



Town of Windsor, Vermont
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Senate Committee on Institutions
115 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05633

Dear Senator Benning and members of the Senate Committee on Institutions

Windsor Vermont has been home to state of Vermont correctional facilities since 1808. Over that 200 plus history the facilities evolved to meet changing needs of the state and eventually both, the Vermont State Penitentiary and the Southeast State Correctional Facility were closed because they no longer met their mission. The State Penitentiary closed in the mid 1970's and the process used to repurpose that facility is as valid today as it was almost 50 years ago. The Town of Windsor encourages the State to consider a similar process in an effort to get a broader perspective of potential uses that benefits all.

Today the former State Penitentiary provides approximately 70 units of housing, a use nobody envisioned when the facility was closed. Originally the State Legislature appropriated \$150,000 to demolish the structure. A few unique inquiries came in for potential uses, ranging from blowing it up as part of a Hollywood movie to a discotheque called "The Cell Block" where servers would wear black and white striped uniforms. Before the state moved forward with the actual demolition however, Richard Raymond, Director of the Purchasing Division of the Agency of Administration put the word out, with little hope of success, that the state would accept bids from anyone who wanted to buy it. As he noted "did you ever try to sell a house of 300 rooms with bars on the windows?"

As it turns out in July of 1975 developers from Boston saw an ad in the New England Real Estate Journal that the state was accepting bids for the facility. The firm specialized in renovating "obsolete" and had done over \$400,000,000 in renovation projects. Key property components when looking at a potential project included structurally sound building, access to sewer and land around the building (pretty close description to the prison farm) Intrigued by this unusual opportunity they strategize to come up with an appropriate bid. Thinking a competitor may choose a round number like \$25,000 the firm figured \$27,000 may work. After further consideration they settled on \$27,050.

Time was tight, as the bids were due on August 14th. The firm flew a representative from Boston to Montpelier to submit the bid along with a check for 10% of the amount. Five bids were received, one was for a negative amount, with the rationale that the State would pay less than the expected demolition cost to get rid of it. Two bids were slightly above 0 (scenario sound familiar?) and the remaining competitive bid was less than half of their \$27,050. They were now the proud owners. Instead of the state spending \$150,000 to tear it down they got a check for \$27,050 a turnaround of 177,050. In today's dollars that equates to about \$1,000,000.

As was noted at the time Windsor residents were enthusiastic about the project which maintained the architectural importance of the imposing downtown building while providing much needed housing.

There are so many similarities between the situation in 1975 and today that the story cannot be ignored. The success of the project, a project that was not even thought of by those involved up to the point of imminent demolition is not disputed.

The Town of Windsor believes that the best chance for a successful project on the prison farm is for the legislature to clarify its intention to sell, lease or keep the property. Should sale or lease be considered to offer a bid opportunity similar to the one in 1975 to the market. We believe the most recent suggestion of considering multiple uses be part of the equation.

Should the state decide not to sell or lease the property it is imperative that funding be allocated to address the current unsafe structures and remove this public safety concern from the property.

The history noted in the document was prepared by Mr. Charles T. Morrissey in a brief publication he authored in, I believe, the early 1980's titled "The Closing of Windsor Prison, Vermont's Unique Experience In Correctional Change and Historic Preservation".

Respectfully submitted;

Thomas E. Marsh
Town Manager, Windsor