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# Memo

DATE: February 15, 2024

TO: Senate Committee on Institutions

FROM: Erik Wells, Town Manager, Williston VT

RE: TESTIMONY CONCERNING FORMER WILLSTON STATE POLICE BARRACKS

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Members of the Senate Committee on Institutions:

My name is Erik Wells and I serve as the Town Manager for the Town of Williston in Chittenden County. I am in my fourth year as Town Manager and have worked for the Town since the year 2017. The community of Williston now has just over 10,000 residents and generally sees that population double during daytime hours. The community has grown steadily since the early 1990s, and the Town takes an active and thoughtful approach in shaping its future with a robust planning program. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.

On behalf of the Williston Selectboard, the Town of Williston requests the Legislature consider granting it a first right of refusal to purchase the former State Police Barracks property located at 2777 Saint George Road (Vermont State Route 2A). The 2.77-acre property with 30,000 square foot structure is in the Town's designated growth center on a busy section of State Highway (Route 2A) with the Exit 12 interchange of Interstate 89 nearby. It is a desirable piece of real estate in a growing section of Williston.

There exist many potential options for the property, and if granted the option to acquire it the Town could have a thoughtful conversation about its potential uses and decide whether it would like to proceed with its purchase within a defined timeframe. Holding the property would enable the Town to dictate its future use in an area of Town that is undergoing a transition.

A common perception statewide about this area adjacent to Taft Corners at the intersection of Routes 2 and 2A is the commercial hub of retail stores and restaurants. Over the past decade the land use pattern for infill development in this area has shifted to also include residential homes as the Town develops a livable and walkable core. The Growth Center is 5% of the town's land area yet represents three quarters of the new dwellings created in the past decade. There were 840 new residential units added over the last decade in the growth center. The Town anticipates up to 600 new units to be built in the growth center by 2030, representing 72% of new homes in Williston.

In 2022 the Selectboard adopted a form-based code that encompasses most of the growth center. Under this code the continuing infill development to the area will adhere to the guiding principles of multistory buildings that are close to the street. Last year, the Selectboard adopted inclusionary zoning, that will now also require a percentage of new housing units in a project be perpetually affordable. Investment in public infrastructure and facilities, including roadways, utilities, sidewalks, and green space will

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dictate the future growth pattern of infill development in this area. The Town Plan for many iterations has contemplated grid streets that will tie together the transportation network within the growth center and alleviate pressure from Routes 2 and 2A.

The Town is also undertaking a project to define the scope of future public facilities for indoor community spaces, the library and recreation. As part of the next phase of this project over the coming year the Town will evaluate sites in the growth center for a possible future community/recreation center space.

The option to acquire the former State Police Barracks property is desirable for the Town to explore given the needs of the community and the vision for the future of the growth center. In considering a timeframe to exercise a potential option, the Town requests consideration to be given to the timeframe leading up to a future Town Meeting Day. It is anticipated that any acquisition may require voter approval.

I presented the following draft language to the House Committee on Corrections and Institutions for the capital bill to consider earlier this month:

*2777 St. George Road (State Route 2A). Notwithstanding 29 V.S.A. § 166(b), the Commissioner of Buildings and General Services is authorized to sell the property located at 2777 St. George Road (State Route 2A) in the Town of Williston. The Commissioner shall first offer in writing to the Town of Williston (the "Town") the right to purchase the property, inclusive of land and structures.*

*(1) The Town's preferential right to purchase the property authorized in this subsection shall terminate unless the Town submits a written notification to the Commissioner of its intent to purchase the property on or before February 1, 2026.*

*(2) If the Town submits a notification of its intent to purchase the property pursuant to subdivision (1) of this subsection, the Town shall submit a written offer to the Commissioner not later than May 1, 2026. In the event the Town fails to submit a written offer by May 1, 2026, then the Town's preferential right to purchase the property shall terminate and the Commissioner is authorized to sell the property to another party.*

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you about this request.