

## Richmond Times-Dispatch

### FIRMS TO WORK ON SITE ; PRELIMINARY PLANS FOR HISTORIC COMPLEX CALL FOR MIXED-USE SPACE; [City Edition]

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City Council chose The Folsom Group and Richmond-based developer Miller & Associates this week to rehabilitate the historic Western State Hospital site.

The two submitted separate proposals but will work together to develop a plan for the site.

The site is a complex of 18 buildings on about 80 acres. It is significant for its Jeffersonian architecture, as well as for its unique place in the nation's history of mental-health treatment.

Preliminary plans call for a mixed-use development of residential, commercial, office and retail space developed in phases over 10 years, said Robin Miller, head of Miller & Associates.

The state, which owns the site, will have to approve the plans, and a price will have to be negotiated to sell the complex to the developers. Developers and city officials hope to have a detailed proposal to submit for next year's General Assembly, Miller said.

"We're extremely excited about this and anxious to work out an acceptable agreement to get started," Miller said.

The Folsom Group has offices in Charlottesville. The Folsom Group and Miller & Associates will employ the expertise of Staunton-based Frazier Associates, an architectural firm acclaimed for designing old buildings for reuse.

The complex opened in 1825 with the intention to use the then-innovative approach of soothing the minds of mentally ill patients with great architecture and campus-like landscaping.

Last year, the state closed a medium-security prison that operated on the site for nearly 30 years. The vacancy on such a prominent piece of property near downtown sent city officials

scrambling for a way to make the complex useful while preserving its historic architecture.

John Avoli, Staunton's mayor, said council members were impressed with the companies' openness to suggestions from the community while planning the renovation.

"As the master site plan comes together, there will be significant input from the stakeholders on what it will be, and that is very unique," Avoli said.

The complex will become the city's sixth historic district, Avoli said.

Credit: Times-Dispatch Staff Writer