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We can't let more APS school closures be another stain on city | Opinion

Jason Segedy Guest opinion

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Key Points

Akron Public Schools (APS) has recently been discussing the possibility of closing more buildings due to declining enrollment and ongoing budgetary woes.

When I served as the city of Akron's director of Planning and Urban Development, I witnessed multiple school buildings fall into grave disrepair.

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Akron Public Schools (APS) has recently been discussing the possibility of closing more buildings due to declining enrollment and ongoing budgetary woes.

If more school buildings are closed, it is imperative that APS work together with the city of Akron to ensure any school facilities that close do not fall into disrepair, and that any buildings sold find their way into the hands of competent, responsible property owners.

When I served as the city of Akron's director of Planning and Urban Development, I witnessed multiple school buildings, including Smith, Lawndale and Hotchkiss, fall into grave disrepair, suffer from vandalism, and ultimately fall victim to devastating fires. I saw the vacant husks of Goodrich and Rankin become nuisances and blights on their respective neighborhoods for years on end. These school sites ultimately became the city of Akron's problem to solve.

The redevelopment of the former Perkins Middle School site as an attractive new housing development is a rare success story and was made possible thanks

to foresight, careful intentional planning and hard work on the part of Mayor Dan Horrigan, Superintendent David James and their respective administrations.

APS must take its responsibility to be a good steward of these properties seriously and cannot allow what happened in the past to happen again.

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Schools represent the city

This is a critical time for the future of the city. Things are heading in the wrong direction. In 1977, APS had 45,000 students. Today, it is down to 19,000.

In 1977, Akron was home to 250,000 people. Today, it is down to 190,000.

Declining school enrollment and population loss are both part of a vicious cycle that must be broken.

Akron is facing serious problems with crime and a general climate of disorder, aging (and increasingly costly) street and utility infrastructure, poorly maintained properties, and blight. For many of us who live here in the city, day-to-day conditions on the ground are noticeably worse than they were in 2019.

I have lived in Akron my entire life, and the city feels more chaotic, disordered and less safe than I can ever remember.

New York City lost over 800,000 residents in the 1970s, due in part to crime and disorder. If the most significant city in the nation wasn't immune from a massive exodus in the face of rapidly deteriorating civic conditions, we certainly won't be.

There are a lot of great things going on here in Akron, and I applaud our leaders, both past and present, for helping to make them happen. But all of the good things are ultimately contingent upon having a city where the people who live

here are not in fear for their safety and where they can see a future for themselves and their families.

Our leaders must find a realistic and effective way forward to stop the chaos and the decline. It must start with a laser-like focus on basic quality of life: the rigorous and unapologetic enforcement of our laws and city codes; keeping people safe from crime and disorder; and ensuring stability in our neighborhoods.

I know first-hand that none of these problems are easy to solve, but they must be solved if this city is going to have a future as a desirable place to live.

Jason Segedy is the former director of Planning and Urban Development for the city of Akron.