudy) Betcher, a professional billboard painter. The water tower was one of Betcher’s more notable works of art, however it appears to be outlier, as his job was focused on billboards.<sup>xiii</sup> He was not specifically instrumental in developing this style of architecture, nor is he seen as influencing the development of the community. The property is not considered significant under this criteria.

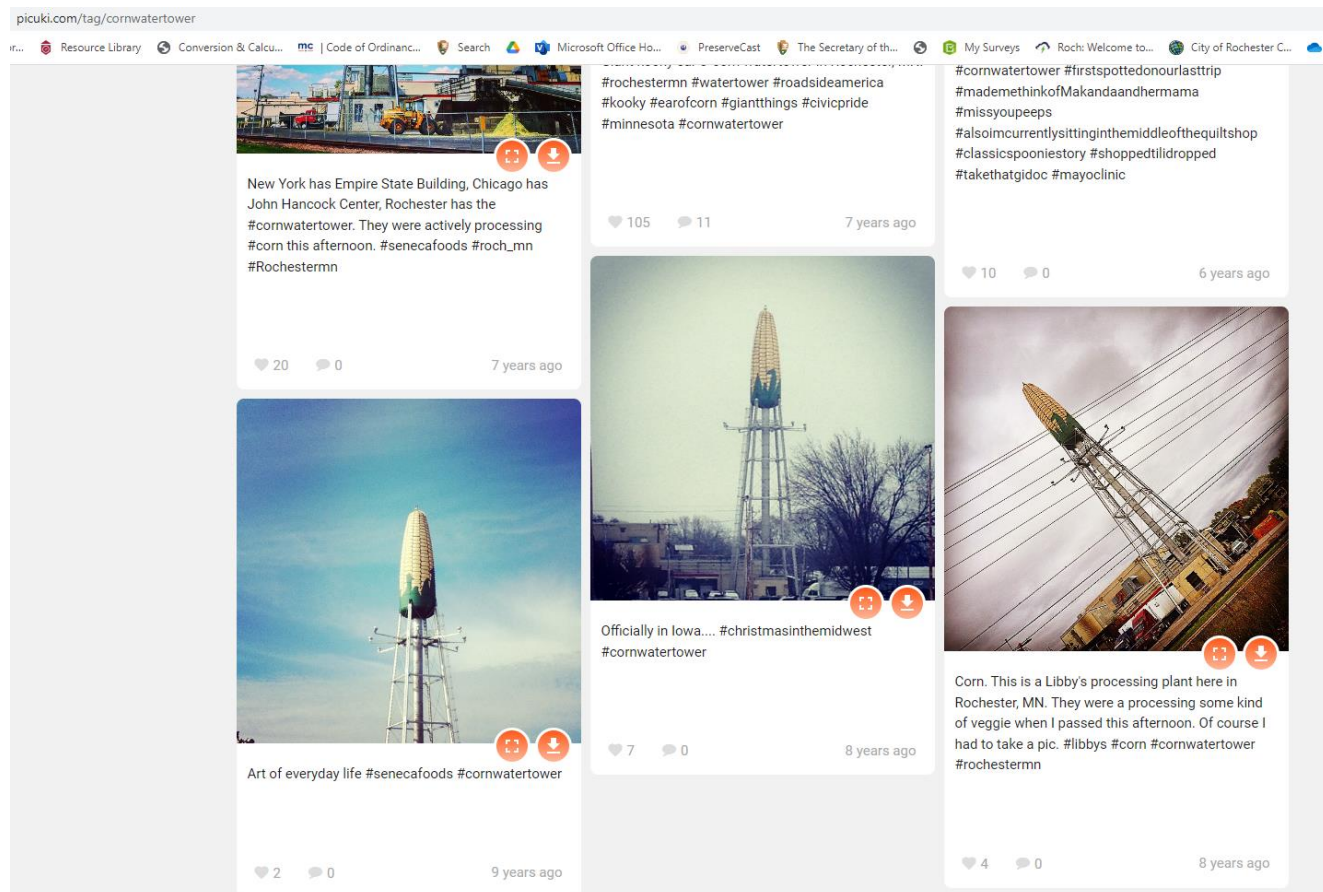
## Historic Property Name: Seneca Ear of Corn Water Tower Rochester Historic Landmark Eligibility

### (7) Its embodiment of elements of architectural design, detail, material, or craftsmanship that represent a significant architectural innovation; and

While unusual in design (see criteria 5) the property is not representative of a significant innovation and therefore does not fit this criteria.

