



TOWN of WINDSOR

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DATE: March 22, 2018

TO: Senate Committee on Institutions

RE: H.806

FROM: Selectboard, Town of Windsor

The Southeast State Correctional Facility is a unique property consisting of agricultural structures, correctional facilities, office and manufacturing space all set in an idyllic Vermont landscape. Recently, oversight of approximately 800 acres of what had been commonly referred to as “the prison property” was transferred from BGS to Fish & Wildlife creating the “*Windsor Grasslands Wildlife Management Area*”. The decision to make this change has resulted in improved wildlife and recreational opportunities not just for Windsor residents but all Vermonters. We are hopeful that a similar result can be realized with a change in use for the remaining 115+/-acres that constitute the prison facility.

To that end the Windsor Selectboard supports H.806. Our expectation is that the process to solicit requests for information from both the public and private sector will result in a range of potential uses that will benefit the residents of Vermont in general and specifically add to the quality of life for the residents of Windsor. We appreciate the provision allowing for consultation with the Town of Windsor and expect that our participation in the effort will be robust.

As noted in testimony submitted earlier in the legislative review process, this practice is not without precedent. When the Vermont State Penitentiary, also located in Windsor, was closed in the 1970's requests for bids were issued to determine the facilities future. Left with an outdated and apparently unredeemable structure the legislature budgeted \$150,000 for demolition. After soliciting bids however, a unique and unforeseen use was proposed. A Boston developer responded to the solicitation for bids and successfully purchased the old penitentiary for \$27,050. The developer was able to secure financing to renovate the building into 60+ apartments for seniors. The building, which had been an albatross to both the State and Town was transformed into an asset that still serves the residents of Vermont well 40 years later.

Additionally, for over 200 years Windsor has been home to State of Vermont correctional facilities. We have been a strong partner working with the State as needs for correctional services have changed. We have done our part and are now asking that a new direction be considered. Through several public forums on the topic of facility repurposing, the residents of Windsor have expressed strong opposition to “transitional housing” or “reentry housing”

particularly as described in the report titled “Plan to provide secure transitional housing for inmates reentering the community” issued to the Joint Justice Oversight Committee in the fall of 2017. Our expectation is that this perspective will be introduced to those working on the repurposing effort early in the process.

The residents of Windsor hold high expectations that through a collaborative state/local effort the former Southeast State Correctional Facility will find a new purpose providing opportunities in education, agriculture, employment, industry or recreation that serves their community and all Vermonters well for decades to come.

Respectfully submitted,

Rich Thomas
Chair, Windsor Selectboard