

## **SEEKING ASSURANCES ON LAND SALE; CONCERN ABOUT LOGGING FOR 'FUTURE GENERATIONS'**

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On a recent afternoon, snow glistened on the trunks and limbs of maple, beech, red oak and the rarer black cherry trees that occupy hillsides in Perrysburg.

Stillness filled these Cattaraugus County woods. But it may not for long.

Turquoise paint marks on some of the trees were evidence of the logging outfit seeking to buy the state-owned property.

Trathen Land Co. wants to log the 450 acres of forest and pasture, and develop an additional 200 acres where a hospital once treated tuberculosis patients and later people with developmental disabilities. The company would also acquire eight two-story hillside homes with garages and woods in the back yard for resale.

Standing in the way of the sale is the Buffalo Common Council, which is expected to vote Tuesday.

Council President David A. Franczyk, who leads the opposition, has asked -- unsuccessfully -- for legally binding assurances from Trathen that it will practice sustainable forestry methods and reuse buildings designed by architect John Hopper Coxhead.

"I want to make sure future generations can enjoy this beautiful land and property," Franczyk said of the three properties 40 miles south of Buffalo.

Company owner Tom Trathen has balked at signing the agreements, arguing that it is unfair to revisit terms already negotiated. He is supported by Empire State Development Co., the state agency that advertised for a buyer.

"We believe the results of our competitive bid are good for the City of Buffalo and the State of New York," said Claudia Hutton, spokeswoman for the state Dormitory Authority, which is working with Empire State Development. "It's a win-win situation."

New York State owns the land, but under a 1960 agreement, the land would revert to its original owner, the City of Buffalo, if it is no longer used to treat people with mental disorders. The state is offering Buffalo 90 percent of the purchase price, or \$339,300.

Empire State Development has unloaded significant properties in recent years -- many of them former

psychiatric centers -- it considers surplus land. Doing so has allowed the properties to return to the tax rolls and has absolved the state of costly maintenance and environmental cleanups. It wants to do the same in Perrysburg.

"The state is not making money off the sale, but would reduce its future operating costs by millions because it would no longer maintain the property," Hutton said.

The Masiello administration and the Buffalo Fiscal Stability Authority also support the sale. So, too, do the town and village officials of Perrysburg, who are eager to add the property to the tax rolls and have the property's water system transferred to the town.

"We have waited a long time for this as a community, and we're hoping the sale will go through," said Myrton Sprague, supervisor for the Town of Perrysburg, which has a population of 2,700.

"The (former hospital) is just sitting there deteriorating, and we're thankful that Trathen Land Co. is willing to try to salvage what they can," Sprague said.

David Swift, a former National Park Service ranger whose home borders a section of the woods for sale, disagrees. He thinks that logging the forest is wrong for Perrysburg, but would support a limited timber auction conducted by the City of Buffalo if it bought time for a better solution to be found.

"My main concern is the preservation of the woods and the wildlife, and the quality of the air and the watershed," Swift said.

Franczyk said he shares those concerns. He wants a 1998 environmental study to be updated and believes that it is required. Empire State Development contends that the earlier review was adequate.

Trathen said he would adopt a forest-management plan that takes a long-range view.

"Our goal as a forestry company is to see land stay in a productive forest, versus the land being stripped or clear-cut. We know the right things to do for the forest."

The land for what began as a tuberculosis sanitarium was donated by then-Mayor James Noble Adam in 1910. It opened two years later bearing his name. The self-sustaining complex included a dairy, greenhouses and a zoo.

It also generated its own power, with three steam boilers and two electric generators.

The hospital was converted in 1960 as an adjunct of the former Gowanda Psychiatric Center. In 1987, it became part of the mental retardation service system, closing in 1993.

Some of the original hospital buildings are still used for offices, and seven group homes are located on

the site.

Karen Blake, a former Cattaraugus County legislator, faults Empire State Development for failing to take the town's suggestions for future use and taking an unimaginative approach in marketing the properties.

"One of the things that upsets me is that the only bidders seem to be loggers," she said. "I have thought there is a lot more potential in that property than just for timber."

Blake thinks that the property would make an ideal retreat or senior citizens center. Other ideas have included a summer educational center for inner-city youth.

Trathen said that his logging company has a history of managing multiple-use properties and is getting an undeserved bad rap.

"It's a benefit that an organization like ours is involved, and that's basically not being appreciated. For the land to go under our stewardship is a break for the property, and for everyone concerned," Trathen said.

Trathen Land would be responsible for tearing down and repairing deteriorating structures, removing asbestos and excavating a dump site. Those expenses alone could cost millions, he said.

Trathen said he would decide what buildings to rehabilitate after an architectural engineer makes an evaluation.

Franczyk believes that some of the buildings designed by Coxhead -- who also designed Delaware Avenue Baptist Church -- are eligible for the State Registry of Historic Places. He has asked the state for an opinion.

He and others have also expressed concern about a yellow and gold glass dome many believe was in the Pan-American Exposition's Temple of Music, the site of President William McKinley's assassination in 1901.

Trathen has agreed to get the city's consent should changes with the dome be considered.

Melissa Brown, collections manager of the Buffalo & Erie County Historical Society, said blueprints and photographs of the Temple of Music prove that it was not there; neither is there evidence that it came from other buildings at the Buffalo World's Fair.

"It's an urban myth," Brown said.

The Council is expected to vote Tuesday, and proponents of the sale appear short of the six votes needed for passage.

Blake, a critic of the sale, said, "So many people in Western New York have emotional and historic ties here. It's not just a piece of abandoned property."