### X (8) Its location, scale, or other physical characteristics representing an established and familiar visual feature or a neighborhood, a district, the community, or the city.

Visible from several blocks away, the ear of corn water tower is a recognizable landmark in the southeastern part of the City. As mentioned in the 1931 article about the towers construction (see p. 6), the tower would, upon its construction, provide a landmark for pilots landing at the nearby airfield. This was the case, until the airport was relocated to a further southern location in 1960. Not only is it quite noticeable due to size and height, it is the uniqueness of the structure, both its shape and paint design that garners attention. The fact that it is so recognizable and specifically attributed to Rochester is evidenced by the presence of its image in artwork and on social media posts, which has grown in number over the past several years. These posts go back at least 9 years, as evidenced by a 2014 post labeled “Art of Everyday Life”<sup>xiv</sup>.

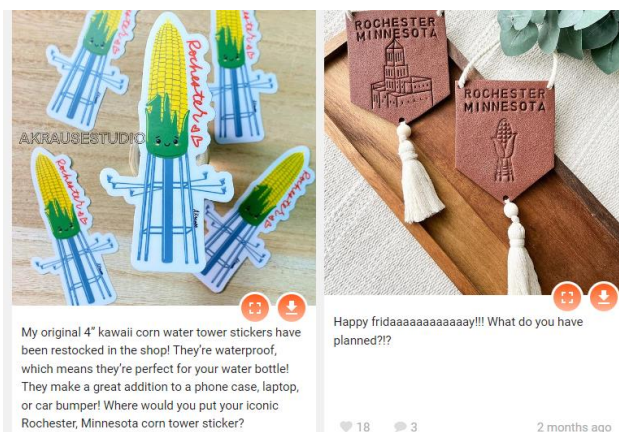


Although the social media posts of the ear of corn water tower is a fairly recent phenomena, it reflects a progression of the association people have with the structure as a familiar visual

# Historic Property Name: Seneca Ear of Corn Water Tower Rochester Historic Landmark Eligibility

feature of Rochester; some posts indicate a multi-generational viewpoint of this. In December of 2018, shortly after the closure of the canning factory was announced, the city received 65 emails in approximately a four week period. These came from individuals sharing their thoughts on how the tower was “an iconic symbol of Rochester”. Several included mentioning their recollections of seeing the water tower from childhood home or while visiting city. Many also mentioned their own children and grandchildren having recognition of the structure. One joke, apparently told in more than one family, was that the tower was going to have to be demolished soon, the punchline being that there was giant worm on the inside eating away at the cob.

More recent images on social media show the water tower depicted in different forms of artwork, stylized on t-shirts, magnets, fashion pins, stickers and book markers. It’s not uncommon to see the image appearing in artwork throughout the City in public places and at businesses.



The tower won the People’s Choice award for Tank of the Year from the protective coating company Tnemec in 2021. A Tweet from October of that year indicates that more than 5,000 votes had been made for the Rochester tower in just a two-week period.

Ongoing social media posts, such as one on the Facebook page of “Quirky Minnesota Places” indicates a recognition of the tower as a symbol of Rochester extending beyond those who live in the City.

