

# IT'S YOUR CHANCE TO SHAPE DIX'S FUTURE



Jay Spain runs with his dogs on the Dix campus. He lives across the street from the campus and thinks it should become a public park.

STAFF PHOTOS BY LINDA LUST

## Public hearings to weigh best use of 300-acre state hospital site near downtown Raleigh

### DIX A NEW DIRECTION

#### HERE'S HOW TO GET INVOLVED IN THE PLANS

The key players in the decision, from the General Assembly to the Wake Botanical Garden Society, are explained. **► 16A**

#### SIX DECISIONS THAT SHAPED RALEIGH

Judgments about public property - Umstead park, downtown squares, the fairgrounds and more - shaped Raleigh's character. **► 17A**



BY RICHARD STRADLING  
STAFF WRITER

With the closing of Dorothea Dix Hospital, one thing is certain: The historic hill on which it sits, overlooking downtown Raleigh, faces a new future.

But what?

State officials want the public to help determine what to do with the 300-acre campus, a decision that will help define the character of North Carolina's Capital City.

The first chance to share your ideas and suggestions comes at a public meeting from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. Tuesday at the Raleigh Convention and Conference Center downtown.

The state and the city of Raleigh chipped in a total of \$230,000 to hire a Charlotte planning firm called LandDesign to craft a plan that takes into account the community's desires. LandDesign will run the meeting Tuesday as well as additional public meetings in May and July.

The plan, due by Sept. 1, will identify possible uses for the property, as well as buildings, streams and other features that should remain untouched. LandDesign will also look at how changes at Dix would affect surrounding neighborhoods and the rest of southwest Raleigh.

LandDesign will likely recom-



The Cathedral Knights practice at one of the soccer fields on the Dix land. Hundreds of soccer players use them.

mend that the state preserve a historic grove of trees on Dix Hill above Rocky Branch, a creek along Western Boulevard, said Brad Davis, a partner in the firm.

Beyond that, Davis said, "The only other given is, 'Let's keep an open mind.'"

The state has treated the mentally ill at Dix since 1856. But the woods and farm fields where patients once worked and convalesced have mostly disappeared as the state turned them into roads, the State Farmers Market and N.C. State University's Cen-

tenial Campus.

State officials must decide what to do with what remains of the Dix land after the psychiatric hospital closes in 2007 and the state opens a new one in Butner. The property covers 300 to 315 acres, but state officials don't know for sure because it has never been surveyed.

The Dix campus is far from a blank canvas. Any plan must account for a cemetery as well as a former city landfill covered with soc-

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# DECISIONS THAT MADE A DIFFERENCE

Here are some other decisions affecting public property that helped shape the character of Raleigh.

## A CAMPUS DIVIDED

### METHODIST HOME FOR CHILDREN

The closing of the Methodist Home for Children orphanage in the late 1970s made 63 acres off Glenwood and Wade avenues north of downtown Raleigh available for redevelopment. Among the ideas: a shopping center, a new home for the N.C. Museum of Natural Sciences and a city park covering the entire property. In the end, the orphanage campus was divided and now includes offices, condominiums and the 21-acre Fred Fletcher Park.



FILE PHOTOS

## A PLACE TO LEARN

### N.C. STATE UNIVERSITY

The N.C. College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts opened in 1889 on the west side of Raleigh, where faculty and students could step outside their classrooms into barns and fields. Today, N.C. State University occupies more than 2,000 acres in Raleigh, including Centennial Campus, established in the 1980s as a place where companies, faculty and students could share research.



## A FOREST IN THE CITY

### UMSTEAD PARK

State and federal agencies began buying worn-out farmland around Crabtree Creek during the Depression, and Civilian Conservation Corps and Works Progress Administration workers helped construct a park that opened in 1937. A state official stirred controversy in 1990 by saying the state could sell off part of the park and make millions. William B. Umstead State Park covers nearly 5,600 acres and lets Triangle residents enjoy a little wilderness close to home.

