

WORRIES ABOUT TRAINING SCHOOL'S FUTURE INCREASE ; MIDDLETOWN MAYOR VISITS HARTFORD TO FIGHT ANY POSSIBILITY OF ADULT JAIL: [5 NORTHWEST CONNECTICUT/SPORTS FINAL EDITION]

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ABSTRACT (ABSTRACT)

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"We indicated there was a strong history of citizen involvement in the neighborhood," Thornton said. She was accompanied by Democratic Councilman Gerald Daley, Republican Councilman Stephen Gionfriddo, and aides William Pillarella and George Dunn.

The center was built under a no-bid, fast-track contract that went to an arm of the Tomasso Group, a New Britain-based construction and property management company with unusual access to the administration of former Gov. John G. Rowland. One of Rowland's former top aides, Peter Ellef, personally monitored the project. Now Rowland is serving a 10 1/2-month federal prison sentence for accepting illegal gifts, including free work on his Litchfield cottage from Tomasso employees. Ellef, William Tomasso and Tomasso Brothers Inc. have been indicted in a federal corruption probe.

FULL TEXT

Mayor Domenique Thornton gave state officials a clear message Monday: Turn the scandalized, underused Connecticut Juvenile Training School into an adult jail, and you'll unleash a torrent of opposition in the city.

"We said the worst-case scenario for us would be that it became a jail," Thornton said. She met in Hartford Monday morning with Department of Children and Families Commissioner Darlene Dunbar, Donald DeVore, DCF's head of juvenile services, and Brenda Cisco, legislative liaison for Gov. M. Jodi Rell.

"We said there were neighborhood groups ready to spring into action and that an adult jail would be viewed as an incompatible and highly objectionable use," Thornton said. "At that point, they cautioned us that no decisions about the future use of the juvenile center have been made and that the prospect of a jail wasn't on the table at this point."

The center, a \$57 million high-security facility for boys surrounded by razor wire, is located on the grounds of Connecticut Valley Hospital. In the mid-1990s, neighborhood groups such as Residents Against Institutional Dumping initially opposed the consolidation at CVH of psychiatric patients from two other state hospitals that had closed. Ultimately, a representative of RAID was named to an advisory panel that helped to monitor the consolidation, and the relationship between the city and the hospital has steadily improved.

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Rell on April 1 asked Dunbar and her staff at DCF to prepare a plan for the future of the juvenile center that would include its closing.

Questions about whether the juvenile center would become a jail "are far too premature," Brian Garnett, spokesman for the state Department of Correction, said Monday. "There's no decision at this point."

When asked if the committee is considering converting the training school into an adult prison, DCF spokesman Gary Kleeblatt said, "In the course of the planning process we will look at all the options."

He declined to elaborate.

Rell asked other state agencies, including correction and the governor's budget office, to provide input to DCF for a report due Aug. 1.

The 4-year-old, 240-bed training center houses 64 boys and has a full staff of 365 workers. The state is spending more than \$500,000 per year for each boy.

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Thornton had some suggestions for state officials Thursday.

"My best-case scenario is that the state turns the building over to the city. It could possibly be developed as a corporate center. Another scenario is that it could be converted to a science-magnet or maritime-magnet high school," she said.

"In the event that it remains a state facility, we asked that the [payment in lieu of taxes] that the city receives remains the same."

DETAILS

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