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LONG LANE SCHOOL RELOCATION

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You asked about the local and state issues involved in relocating Long Lane School.

The information in this report was obtained from newspaper reports, principally the *Hartford Courant*.

SUMMARY

The recent relocation of Long Lane School from the center of Middletown to a more remote location near the Connecticut Valley Hospital (CVH) was the result of negotiations between the state, Wesleyan University, and the town. They began in 1995 and were finalized in 1999. They took place in the context of major juvenile justice reforms initiated in 1995 and the state's closing psychiatric hospitals in Norwich and Newtown and consolidating inpatient care at CVH.

Long Lane School abutted Wesleyan's campus in central Middletown. The school had sought to purchase the property for some time. Long Lane's facilities were old and outdated for the more troubled and growing population it had come to serve. The state wanted either to renovate and expand on the existing site or to relocate to another site in town. Town officials preferred to have Long Lane relocate to another town, but some were willing to accede to

relocation in return for concessions from the state. Legislators were split as well, some ready to accommodate

relocation while others vocally opposed it. Residents near the existing Long Lane site wanted it to move; residents near CVH wanted no more state institutions in their neighborhood.

Although the governor stated that he wanted town consensus on the issue before the state would relocate the school, consensus never developed. The town council twice split evenly on the question, with the mayor casting deciding votes favoring relocation on both occasions. Residents disputed the issue even after the legislature voted to relocate and sell the existing site to Wesleyan. But threatened lawsuits to halt or delay relocation never materialized.

BACKGROUND

Long Lane is situated on 200 hundred acres of state-owned property in Middletown. Long Lane began as a farm for adolescent girls who committed crimes or could not live at home because of delinquent activity or pregnancy. As times changed, it became an industrial school for this population. In 1973 its mission changed to serving adjudicated delinquents who needed a secure setting, and it was opened to boys, who had previously been served at the Meriden School for Boys, which was closed.

When it began in 1870 the area around Long Lane was relatively undeveloped; in the century since, Middletown has grown around the campus, and Wesleyan University in particular and now abuts Long Lane. Wesleyan first approached the state about purchasing the property in 1956 when it was undergoing enrollment expansion and considering becoming coed. The Long Lane property was considered for a coordinate college for women. Governor Ribicoff set up a commission to study the proposal, but it determined the sale would not be in the state's best interest except at a price that was too high for Wesleyan.

LONG LANE RELOCATION

Expansion or Relocation

In 1995, discussions about the school and site began again. The legislature enacted a major juvenile justice initiative that included treating violent juveniles as adults while sending nonviolent delinquents to community residential facilities. But the governor proposed doubling the number of secure beds at the school (to 130). And in separate actions, Wesleyan asked the state to sell the property, offering around \$10 million, and the legislature conveyed 40 acres of the campus to Middletown for passive recreation uses (the conveyance was never consummated). Discussions to sell the site and relocate the school took place at the same time plans went forward to expand and renovate it.

Wesleyan's discussions with the state became more public in mid-1997. A Hartford *Courant* article (8/27) reported on a proposed three-part deal in which Long Lane would be relocated to the CVH campus near the Connecticut River, Middletown would receive 58 acres of the campus, and Wesleyan would acquire the rest. The article also noted that two lawsuits involving the town and the state (one concerning payment in lieu of taxes (PILOT) on a courthouse) complicated the issue.

Neighborhood Reaction

The state's closing its Norwich and Fairfield Hills psychiatric hospitals and transferring their patients to CVH complicated the Long Lane issue. This action had led to the creation of a vocal Residents Against Institutional Dumping (RAID) group. RAID represented people who lived near CVH. When it failed to prevent the mental health transfer, it turned its attention to the proposal to relocate Long Lane.

The common council, fearing that the prospect of relocating Long Lane to CVH would pit one neighborhood against another, entered the scene in November when it unanimously approved a resolution calling for removing Long Lane from the town. The resolution supported Wesleyan's attempts to buy the property and called for blocking any new facilities that would house juvenile delinquents or provide treatment for sexual predators (apparently the state was proposing to place convicted sex offenders in CVH).

Building Consensus

Governor Calls for Consensus. The state's response to the local turmoil was to tell Wesleyan that any deal was contingent on it enlisting the support of town leaders and legislators. Marc Ryan was quoted as saying, "We would not want to see this go forward if it would tear the community apart" (*Hartford Courant*, 12/22/97). But he also said the state had no plans to relocate Long Lane outside the town.

A state representative whose district encompassed both the Long Lane property and CVH, recognized that no other town was likely to embrace the idea of a secure juvenile detention center in its midst. He was willing to support the move to CVH if Middletown received some incentives such as more state aid or state property.