## Period of Significance

The first period of significance is from its construction in 1931 for its embodiment of distinguishing characteristics of the mimetic architectural style of the early automobile period in the United States. By the 1950’s, novelty architecture had begun to transform into a more subtle reference of the product, with the building representing a corporate brand (i.e. fast food and gas station franchise’s), rather than as an individual and highly unusual lone structure i.e. more characteristic of the earlier era. However, mimetic architecture has had resurgence in popularity or in occasional use at different

**Historic Property Name: Seneca Ear of Corn Water Tower  
Rochester Historic Landmark Eligibility**

times since. Some notable examples of this include: the Longeaberger Basket building (1997, Newark Ohio) and the National Fisheries Development Board building (2012, Telangana India).<sup>xv</sup>

1950-Current is the second period of significance, and relates to its characteristics as an established and familiar visual feature of the City. Its dominance over the skyline in this part of the City and its proximity to highways and the airport made the tower a visible gateway feature from its beginning. Its association with the community continues to strengthen over time. It was notable enough for the factory and water tower to appear on a c. 1950s post card. Recollections shared over social media posts indicate that by the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the tower was well recognized by both residents and visitors as a visible landmark in the City.



xvi

**Evaluation of Integrity**

This measures a properties physical features, how well it is able to convey its historic significance, based on the criteria for which it is significant, during its period of significance.

|  |
|--|
| <b>Location</b>  |
| Excellent. The water tower remains where it was originally constructed in 1931.  |
| <b>Design</b>  |
| Good. The form of the structure, an elongated tank mounted on one center pole, with four evenly spaced support legs, has remained as it was originally. The location and configuration of spotlights and the corn kernel and leaf painted design are also from its original design. No changes appear to have been made to the towers height or any of its components, except for repainting of the surface. While the original paint surface/design was very likely removed or at least painted over completely in the past, reports from the 2021 refurbishment indicate the old layers of paint were removed at that time. The repainting however shows the same design as what it replaced and changes to the design of the painted surface over time appear to be minimal.              |
| <b>Setting</b>   |
| Good. The environment of the water tower has changed over time. While its location remains the same, changes to the property itself and those that surround it have occurred since its construction in 1931, but most of those changes have occurred within the period of significance. The canning factory which originally prompted the need for the water tower, is no longer present and the buildings associated with it have been demolished. At time of construction, the property was on the southern edge of the City. Residential neighborhoods to the north and east were at initial stages of development. The airport (labeled as "Rochester Landing Field" on a 1935 USGS map) was southeast of the new Reid-Murdoch canning factory when it was built. The County fairgrounds |



Historic Property Name: Seneca Ear of Corn Water Tower  
Rochester Historic Landmark Eligibility

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were already present, as was Highway 14 on the northern side, where it remains today (it also carried Highway 52 at that time). The airport moved from this location in 1960 and a new neighborhood grew in its place.

**Materials**

Good. The painted surface is documented to have been completely replaced in 2021, although it is possible that occurred prior to this as well. In depth records of maintenance of the structure are not available, but the remainder of the original materials are very likely intact, with the exception of small areas or pieces of replacement needed maintenance over the structures life.

**Workmanship**

Fair. The work of, to Rudolph E. (Rudy) Betcher, the original painter has been completely removed and replaced, with the latest refurbishment in 2021. The painting was completed by hand and they followed the original design, making the design aspect of integrity still good. Other aspects of original workmanship from its construction however, remain on the tower.

**Feeling**

Excellent. The feeling the structure emanates, as a unique and early 20<sup>th</sup> century example of mimetic architecture, remains strong. Its stylistic design is simplistic yet colorful typical of the era in which it was constructed.

The feeling of the structure being a local landmark, recognized beyond the Southeast region of the state, continues to strengthen as time progresses. Originally built a landmark to help make the canning factory a recognized location in the community, the water tower's feeling of presence only continues to grow with its depiction in artistic representations of Rochester.

**Association**

Good. The structure remains recognizable as a water tower (related to the criteria of historic architectural style), and its original purpose, even though the factory, is no longer present. As a visible landmark, its association has somewhat shifted. With the closure of the canning factory, the tower is now becoming more associated with Graham Park/County Fair Grounds and weekly Farmers Market which are adjacent to the tower site. Interestingly, these new associations are still related to the community's agricultural roots.

