

Gage towers need to be replaced, Free Press says

President Richard Davenport's fast-track plan to build new residence halls and demolish Gage towers is necessary and good, The Free Press editorializes.

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Drive down the Lookout Drive hill in North Mankato and you can get your bearings by looking far across the valley to the two towers poking up on the opposite bluff.

The Gage towers have long been an easily identifiable landmark in Mankato. It is a landmark that may soon be gone.

Minnesota State University President Richard Davenport is hoping for a fast-track plan that would see the demolition of the Gage dormitories and construction of new ones within the next three years.

Anytime a public entity seeks to tear down buildings and build new, some critics will say it's wasteful not to remodel. In this case, the decision to raze the towers makes good sense.

It's true Gage Center is not that old, being completed in 1966. (The dorms are named for George Gage, who was the principal of the Normal School when it was started in 1968. Initially, one tower was for females and one for males, but the towers have been co-ed for years.)

But the cost of remodeling the 40-year-old building would be immense. The new residence hall complex the university hopes to build would be about \$40 million.

Even if remodeled, Gage dorms would not provide the living quarters required on today's campuses. The days of small dorm rooms, with two or more students bunked together with a shared shower and bathroom down the hall, are gone.

The new residence halls will feature two- or four-bedroom units in which the students have their own bedroom and share a lounge room and bathroom.

Removing Gage also eases problems with safety as hundreds of students cross Stadium Road to get to and from campus and Gage. The new residences would be built more centrally on campus near the other existing dorms.

The planned construction fits in with a systematic updating of the university that began about a decade ago. Several new and remodeled sports and recreation facilities are done. The Student Union has been expanded and updated. And soon, the biggest project ever in the state college and university system will be underway with the \$50 million add-on and remodeling of Trafton Science Center.

The previous administration of Dick Rush and the current Davenport administration have done exemplary work when it comes to keeping the MSU campus positioned to meet the needs of students.