RICHARD STRADLING AND JANE RUFFIN



## LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

### JOEL LANE'S HOUSE, OR WHERE TO PLACE THE CITY OF RALEIGH

Although most towns started near trading routes, Raleigh was created by politicians for politicians. In 1792, a state commission spent the night at Joel Lane's house, "Wakefield," in a section then known as Bloomsbury. The next day, commission members voted to buy land from Lane as the site for the state capital. That decision was the beginning of the town of Raleigh, which to the total puzzlement of some observers was nowhere near a navigable waterway.

## SAVING THE SQUARES

### UNION, BURKE, CASWELL, NASH AND MOORE SQUARES

William Christmas, the state senator who drew up a plan for Raleigh, laid out five small parks: Union Square (site of the Capitol), Burke Square, Caswell Square, Nash Square and Moore Square. Burke later became the Executive Mansion; Caswell became a school for the deaf and blind and is now used for government offices. But preservationists saved Nash and Moore, fending off such threats as a 1950 plan to put parking in Moore Square.



## GO WEST

### STATE FAIRGROUNDS, CARTER-FINLEY STADIUM, N.C. MUSEUM OF ART, RBC CENTER

Sports and cultural institutions found new homes on the state's extensive land holdings in West Raleigh. The State Fair moved from near NCSU's main campus to its current location in 1928, followed by the university's football stadium in 1966. The N.C. Museum of Art left downtown Raleigh for Blue Ridge Road in 1983, and the RBC Center, a sports arena for NCSU and the Carolina Hurricanes, opened next to the football stadium in 1999. The latest: Prairie Ridge, the N.C. Museum of Natural Sciences' new 38-acre outdoor education center.

## THE PLAYERS

### THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

**Why it's interested:** With the state chronically short of money, Dix represents a potential source of income and an opportunity to make a lasting impact on the Capital City.

**What it wants:** Legislators' views vary. Some, including Senate Majority Leader Tony Rand of Fayetteville, say the state should sell the property. Triangle legislators have tried to head off a backroom deal by pushing the state to involve the public and create the Dorothea Dix Property Study Commission. The commission will receive the Dix master plan in the fall and make recommendations to the full General Assembly in 2006.

**How to contact:** [www.ncga.state.nc.us](http://www.ncga.state.nc.us). Legislative members of the study panel: Sen. Vernon Malone, D-Raleigh, 733-5880; Rep. Deborah Ross, D-Raleigh, 733-5773; Rep. Paul Stam, R-Apex, 733-5780; Rep. Jennifer Weiss, D-Cary, 733-5781.

### DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

**Why it's interested:** Even without Dix Hospital, the department has about 1,200 workers on campus, including Secretary Carmen Hooker Odom and other top brass. Its recommendation will carry a lot of weight, because it now controls the Dix property and needs office space for its workers.

**What it wants:** Not only to keep workers at Dix but also to bring as many as 2,500 others from other parts of Wake County, either in new buildings or renovated ones.

**How to contact:** [www.dhhs.state.nc.us](http://www.dhhs.state.nc.us) or (919) 733-4534.

### GOV. MIKE EASLEY



**Why he's interested:** The governor has the final say on what happens to state property. He has said he wants the state to get rid of property it no longer needs.

**What he wants:** He has been mum about Dix. A spokeswoman said he wants to see what comes out of the planning process before taking a position.

**How to contact:** [www.governor.state.nc.us/](http://www.governor.state.nc.us/) or (800) 662-7952, (919) 733-4240 or (919) 733-5811.

### CITY OF RALEIGH

**Why it's interested:** Dix covers a large chunk of land near the heart of the city; whatever happens to it will resonate in surrounding neighborhoods and the city beyond.

**What it wants:** The City Council has not said what it wants, if the state decides to sell the land, city officials can use zoning and regulations to shape or even veto any development.

**How to contact:** [www.raleigh-nc.org](http://www.raleigh-nc.org) or (919) 890-3050.

### FRIENDS OF DOROTHEA DIX PARK

**Why they're interested:** This coalition represents 23 environmental, historical and recreation groups that consider Dix an important community asset. Includes the Boylan Heights Neighborhood Association, Capital Area Preservation Inc., League of Women Voters of North Carolina, Raleigh Garden Society and Triangle Land Conservancy.

