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State may run out of money, time to save old St. Edward State Park seminary building

Someone other than the state may have to step up to save the St. Edward State Park seminary building in Kenmore by the end of next year if it's to continue standing.

By [Alexa Vaughn](#)



Proposals for how to renovate and breathe new life into St. Edward State Park's historic, brick seminary building have bounced around for years. Its noncommittal suitors have included Portland-based hotel company McMenamins, a local cybersecurity company with ties to the U.S. Department of Defense, and Bastyr University.

Open-ended vacillations may have to end next year, though, if the decaying and expensive-to-maintain Kenmore building is to continue standing.

The State Parks and Recreation Commission will meet Sept. 18 in Ilwaco, Pacific County, to consider setting deadlines for when parties interested in renovating and reusing the late-Romanesque edifice must commit to plans for it. The commission will also host a community information meeting in Kenmore on Sept. 10.

Officials with the cash-strapped parks system are preparing for the possibility that if there is not enough state money to keep heating and maintaining the 90,000 square-foot building at an annual cost of about \$100,000, some or all of it may have to be knocked down, said commission spokeswoman Virginia Painter.

Right now, the park's neighbor, Bastyr University, is working on a lease proposal with Daniels Real Estate, a Seattle firm known for redeveloping Union Station and transforming the former Sears building in Sodo into Starbucks Center.

Bastyr has been exploring an expansion at the seminary for years. University President Daniel Church said Bastyr has recently started "aggressively working" on a plan with Daniels Real Estate to take advantage of the building's full potential. About 1,100 students attended the natural-health arts and Science University last school year.

"If the proposal is approved, we envision adding both classrooms and student residences inside the building to ensure our community has ample room to learn, grow and enjoy the full university experience," Church said.

Kenmore has long-hoped that Bastyr, the city's largest employer, would expand inside the seminary building, which once housed the Sulpician Order of Catholic Priests. The building and more than 300 acres surrounding it were sold to the state in 1978.

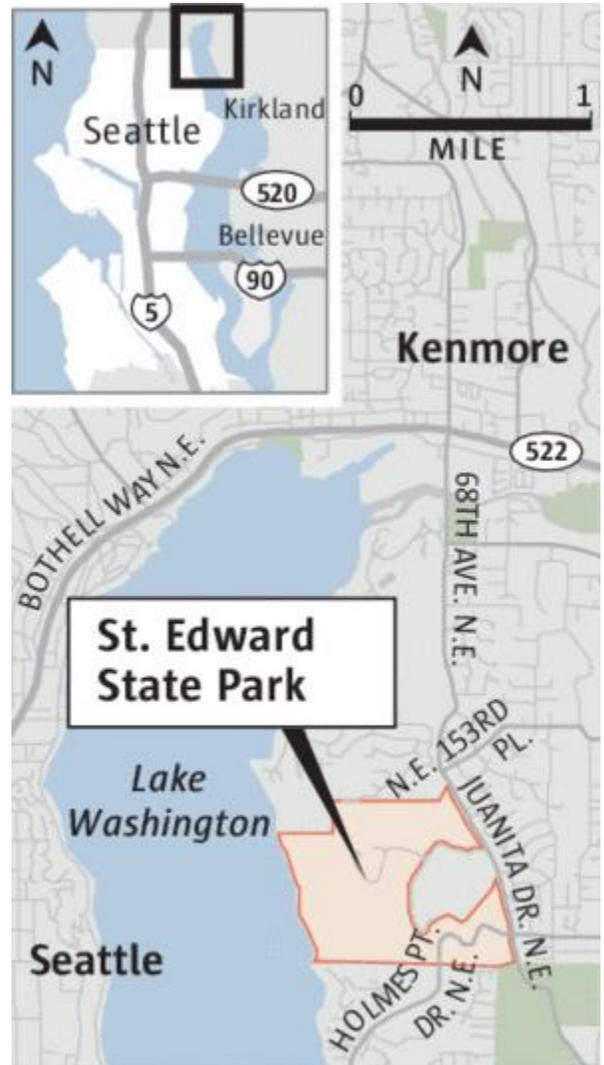
"Bastyr University has already set a standard for sustainable values on their campus, and we want to see the university continue to flourish here," said Kenmore Mayor David Baker.

But parks officials and the city are largely sitting on the sidelines while Bastyr and Daniels hash something out.

"We'll see what happens — it's still early on in the process and it's got to work for all the parties involved," said Nancy Ousley, Kenmore's assistant city manager. "But there's something about this current idea that, at least to me personally, seems to have a lot of the right elements to be successful."

Securing millions of dollars to repair the building first dedicated in 1931, prepare it for new uses and maintain it tends to be one of the highest hurdles for interested parties to jump. Temporal Defense Systems, which took back a lease proposal for the building earlier this year after its name was not kept confidential, discussed investing around \$40 million into repairs for the building, which needs at least \$60 million in structural improvements.

Some walls are crumbling. Others ooze an oily substance previously absorbed from priests' cigarette smoke. All need to be made more earthquake-safe.



Source: ESRI, TeleAtlas

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Another recurring problem has been gaining the approval of Kenmore residents who don't want the character of the park disturbed. About a decade ago, a group railed against McMenamins possibly creating a hotel resort there. The company has since committed to building a resort at Bothell's Anderson School instead.

State Parks partnerships with large private entities are rare. The closest example of a similar one is at Fort Worden State Park in Port Townsend, where small businesses and nonprofits lease space in historic military buildings.

The parks system has faced drastic cuts since 2000. In 2011, most of its direct state funding was cut with the hope that sales of \$30 Discover Passes to park visitors would help fill the financial void, but it didn't.

Painter said parks officials are doing everything they can to spend money efficiently. State Parks wants Issaquah, for instance, to annex Lake Sammamish State Park. If Issaquah did so, the state would still own the land, but Issaquah would use its resources to hire workers such as lifeguards.

Uncertainty about how to maintain parks statewide leaves the future of the St. Edward's building in peril — unless an adequate outside investor can be found.

“The central thing is going to be the money,” Painter said. “There's a wide range of things that could happen to this building.”

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