## Historic Property Name: Seneca Ear of Corn Water Tower Rochester Historic Landmark Eligibility

A photo from the “Rochester Local” website<sup>xvii</sup> shows the water tower’s presence, adjacent to Graham Park, provides for a photo-op creating a new association between the weekly farmers market and the historic structure



**Rochester Farmers Market**

### Identification of Historically Significant Features

The most historically significant features of the water tower are the shape and painting of the water tank. Additional features contribute to the historic design.

- Water Tank (shape and paint design)
- Top beacon light
- Spot-lights
- Central support pole
- 4 support legs

**Ear of Corn Water Tower - from 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue.**  
(Image is looking west/southwest)<sup>xviii</sup>



## Historic Contexts

The City of Rochester historic contexts were developed in 2014. While they are rather limited, they still provide for a basic framework of historic information about the community, with which to review and analyze the significance of historic property.

Chronologically, the property is associated with the 1889-present context, called “Born in a Storm, The Mayo Clinic & Hospitality in Rochester”. The 1920’s & 30’s growth of Rochester as a central hub of economic activity in Southeastern Minnesota was related to the growth of the medical industry, but this property reminds us that agricultural, which preceded that industry locally and has remained a strong economic presence as food processing<sup>xix</sup>. The property fits within a yet to be developed local context of agricultural industry. Other local businesses within this context would include large scale dairy processing (AMPI & Kemps/Marigold) and possibly others. More broadly these fit within a statewide context of this time period seeing a change in industrial of manufacturing from harvesting and processing commodities such as wood and flour to further developing consumer products such as paper & cereal.<sup>xx</sup>

The property is also associated with the local historic context of neighborhood development, specifically in the Southeast quadrant of the City. Slattery Park & Sunnyside, which were under development before and during the early years of the factory. These may have provided a large amount of housing for the canning factory’s workers. Additionally, the neighborhood platted as Irelands 1<sup>st</sup> and the old airport property, bounded by 12<sup>th</sup> Street (on the north), 3rd Avenue (on the west), 16<sup>th</sup> Street (on the south) and 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue (on the east), would likely have provided workforce housing for the factory. The tower would have been seen by residents and visitors to these neighborhoods.

Historic Property Name: Seneca Ear of Corn Water Tower  
Rochester Historic Landmark Eligibility

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**Preparer Information**

|                              |   |
|------------------------------|---|
| Date of Study                | July/August 2023  |
| Name & Title of Preparer I   | Molly Patterson-Lundgren, Heritage Preservation Coordinator |
| Organization/Firm            | City of Rochester, Community Development Department         |
|                              |   |
| Additional Information/Study | Seneca Foods Plant & Water Tower, Historical Analysis, 2020 |
| Organization/Firm            | New History, for Olmsted County                             |

**SHPO Comments & Recommendation**

**Date Sent to SHPO** August 31, 2023  
**Date Comment** November 7, 2023  
**Received from SHPO**

**Comments:** Letter dated November 3, 2023 from Michael Koop at MN Historic Preservation Office, indicates, “Rochester’s ”Ear of Corn” water tower is historically significant as an excellent representation of a novelty type of architecture in which a sculptural form is used to advertise the business for which it was constructed. The Ear of Corn water tower is a recognizable and familiar local landmark, visible from a considerable distance. As such, it is an ideal candidate for local designation under Criteria 5 and 8.

**Heritage Preservation Commission Action**

**Date Landmark Initiated** Listed on historic inventory (potential landmark) January 201, 2019  
**Date of Publication** November 18, 2023  
**Date of Public Hearing** November 28. 2023  
**HPC Action** T.B.D.