**What they want:** To see the Dix campus turned into a park.

**How to contact:** [www.friendsofdix.org](http://www.friendsofdix.org)

### WAKE COUNTY BOTANICAL GARDEN SOCIETY

**Why it's interested:** This group of garden buffs has long sought a large chunk of public land to turn into a world-class botanical garden.

**What it wants:** To put that garden at Dix.

**How to contact:** By e-mail, [wakecountybotanicalgardensociety@att.net](mailto:wakecountybotanicalgardensociety@att.net) or call (919) 772-6761 and leave a message for Willie D. Pilkington.

### ASSAD MEYMANDI



**Why he's interested:** Meymandi, a psychiatrist and philanthropist, lived at Dix as during his residency.

**What he wants:** For Dix to remain open to the public. He has agreed to put up \$1 million toward making Dix a park.

**How to contact:** 954-5020

### NAMI OF WAKE COUNTY

**Why it's interested:** NAMI, an affiliate of the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill, was one of several mental health advocacy groups that wanted to see Dix remain open to serve the mental health needs of the Triangle.

**What it wants:** For the property to benefit the mentally ill, as a place for

## POSSIBILITIES ABOUND FOR DIX PROPERTY

### Soccer fields

Raleigh has a long-term lease on about 60 acres where it operated a landfill from the 1950s until the 1970s. Much of the land is now used for soccer fields.

### Highest point of property

### Cemetery

About 950 hospital patients and prison inmates buried here between 1859 and 1970.

### Open field

The state Department of Health and Human Services wants to build new offices and labs for up to 2,000

workers on this 55-acre field, not far from the department's current headquarters.

Plans to close Dorothea Dix Hospital have triggered debate on what to do with the more than 300-acre campus overlooking downtown. Developers and real estate brokers consider it a prime location for offices, homes and stores. Some state officials say it should continue to house state offices. And some neighbors and preservationists want it to remain much as it is, with open grassy hillsides and tree-lined drives.

### Historic hill

Dix Hill was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1990. The register doesn't protect buildings or the land, but it does mean private redevelopment that preserves the campus could qualify for state and federal tax credits.

### Lowest point of property

### Healing Place

The Healing Place of Wake County, a nonprofit shelter for homeless men with alcohol and drug abuse problems, has a long-term lease.

## THE BIGGER PICTURE

LandDesign, the Charlotte planning firm, will not only create a master plan for the Dix campus but will help the city understand how changes at Dix will resonate throughout southwest Raleigh.

### Properties surrounding Dorothea Dix

Residential neighborhoods border Dix to the east. On the west lies largely undeveloped land in N.C. State University's Centennial Campus. Also adjacent to Dix: 45 acres the Catholic Diocese wants to sell for development.



Source: Dorothea Dix Property Study Commission, USGS staff research  
JUDSON DRENNAN STAFF The News & Observer



a new clinic, housing or a community center, or as a source of income for mental health programs.

**How to contact:** www.nami-wake.org

## N.C. STATE UNIVERSITY

**Why it's interested:** The university is Dix's largest neighbor. Gov. Jim Hunt gave the university nearly 1,000 acres of Dix property to establish the Centennial Campus starting in the 1980s.

**What it wants:** The state once planned to give even more Dix land to NCSU, but the university has no plans to ask for it, said Centennial Campus Director David Winwood.

**How to contact:** www.centennial.ncsu.edu

## DEVELOPERS

**Why they're interested:** The property consists of more than 300 acres, and is close to Interstate 40 and N.C. State University with views of downtown.

**What they want:** No one has come forward with a specific development plan. But any developer would likely want a clear sense of direction and support from the city and the state before proposing to build at Dix.

## LANDDESIGN

**Why it's interested:** The state hired the Charlotte-based land planning firm to draft a master plan for the Dix property, in part because of its experience helping to design NCSU's Centennial Campus next door.

**What it wants:** Lots of public participation in the planning process to lend legitimacy to its recommendations to the state.

**How to contact:** www.landdesign.com or (704) 333-0325.

## PULLEN PARK TERRACE RESIDENTS

**Why they're interested:** Dix is the largest neighbor of this tiny neighborhood, which consists of a six-unit apartment building and 27 homes and duplexes.

