



Town of Windsor, Vermont
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February 10, 2022

Senate Committee on Institutions
115 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05633

Dear Senator Benning and members of the Senate Committee on Institutions

In 1808, the cornerstone for the Vermont State Prison was laid in Windsor. 209 years later, in 2017, the Southeast State Correctional Facility, or the “prison farm” closed its gate for the last time. For over two centuries, Windsor has been home to a state correctional facility. Understanding that every community must have vision beyond its own borders, we accepted the role and responsibilities that came with the facility. Now that it is closed, the community has expressed a clear desire to move in a new direction. Two hundred years reflects a significant track record of commitment to the state, and now Windsor is focused on putting the land and facility to a more inspired use. Fortunately, we have already seen inspiration, as demonstrated when the state and the town worked collaboratively to establish the Windsor Grasslands Wildlife Management Area in 2017. 826 acres are now managed and protected for the enjoyment of all Vermonters and those who travel to our area.

In 2018 and 2021, town wide surveys were conducted to get a sense of community sentiment for potential use of the property. (attached) In both surveys, two thirds of residents either oppose or strongly oppose repurposing the remaining acres for correctional or social services purposes. The same surveys indicate support or consideration for a wide range of uses from housing, to state offices outside of Human Services, commercial development or incorporation into the wildlife management area.

In addition to Windsor’s opposition to a correctional facility or human services use, the state has expressed significant reservations for such uses in the past. In multiple reports conducted since the facilities closing, most notably a report to the legislature on [AHS Major Facilities](#) conducted in 2018, shortcomings of the facility, the property, and surrounding economic base were noted.

Conversely, the recently completed (December 2021) Report to the Legislature on the Use of the Former Southeast State Correctional Facility concludes *A strategic plan needs to be developed for the site that includes the costs and benefits of state or private ownership of the site. A plan that would include a large state corrections or social services facility at the site would not be supported by the Town of Windsor. The legislature needs to appropriate additional funding for the site, outside of the present maintenance funding, to support the demolition of unwanted or blighted structures on the site. The legislature needs to decide on the disposition of the property, the lack of clarity on whether the legislature wants to maintain ownership, sell, or lease the property makes redevelopment efforts difficult given this uncertainty. The existing statutory provisions, as stated above, adds to the uncertainty. The sale of the site will require the State to spend a significant amount of money for the demolition and clearance of the site. The site, in its present condition, is not attractive to the private sector given the significant redevelopment costs.*

Another possibility is a Public/Private partnership that would redevelop the site, in a campus like setting, that included small state facilities, housing, office space, businesses, and recreational facilities where the state would maintain a small footprint.

The Town of Windsor supports these conclusions and strongly encourages the legislature to address the failing buildings and consider the prospect of a public private partnership. If such a partnership were to be considered, the inclusion of a corrections or social services facility would still not be supported as we firmly believe that such a facility would cloud the potential development of remaining parcels.

Respectfully submitted;

Michael McNaughton
Chairman, Windsor Selectboard