**City Council Action T.B.D.**

**Date of Meeting**  
**Council Action**  
**Ordinance Number**

# Historic Property Name: Seneca Ear of Corn Water Tower

## Rochester Historic Landmark Eligibility

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### Resources

- <sup>i</sup> Olmsted County GIS, <https://rpu.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=e82af56b315a46adb6904b954d6fa0c7> Accessed on August 31, 2023
- <sup>ii</sup> Seneca Foods Plan & Ear of Corn Water Tower, (property history or section of larger document), New History, 2020, Olmsted County Property Management Department files.
- <sup>iii</sup> Seneca Foods Plan & Ear of Corn Water Tower, (property history or section of larger document), New History, 2020, Olmsted County Property Management Department files.
- <sup>iv</sup> Rudolph E. Betcher of St. Paul dies; was a top commercial billboard artist, Star Tribune, April 13, 1988, <https://www.newspapers.com/article/128932850/obituary-for-rudolph-e-betcher/>, Accessed June 15, 2023.
- <sup>v</sup> Rochester Post Bulletin, July 15, 1931, History Center of Olmsted County files
- <sup>vi</sup> Special Edition, Rochester Post Bulletin, 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition, August 5, 1983, p. 4B. Rochester Public Library Digital Collections, [http://rescarta.rplmn.org/jsp/RcWebImageViewer.jsp?doc\\_id=2a73774b-be6f-4788-a2d6-980b069c15f2/MNR00000/20220903/00000004](http://rescarta.rplmn.org/jsp/RcWebImageViewer.jsp?doc_id=2a73774b-be6f-4788-a2d6-980b069c15f2/MNR00000/20220903/00000004), accessed June 22, 2023.
- <sup>vii</sup> "The ear-of-corn tower: Why does Rochester care so much about it?" Post Bulletin, July 16, 2021 <https://www.postbulletin.com/community/the-ear-of-corn-tower-why-does-rochester-care-so-much-about-it>
- <sup>viii</sup> SAH Archipedia, Society of Architectural Historians, <https://sah-archipedia.org/essays/TH-01-ART-004>, accessed June 15, 2023.
- <sup>ix</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pequot\\_Lakes,\\_Minnesota](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pequot_Lakes,_Minnesota)
- <sup>x</sup> <https://www.cityoflindstrom.us/>
- <sup>xi</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brooks\\_Catsup\\_Bottle\\_water\\_tower#/media/File:Collinsville\\_watertower.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brooks_Catsup_Bottle_water_tower#/media/File:Collinsville_watertower.jpg)
- <sup>xii</sup> <https://www.honolulumagazine.com/the-largest-pineapple-in-the-world/>
- <sup>xiii</sup> Rudolph E. Betcher of St. Paul dies; was a top commercial billboard artist, Star Tribune, April 13, 1988, <https://www.newspapers.com/article/128932850/obituary-for-rudolph-e-betcher/>, Accessed June 15, 2023.
- <sup>xiv</sup> <https://www.picuki.com/tag/cornwatertower>
- <sup>xv</sup> Mimetic Architecture: Why Does this Building Look Like a Fish?" April 24, 2018, CNN Style, <https://www.cnn.com/style/article/mimetic-architecture-osm/index.html> Accessed August 1, 2023.
- <sup>xvi</sup> *Note - Source needs to be updated with complete citation. Image downloaded from MNHS Collections Online, temporarily unavailable for remote and in-person researchers.* <https://www.mnhs.org/collectionsupdate>
- <sup>xvii</sup> <https://rochesterlocal.com/rochestermn/guide-to-the-downtown-rochester-mn-farmers-market/>
- <sup>xviii</sup> Photo Source, Rochester Community Development files
- <sup>xix</sup> 106 Group, "Rochester Historical Contexts: Rochester, Olmsted County, Minnesota," July 2014, Rochester Community Development Files.
- <sup>xx</sup> Johnston, Louis. "Exchange, Industry, and Adaptation: Economics in Minnesota." MNopedia, Minnesota Historical Society. <http://www.mnopedia.org/exchange-industry-and-adaptation-economics-minnesota> (accessed August 1, 2023).

