

About the Willard Campus Reuse Study

Seneca County IDA engaged MRB Group and its partners EDR, Bero Architecture, and HRP Associates to conduct a Reuse Study for the Willard Campus. The purpose of this study is to identify the highest and best uses for the campus moving forward, as well as develop a strategy for the local community to advance that vision. To do this, the MRB Group team is conducting economic and real estate analysis, doing architectural and engineering assessments of the current conditions at the site, and gathering input from community stakeholders and residents. The team will use this information to develop a future site plan concept, including uses that are viable and supported by the community. The resulting master plan and strategy will help all parties to envision the details of this plan, and provide clear guidance to potential developers about the community's goals for the campus.

FAQs

What does "highest-and-best-use" mean?

"Highest and best use" refers to the most advantageous use of a property that is physically possible, legally permissible, financially feasible, and maximizes its value. The concept recognizes that different uses of a property may yield different levels of value (including community benefit). The highest and best use is the one that results in the greatest benefit or return on investment.

Who decides what the highest and best use is?

The MRB Group consulting team is working with a committee of involved stakeholders to assess the potential uses for the site, and terms which one(s) will likely make the highest and best uses. This determination will be informed by local stakeholders, community input, economic and real estate analysis, and, to some degree, market forces. By conducting this study, community leaders and stakeholders will be able to clearly communicate a vision and desirable outcomes to potential developers. However, this does not mean that the future site uses will align 100% with the results of this study.

Who owns Willard today?

The New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (NYS DOCCS) currently owns the site, and there is some oversight and presence by the New York State Office of General Services (NYS OGS).

Why was it closed?

The Willard Drug Treatment Center was closed in March 2022 along with a number of other prison facilities across the state. This was in response to a shrinking prison population.

Who took down the razor-wire and why?

NYS DOCCS removed the razor wire. This was done to make the site look more like a part of a community and less like a prison. The fences were retained for security purposes and to protect the structures that are currently enclosed.

How many acres is the site and what kinds of facilities does it include?

The site is 550 acres and includes 107 buildings totaling 930,000 sq ft. The buildings are generally broken down into the following categories: patient/incarcerated individual housing; staff housing; commons; maintenance; storage; grounds; and other. These include a commissary kitchen, cold storage, a recycling center, a morgue, offices, cabins, and many other uses. The site also has water, sanitary sewer, and electrical distribution.

Will all the buildings be torn down, or will some be restored?

While some buildings are unfortunately past the point of repair, the goal is to retain, restore, and reuse many of the buildings on the site. Engineering, environmental, and architectural review will help in determining which buildings can feasibly be reused.

How many of the historic buildings will be preserved?

A final determination has not been made at this time.

What is the plan for the future?

That is what we are trying to determine and advance with this Highest and Best Use Study. At the end of the study, we hope to be able to determine the best path forward in terms of ownership, as well as the kinds of uses that would be a good fit for the site. Then, local community leaders can move forward with a strategy to attract the types of uses desired.

How was MRB Group selected?

The Seneca County IDA used a Request for Proposals to solicit quotes and qualifications from various firms. MRB Group and EDR (formerly Elan) were selected as part of this competitive process based on their experience with site reuse planning, real estate analysis, economic analysis, public engagement, and array of technical services. Also on the consulting team is HRP Associates, who conducted prior environmental assessments at the site, and Bero Architecture, who is well versed on the historic aspects of the site.

When will the MRB segment of the study be finished?

The Highest and Best Use Study will likely be complete in late-summer or early-fall.

What will happen once MRB has submitted its plan?

Once the plan is complete, the Seneca County IDA and community partners can decide whether and how to take control of the property. If there is an interest in local ownership, a request will be submitted to the state along with the plan for redevelopment.

Who is going to be in charge of implementing that plan?

Seneca County IDA and the Willard Taskforce will usher along the plan implementation, but municipalities and various nonprofits will also likely have roles to play. However, those partners and roles will be determined after the proposed uses are identified.

Will there be public access to the lakefront?

Is that what you want? Let us know at this session! Add your idea at the mapping station or one of the input boards.

How much new housing will be constructed?

Do you think housing is a good idea? Make sure to note that on the map or one of the boards, too. If housing indeed turns out to be one of the desired uses, our analysis would take into account local housing market conditions and determine a viable level of units. Ultimately, a developer would likely make the final decision, but the plan will help them better understand the community need and input.

Of the housing that might be constructed, will it be market-rate, below-market-rate or luxury waterfront homes?

If housing is in the final plan, it could be any one, combination, or all of those types. That will be determined by community input, housing market conditions, and developer interest.

Will there be illegal migrants housed there in the meantime?

We are not aware of a plan to house anybody at the site. Many of the buildings have been boarded up for security and to protect the structures.

How can we tour the site ourselves?

The Romulus Historical Society is now giving small tours of the campus grounds. For more information, contact Craig Williams: 1735james@fairpoint.net

Will our taxes go up to fund the re-development?

In most cases, the redevelopment will be funded by the developers themselves. This may involve some state grants or local incentives, but should not increase taxes directly. Local tax dollars may be used to fund any public uses at the site, and those investments would likely be offset by grant dollars.

Importantly, private redevelopment of portions of the site will return those areas to the tax rolls and ultimately generate MORE property tax dollars for the community over time. This will help to reduce the burden for other tax payers.