



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

Senate OK's Ritchie Bill That Opens Psych Center Waterfront for Development

PATTY RITCHIE June 15, 2016

The State Senate Wednesday approved a measure by Senator Patty Ritchie that would open a large swath of St. Lawrence County riverfront to new housing and development, revitalizing the North Country economy with new jobs, and strengthening the St. Lawrence Psychiatric Center's mission to help those suffering mental illness lead fuller and more successful lives.

The bill, S.5950-A, authorizes the state to transfer to the City of Ogdensburg 50 acres of waterfront property for residential development, along with a separate six-acre parcel nearby for commercial use.

The transfer legislation is the second part of a much wider plan to bring 160 acres of the vast hospital campus back onto city tax rolls, and encourage new development and economic activity in the region. A 2014 law began the process of transferring to the city the first parcel of unused land, known as "Parcel A" and located along busy State Route 37. The city envisions offering that land for retail or commercial development.

"When we outlined the 'Point Airy Vision' plan a few years ago, city leaders and I saw an opportunity to transform the open spaces and decaying and unused buildings at the site to create a vibrant community of new homes, retail and commercial development, attracting

new residents and reinvigorating the North Country economy,” said Senator Ritchie.

“With the addition of this parcel—which includes the longest stretch of undeveloped waterfront along the majestic and beautiful St. Lawrence River—the major pieces of the plan are falling into place, and I look forward to the day we can welcome new development and new homeowners to Ogdensburg and the new Point Airy community.”

Point Airy is the traditional name for the spot where the Psychiatric Center is located.

“On behalf of the city of Ogdensburg I want to thank Senator Ritchie for her leadership by helping our community transform vacant, tax exempt property into an asset that can help us expand our tax base and revitalize our community,” said Mayor Wayne Ashley. “One of city council’s top priorities is to redevelop our vacant shoreline and get state-owned properties back on the tax rolls to relieve our hard pressed property taxpayers.”

Under terms of the legislation, the city and state still must agree to a purchase price for the property, and under state law, all proceeds from the sale will be reinvested in improving health services to the mentally ill.

The state also will help the city market the property to potential developers. In addition, the bill includes a landmark provision that would require developers to set aside a small number of housing units where clients of the Psych Center could continue to access programs and services while transitioning back into the wider community. Senator Ritchie cited this provision as strong evidence that the state remains committed to operating the hospital, which not long ago was threatened with closure.

“Our plan strengthens the North Country, strengthens Ogdensburg, and also strengthens the state’s commitment to the St. Lawrence Psychiatric Center, a premier facility that provides needed care to many families in our community,” Senator Ritchie said.

“I’d like to thank state Mental Health Commissioner Dr. Ann Marie Sullivan and her staff, Ogdensburg Mayor Wayne Ashley, City Manager Sarah Purdy and City Planner Andrea Smith for all their hard work and commitment to this plan, and our efforts to transform and build the St. Lawrence Psychiatric Center campus,” Senator Ritchie said.

The bill was sent to the Assembly, where it is sponsored by Assemblywoman Russell.