**What they want:** To maintain as much of its quiet and isolation as possible.

**How to contact:** Aly Khalifa, 755-1733 or Will Hooker, 832-0226.

RICHARD STRADLING

## HOW TO GET INVOLVED

### PUBLIC MEETINGS

**Tuesday:** Public hearing, 6 p.m. to 8 p.m., Raleigh Convention and Conference Center, 500 Fayetteville Street Mall.

**May 17 and 18:** Design workshop, time and location to be determined.

**July 19:** Draft redevelopment plan presentation, time and location to be determined.

### ONLINE

Go to [newsobserver.com](http://newsobserver.com) and use key word: **dix**. Comments may appear in print and will be forwarded to LandDesign.

### PLANNING FIRM

**Phone:** (704) 333-0325 **E-mail:** Brad Davis at [bdavis@landdesign.com](mailto:bdavis@landdesign.com)

**Mail:** LandDesign; P.O. Box 36959; Charlotte, N.C. 28236

# DIX

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cer fields and a grove of young pines. A Norfolk & Southern rail line cuts the property roughly in half; dozens of hospital buildings, including the fortresslike patients' building, dot the hill.

Still, the Dix campus has long been considered prime real estate. It lies between Interstate 40 and downtown Raleigh and offers a rare view of the city skyline. Many people already have ideas about what to do with the property.

Developers have said the campus would be ideal for condominiums, apartments or offices. Some legislators, including Senate Majority Leader Tony Rand of Fayetteville, think the state should cash in by selling it for development.

Mental health advocates hope the property can continue to benefit the mentally ill, either as a site for housing or a community center. If the property is sold, they say, the money should go for mental health programs.

**1848:** Dorothea Lynde Dix, a social reformer and former teacher from Massachusetts, tours North Carolina and helps persuade the General Assembly to create an institution to treat the mentally ill.

**1850:** Commissioners of the "Insane Hospital of North Carolina" select a site on a hill outside Raleigh and buy 182 acres for \$1,944.63.

**1856:** The first patient is admitted suffering from "suicidal mania." Within nine months, 90 patients are admitted.

**EARLY 1900s:** A colony for people with epilepsy opens on 1,155 adjacent acres.

**1959:** Hospital renamed for Dorothea Dix.

**1973:** Hospital has 2,354 acres, including three lakes, 282 buildings and 1,300 acres of farmland.

**1980s:** In several steps, state transfers nearly 1,000 acres of Dix property to N.C. State University's Centennial Campus.

**2002:** State officials decide to close Dix in 2007 and replace it with a new, smaller hospital in Butner.

Several recreation and neighborhood groups have banded together as Friends of Dorothea Dix Park to campaign for preserving the grassy slopes and oak-shaded drives as a public park. A group of gardeners would like to see Dix become a world-class botanical garden.

Despite all the big ideas, the state could decide to keep Dix as an office park.

The state Department of Health and Human Services already has about 1,200 workers on campus in addition to hospital employees. Department officials have proposed bringing as many as 2,500 additional workers to campus from rented offices throughout Wake County, either in new offices and labs or in renovated hospital buildings.

The Dix campus is so big and so

varied that it probably won't be used for a single purpose. Friends of Dorothea Dix Park, for example, supports putting state workers in existing buildings as long as the land around them can be used for a park.

"Our main purpose is to prevent the state from selling the property," said Jay Spain, a resident of the nearby Boylan Heights neighborhood and the group's president.

The future of Dix ultimately rests with the General Assembly, the governor and other statewide elected officials who make up the Council of State. None of them are compelled to follow the redevelopment plan that LandDesign will produce in the months ahead.

But Wake County legislators, who pushed the state to come up with the plan, think state officials wouldn't dare ignore the will of the community. And now, they say, is the time to be heard.

Staff writer Richard Stradling can be reached at 829-4739 or [rstradl@newsobserver.com](mailto:rstradl@newsobserver.com).

## WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

We're interested in your views on what should happen to the Dix property. We'll forward the responses to LandDesign and may publish some as well.

**How do you think the Dix property should be used after the hospital closes?**

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**Mail to:** Dix plan  
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P.O. Box 191  
Raleigh, N.C. 27602

**or send e-mail to:** [richard.stradling@newsobserver.com](mailto:richard.stradling@newsobserver.com)

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