

John MacGovern
1653 Marton Road
Windsor, VT 05089

Testimony before Vermont Legislature's Senate Committee on Institutions
March 27, 2018

Madam Chair and members of the Committee:

Thank you for letting me testify before this Committee.

I urge you to delete the text of H.806 that is before you today and insert entirely new language. The current language is itself an entirely new bill, different in word and intent from the original bill that was originally filed by Windsor's two Representatives.

What we seek is not the usual process for repurposing State property, which this bill's language asks for, but rather a wholly new process to meet an truly historic opportunity.

A historic, once in a lifetime opportunity lies before us with the prison closing, a prison that has been in Windsor for 200 years. This closing is not a calamity but rather an opportunity to transform Windsor, the region and the State.

As to the Windsor land, it is spectacularly beautiful, it is agricultural, with woodlands, grasslands, and marshes: 850 acres of a State Wildlife Management Area.

On the other hand, the town of Windsor and this southeastern part of the State have special problems, some because of the fact that it is so close to the border with New Hampshire and so often gets the short end of the stick.

Windsor residents hope we can do something great, something that creates jobs and wealth for the town and the region, all the while remaining consistent with the immediately adjacent properties, that is, a bird sanctuary, a wildlife area and very beautiful agricultural land.

This is a chance to change the whole image of Windsor. Moreover, it is time to think big, not small. Think Google's New England headquarters, the University of Vermont Agricultural School, Cabot Cheese, etc.

Is this doable?

Are we up to it? I believe so.

The problem.

The property is owned by the State but situated in the town of Windsor. Consequently, though theoretically the State can do whatever it wishes there, politically it cannot. Without the support of the local community, the State would have trouble establishing another project on this site. Already, the whole community is up in arms over the possibility that the State will use this land for another Department of Corrections institution like a re-entry facility, or some such.

The solution.

A special committee established by this Legislature can bring together the State, the region and the town, including creative entrepreneurial minds in this wonderful State, to come up with a process to examine, vet and then propose, in a transparent way, the best options for this special property. This process will bring all the stakeholders together and force collaboration not confrontation. The result of this new process is much more likely to bring a result that satisfies the State and the community of citizens around this property.

I hope this committee will insert into H. 806 new language that brings these ideas into reality.

Please return H. 806 closer to its original form.

More specifically, I suggest establishing a committee of seven members. Three to be appointed by the governor, two by the President Pro Tempore of the Senate and two by the Speaker of the House. Of these seven, two shall be appointed from a list of five names submitted by the chair of Windsor Select board and at least one of the seven shall be a true entrepreneur, a creator of private sector jobs.

The job of this committee would be to examine and vet proposals for the repurposing of the former prison property and to then submit their recommendation/s to the Legislature and governor.

Please let me end this testimony with a quote from an extraordinary young man named Charles Russell Lowell. He was killed at the young age of 29 during the Civil War. He was fighting to end slavery.

The quote comes from his valedictory speech on his graduation from Harvard College:

“...the world advances by impossibilities achieved.”

With your help, ladies and gentlemen, let's help us achieve those “impossibilities” for the town of Windsor and for our great State.