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Old Port Columbus terminal all but beyond repair

By [Mark Ferencik](#)

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Sun reflects on the searchlight atop the original Port Columbus Airport Terminal on July 31, 2014.

As preservationists work to save the original Port Columbus terminal, some say the Columbus Regional Airport Authority should have done more to keep the building from leaking and filling with mold.

“They have tens of millions of dollars coming in. They can’t fix a roof that’s leaking,” said Michael Young, a commercial real-estate broker and developer whose company held the lease on the building and occupied it from 1996 to 2008.

The authority’s capital budget for all of Port Columbus this year is \$67 million. Robin Holderman, the authority’s chief asset and development officer, said repairing the 85-year-old building would cost \$250,000, and that is not an insignificant amount.

Real-estate developer Mike Peppe, one of those leading the effort to preserve the building, said a roofing contractor estimated that fixing the roof would cost \$60,000.

Peppe said he has never asked airport officials why they didn’t repair the roof. He said the airport is working with his group.

The authority is willing to work with anyone who wants to help update the building.

“We haven’t replaced the roof,” Holderman said. “The mechanical and electrical systems need to be done to bring them up to standards.”

The original terminal, at 4920 E. 5th Ave., [could be demolished if backers can’t raise enough money to fully restore it](#). That could cost as much as \$1.2 million to \$2.4 million.

“Our desire has never been to tear it down,” Holderman said. “The goal has always been to save it. How long can you wait to do it?”

The brick building, with its distinctive glass tower, is at the airport’s eastern edge near N. Hamilton Road. It opened in 1929 and was the airport’s terminal until the current one opened in 1958.

It is on the National Register of Historic Places. In May, Columbus Landmarks [placed the terminal on its list of the area’s 13 most-endangered buildings](#).

So far, there are no financial commitments from anyone to restore the building, said Ed Lentz, Columbus Landmarks’ executive director. He once asked airport officials during a tour of the building why the roof was never fixed but doesn’t recall getting an answer.

Young is not in the preservation group but is “going to help them in any way I can,” he said.

He is a partner in Fairway Corp., a real-estate holding company that was headquartered in the building. He said the building could be converted into offices and a charter-flight operations center.

“It would be the perfect place for a museum,” he said.

Ed Gillespie is a retired chief test pilot for Rockwell International who lives about 3 miles from the old terminal. He and his partner spent more than \$600,000 in the late 1980s to restore the building that was then under threat of demolition. He has a framed photo of the terminal in his living room.

Gillespie, who still flies at 86, supports efforts to save the terminal: “It’s too bad the airport can’t use it. It is one of the very few left of that era in its original configuration.”

As for converting at least part of the building into a museum, Gillespie said: “It would be nice, but museums don’t make money.”

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