November 3, 2023

Molly Patterson-Lundgren  
Historic Preservation & Urban Design Coordinator  
Community Development  
City of Rochester  
4001 West River Parkway NW, Suite 100  
Rochester, MN 55901

RE: Local designation of the Reid, Murdoch & Co./Libby, McNeil & Libby/Seneca Foods Canning Co. Water Tower "Ear of Corn"; 1217 3<sup>rd</sup> Ave SE, SHPO Referral Number 2023-2701

Dear Ms. Patterson-Lundgren,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the above referenced local designation. It has been reviewed pursuant to Minnesota Statute §471.193, subd. 6., and Sec. 4-7-8 (e) of the City of Rochester Code of Ordinances.

The Reid, Murdoch & Company/Libby, McNeil & Libby/Seneca Foods Canning Company Water Tower, also known locally as the "Ear of Corn" water tower, is a decorative water tower constructed in 1931. It was designed as a pressure tank to hold 50,000 gallons of water used in the process of canning sweet corn by the Reid Murdoch Company. The tank is supported by four steel columns resting on a reinforced concrete foundation extending 14 feet into the ground. The overall height of the tower from the top of the foundation to the top of the ear of corn is 149 feet. The actual ear of corn forming the water tank proper is built of quarter-inch steel plate. It is 49 feet, six inches high and 15 feet, six inches in diameter. The kernels of corn average in size one foot in height and three feet in width. The tank itself was painted to replicate an ear of corn by Rudolph E. (Rudy) Betcher, a professional billboard painter with the General Outdoor Advertising Company.

Rochester's "Ear of Corn" water tower is historically significant as an excellent representation of a novelty type of architecture in which a sculptural form is used to advertise the business for which it was constructed. The Ear of Corn water tower is a recognizable and familiar local landmark, visible from a considerable distance. As such, it is an ideal candidate for local designation under Criteria 5 and 8.

If you have any questions regarding our assessment of these properties, please contact me at 651.201.3291 or [michael.koop@state.mn.us](mailto:michael.koop@state.mn.us).

Sincerely,



Michael Koop  
State Historic Preservation Office

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MINNESOTA STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE

50 Sherburne Avenue ■ Administration Building 203 ■ Saint Paul, Minnesota 55155 ■ 651-201-3287

[mn.gov/admin/shpo](http://mn.gov/admin/shpo) ■ [mnsppo@state.mn.us](mailto:mnsppo@state.mn.us)

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## **REQUEST FOR ACTION**

### **Updates & Future Meetings**

**MEETING DATE:**  
November 28, 2023

**ORIGINATING DEPT:**  
Community Development

**AGENDA SECTION:**  
Other Business

**PRESENTER:**  
Molly Patterson-Lundgren

### **Action Requested:**

No action recommended; informational only.

### **Report Narrative:**

City teammates will provide updates regarding ongoing projects and future agenda items.

### **Prepared By:**

Molly Patterson-Lundgren

### **Attachments:**

[2024 Calendar](#)

**2024 Heritage Preservation Commission (HPC)**  
**Meetings start at 5:00 PM**

| MEETING DATE                | MEETING LOCATION       |
|-----------------------------|------------------------|
| Tuesday, January 23, 2024   | Council/Board Chambers |
| Tuesday, February 27, 2024  | Council/Board Chambers |
| Tuesday, March 26, 2024     | Council/Board Chambers |
| Tuesday, April 23, 2024     | Council/Board Chambers |
| Tuesday, May 28, 2024       | Council/Board Chambers |
| Tuesday, June 25, 2024      | Council/Board Chambers |
| Tuesday, July 23, 2024      | Council/Board Chambers |
| Tuesday, August 27, 2024    | Council/Board Chambers |
| Tuesday, September 24, 2024 | Council/Board Chambers |
| Tuesday, October 22, 2024   | Council/Board Chambers |
| Tuesday, November 26, 2024  | Council/Board Chambers |
| Tuesday, December 17, 2024  | Council/Board Chambers |

Updated 11/03/2023