By early 1998, newly elected mayor Dominique Thornton, faced with plans for large institutional buildings on the existing site surrounded by a 15-foot high perimeter fence, concluded that the state was either going to build the 130-secure bed facility at its existing location or at CVH, it was not going to relocate outside of Middletown. "This thing is going through whether we like it or not," she said (*Hartford Courant* 2/4/98). She went to Hartford to discuss alternatives with legislative leaders.

Consensus Problems. Thornton discussions led in mid-March to her apparently agreeing to relocation in return for settling several disputes simmering with the state, principally the state guaranteeing PILOT grants on the courthouse. The state's nonpayment was posing a \$1.8 million shortfall in the town's budget.

One senator, whose district encompassed part of Middletown, criticized the mayor's shift on relocation. In turn, she called on the senator to come up with a better solution by March 30 when the council planned to take up her Long Lane proposal.

Neighborhood disputes continued during this period as RAID kept up its pressure against relocation to CVH. At the same time residents of the area near the existing school, obtained over 350 signatures on a petition supporting Long Lane's move out of the center of town.

Consensus Achieved, Barely. The disputes culminated in a six-hour council meeting on March 30, 1998. Following a four-hour public hearing at which both supporters and opponents of relocation spoke out passionately, the council deadlocked six to six, on a resolution authorizing Mayor Thornton to negotiate with the state on relocation. The mayor broke the tie vote in which two democratic councilmen joined with four republicans to oppose the resolution while the other six democrats supported it.

The resolution, apparently at the state senator's urging, created a committee consisting of the mayor, two council members, legislators, and representatives of Wesleyan and other town groups, including RAID and

pro-relocation groups. But RAID officials would not participate. The committee had 30 days to come up with an alternative to a CVH site, including sites in other towns.

The resolution called for the town to pursue the following concessions from the state if Long Lane were relocated within the town: (1) banning sexual predators from the hospital and other state facilities in town, (2) capping CVH's census at 615, (3) limiting the relocated Long Lane's census to 131 plus 44 overflow beds, (4) obtaining a \$400,000 payment on the \$1.8 million the town claimed the state owed on the courthouse and the promise of future PILOT grants, (5) providing \$6 million for sewer links to a Pratt and Whitney plant and \$2 million for a soccer facility, and (6) completing the transfer of previously conveyed state property (Hartford *Courant* 3/31/98).

Searching for Alternatives

The committee was unsuccessful in finding an alternative location outside of Middletown. Several committee members complained that the state's secretiveness and failure to provide needed information impeded their efforts. Others wondered whether the state considered the council's close vote on negotiating an agreement sufficient consensus to consider relocating Long Lane within the city.

While the town was searching for outside locations, the state was looking for Middletown sites it determined acceptable. It found three sites. The top one was near DCF's Riverview Hospital not far from CVH. This displaced the previous top site, a Department of Administrative Services (DAS) warehouse on CVH property, which RAID had vigorously opposed. But RAID reiterated its opposition to any site in the vicinity of CVH (Hartford *Courant*, 4/29/98).

The legislature adjourned before any decision was reached.

Reaching Agreement

In January 1999, the state asked the city council to decide whether to rebuild Long Lane at its existing site or relocate it to one of two sites in the CVH neighborhood: the DAS site or a soon-to-be-demolished public housing complex. State officials said the vote would carry significant weight but would not bind their ultimate site selections.

On January 29, the council again split six to six, with Mayor Thornton breaking the tie in support of relocation. Several council members and RAID members stated that the consensus the governor had asked for had still not been reached, except for moving Long Lane out of

Middletown, and expected litigation to follow whatever decision the governor made on location (*Hartford Courant*, 1/30/99).

Town officials left the final decision making to the governor and legislature. A Middletown senator introduced a bill to establish three regional detention facilities, rather than one large facility like Long Lane. The Children's Committee reported the bill favorably, but the Judiciary Committee took no action on it. Instead the General Assembly voted to establish a 240-bed secure Connecticut Juvenile Training School in Middletown. It also provided for (1) the sale to Wesleyan of 150 acres at the existing Long Lane School, (2) the conveyance of some Long Lane property to the town, and (3) PILOT payments for the courthouse and Long Lane (PA 99-26).

Local critics of the final package contended that the town failed to get most of the concessions it had asked for in its March 1998 resolution, and the ones it got—land and PILOT payments—would have happened without the legislation. Former mayor Maria Madsen Holzberg charged that once the town agreed to relocation it “didn't have any leverage left with which to bargain with the state.” She stated that the mayor, half the council, and the legislative delegation did not want to fight at all. The mayor noted the PILOT payments and the fact that the state would not be able to build any more facilities on the land it conveyed to Wesleyan and the town.

Within one week of the General Assembly's action, the governor announced that the state had decided to build the new facility on the DAS warehouse site at CVH.

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