

OUR OPINION

Saving the 'old Greystone'

A way to do it may be hard to find

Over the years, when people speak of "Greystone," they undoubtedly have the main building in mind. Officially called the Kirkbride Building, this is the original hospital building, a dark and hulking edifice that resembles what you might see in a movie about a 19th-century asylum. That's appropriate because the building was constructed in the 1870s when Greystone opened.

The so called "old Greystone" closed and a new hospital opened in the spring of 2008. The 450-bed hospital occupies a small part of land on the nearly 700-acre property in Parsippany. Part of the remaining land,

about 300 acres, was sold to Morris County for the proverbial \$1 and a recreation complex developed. The county also is creating offices for non-profits in some of the old buildings on the land it bought. The rest of the land, including the Kirkbride Building, remains state property.

Amid fears the state will seek to sell that land for development, a group called Preserve Greystone has been created. It seeks to use a portion of the \$400 million open space referendum passed by voters last month to preserve and save the historic main building.

Our View

A sale of the property is unlikely.

"The recent passing of this ballot question reinforces New Jersey's commitment to preserving the state's historic sites, open space and farmland," is how Denville Mayor Ted Husa, a member of the group, puts it.

We applaud the group's goal.

Preserving the Kirkbride building, however, presents a challenge worthy of a character in a Kafka novel.

Here's why: It is estimated that the building could cost as much as \$40 million to remediate and preserve. But given its bulk and sturdiness, it would cost millions to demolish.

So, what's the answer if there are financial impediments to both solutions?

Marion Harris, a historic preservationist, told the Daily Record, "Across the country, there have been success stories with complexes like Greystone being saved for uses that are economically self-supporting and preserve treasures of architecture and green space."

We hope she's right.