

Sites Worth Saving

MINNESOTA'S 10 MOST ENDANGERED HISTORIC PLACES 2011



Preservation Alliance of Minnesota ❖ www.mnpreservation.org

State-sponsored treatment of the mentally ill became a national trend during the late nineteenth century, and asylum buildings and mental hospitals were built in large numbers across the U.S. The Fergus Falls Regional Treatment Center was built in 1888, accepted its first patients in 1906, treated thousands of the state's mentally ill, and sustained the local economy with hundreds of jobs until its closure in 2005.



The Fergus Falls complex was built using a model developed by Dr. Thomas S. Kirkbride, based on the belief that building design aided in the recuperation and maintenance of mental health. More than seventy-five centers were built nationwide following Kirkbride's basic floor plan and arrangement of rooms. Individual architects, including Warren B. Dunnell, who designed the Fergus Falls RTC, gave each Kirkbride building its own unique character. Today, Kirkbride buildings are rapidly vanishing symbols of an important time in American health care and architecture. The Fergus Falls building remains one of a handful of intact Kirkbrides in the Midwest, and was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1986.

Between 2002 and 2006, the state legislature approved \$7 million in bond funds that were to be used for disposition of the RTC buildings and related infrastructure improvements. Ownership of the property was transferred to the city in 2007, but the state has not yet issued the bonds. Although some reuse projects have been proposed, the faltering economy has impacted the viability of these proposals. Concerned that the bonding funds are "use it or lose it," the city is considering demolishing the historic complex and issuing a request for proposals for cleared-site development in the coming months. The city council has set a tight deadline, stating that it will proceed with demolition unless a viable reuse is in place by summer 2012.

A volunteer group called Friends of the Kirkbride leads tours through the RTC to raise awareness, and conducts security sweeps and light maintenance. The Friends group hopes experienced developers and potential investors will come forward before the threat of demolition becomes all too real.

Action Steps

1. Contact the Fergus Falls city administrator and local elected officials to express your support for preservation of the RTC.
2. All Minnesotans—contact your state legislators and let them know that you oppose using state bonding dollars for the demolition of historically significant buildings such as the Fergus Falls RTC.
3. Discuss the Fergus Falls RTC with potential investors and rehab developers, and encourage them to contact the Friends of the Kirkbride and the Fergus Falls city council with their development proposals.
4. Join the Friends of the Kirkbride group on [Facebook](#).



FERGUS FALLS

FERGUS FALLS REGIONAL TREATMENT CENTER

