

David Swift, a member of the Friends of J. N. Adam Historic Landmark and Forest, calls state inaction a travesty.

Buffalo News file photo



## **Lawsuit threatened over J. N. Adam site**

### *Preservationists want state to act*

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A decade-long dispute over the future of a 500-acre forest in Cattaraugus County and the historic buildings it surrounds may finally be headed to the courts.

A preservation group with ties to the Perrysburg site, home of the now-closed J. N. Adam Developmental Center, is threatening to sue unless the state makes repairs to several landmark buildings.

The former hospital campus, a complex of more than two dozen buildings, is listed on the New York State Historic Register and is perhaps best known for the stained-glass dome in the rotunda of the main building.

“It’s a travesty,” said David Swift, a nearby homeowner and member of the Friends of J. N. Adam Historic Landmark and Forest. “This borders on malfeasance.”

In a recent letter to the state, the Friends of J. N. Adam expressed concern that several roof leaks could damage the buildings and asked the state to protect them.

Officials with the State Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities could not be reached to comment but, in a written response to the group, indicated the request is under review.

“This is demolition by neglect,” said Michael Kuzma, president of Friends of J. N. Adam. “The state has been aware of these problems for months.”

Kuzma said the group is preparing a lawsuit that would mirror the legal action taken against the state eight years ago over the historic Richardson complex in Buffalo.

The suit would argue that the state, under its Public Buildings Law, has a legal obligation to maintain its historic buildings.

“They’re not in terrible shape, but they’re getting there,” Richard Lippes, a lawyer for the group, said of the buildings. “The main building is the one most at risk.”

Swift, a former National Park ranger whose home borders the state-owned land, said the group is not demanding widespread improvements to the now-vacant complex.

Like Lippes, he worries most about the main building and the huge stained-glass dome that sits atop it. He noted that Perrysburg’s 30 inches of snow last week didn’t help.

“A decent roof,” Swift said of the building, “that’s all it would take.”

New York’s oversight of the property is complicated by the City of Buffalo’s legal claims to both the forest and adjoining buildings.

The state owns the land, but under a 1960 agreement, it reverts to the city — the original owner — if the site is no longer used to treat people with mental disorders.

Buffalo’s claim became a major issue five years ago when the state tried to sell the site to a logging company.

The Common Council rejected the sale but retained the city’s reversionary rights to the property.

“It’s outlandish,” said Kuzma, an aide to Common Council President David A. Franczyk and a recently announced candidate for State Senate, “that the state is neglecting this valuable property.”

Swift thinks the site — a total of 650 acres when the forest and hospital complex are included — has already sustained physical damage because of the years of neglect. The hospital closed in 1993.

“It’s a priceless resource,” Swift said of the property. “And the state has not been a good owner.”

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