

Preserve this building

State must save Perrysburg center without forcing group to file lawsuit

Updated: January 19, 2010, 9:51 am

Published: January 19, 2010, 12:30 am



Albany already knows how this is going to end. A judge will rule that it must protect the now-closed J. N. Adam Developmental Center from deterioration, which will cost more than it will now. Albany should acknowledge its responsibility and move quickly to preserve this remarkable and historic site.

Located in Perrysburg, the center dates to 1912, and was funded in part by its namesake, former Buffalo Mayor J. N. Adam. The center is a complex of more than 24 buildings situated within a 500-acre forest. The main building is renowned for the stained-glass dome over its rotunda.

The center offered treatment for what was then the scourge of tuberculosis. Treatments improved, and the center was transformed into a location for the education of mentally handicapped people. Eventually, large institutions fell into disfavor for that purpose, and in 1995, the center was largely abandoned.

Today, it is vacant and falling into disrepair. In particular, the roof is leaking. A preservation group, the Friends of J. N. Adam Historic Landmark and Forest, is threatening to sue the state to force it to protect the complex, particularly the main building and stained-glass dome, which the state owns.

The group is patterning its approach after the successful lawsuit filed by Assemblyman Sam Hoyt, D-Buffalo, to compel the state to rescue the historic Richardson Towers, which were in much worse shape than the Adam center. The state is now in the midst of a project to restore and reuse the main building, once a psychiatric center.

Liability for the Adam center is slightly more complicated, given the City of Buffalo's claim to the forest and adjoining buildings. But the outcome of this is all but foregone: The state must protect this building. It should do so now, before legal costs mount and before snow and rain make what is now a manageable problem far worse.