



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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## NYS Needs to Decide the Future of West Seneca DDSO Site

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West Seneca DDSO site.

The state-owned West Seneca Developmental Center is a 475-acre parcel off East and West Road that for many years housed and served individuals with developmental disabilities. The campus included dozens of buildings and was largely self-sufficient, a neighborhood within a neighborhood. As part of nationwide shift to community-based care, the state closed this and other large centers across New York. Today, except for the Western New York Children's Psychiatric Center and a few other buildings, the property is greatly

underutilized.

The Office of People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) still occupies a couple of the buildings, along with other state agencies and outside tenants, but most of the thirty or so structures on the campus are vacant. Some appear dilapidated and in danger of collapsing while others are surrounded by chain-link fencing and overgrown vegetation. The state also owns several homes adjacent to the site along East and West Road and Leydecker Road that are also abandoned and in various states of disrepair.

Over the years, there have been various proposals for redevelopment of the site, which sits in a large residential area of the town of West Seneca. Many believe housing is the most logical re-use of the land, given the surrounding community and the lack of affordable housing in the region. Regardless, returning the land to the tax rolls seems to be in the best interest of everyone. Unfortunately, nothing can happen until the state decides what to do with the property. In a recent letter to the Acting Commissioner of OPWDD, I asked her to inform the community of the agency's long-range plans for this valuable asset. Is the state looking to redevelop the property itself, or sell it? Does the land need to be remediated? These questions are justified, and taxpayers deserve answers.

In the meantime, it is imperative that the state address the deplorable conditions at the site. My office has received numerous complaints recently from residents, community stakeholders and local government leaders about the deteriorating buildings, abandoned vehicles, old appliances, trash, and other debris scattered throughout the property. These conditions not only pose health and safety concerns, but they are also unsightly to residents who live nearby. The state has an obligation to be a better neighbor.

Securing the property to ensure the buildings are not targets for vandals or other illegal activity must be a priority. The state should also immediately remove piles of debris and

take steps to better secure the site from outside dumping. It must also provide some guidance on the long-range plans for the property, including a detailed timeline. The residents of West Seneca and Western New York have waited long enough.