Agenda Item 4B





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493	Assemblyman Livermore Provides access to Nevada State Prison for operation of non-profit education museum by Nevada State Prison Preservation Society.		9/05/2012
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Notes for Assemblyman Pete Livermore re Nevada State Prison:

Statute: TBD

State Fiscal Impact: This bill has the potential to positively impact the economy of Carson City through the operation of a historic museum.

Purpose: To provide access to the Nevada State Prison for the Nevada State Prison Preservation Society for the operation of a non-profit/education museum.

Language: The Department of Administration shall develop and create a lease between the State of Nevada and the Nevada State Prison Preservation Society (NSPPS) for the historic portion of the Nevada State Prison (NSP). This lease shall be for the full extent of the State's contracting limits.

The historic portion of the facility will be determined by arrangement between the NSPPS and the State Public Works Board.

The designation of the historic areas of the NSP shall not impact the State in the future use of the operational portions of the facility to include the DMV license plate factory.

The museum operated the NSPPS must be on a non-profit basis.

The cost of the lease to NSPPS shall not exceed \$1 per year. Utilities shall be the responsibility of NSPPS for the portion leased. The State of Nevada shall retain responsibility for security of the entire NSP facility.

The Department of Cultural Affairs and the Department of Transportation shall provide the NSPPS with artifacts for display in the proposed museum.

These artifacts shall remain the property of the State of Nevada.

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Iconic Carson City prison could become museum

BY ED VOGEL LAS VEGAS REVIEW-JOURNAL CAPITAL BUREAU

Posted: Nov. 26, 2012 | 6:24 p.m.

CARSON CITY - The 150-year-old Nevada State Prison has been gathering cobwebs since it closed Jan. 4. And in a state without funds for anything new, its destiny might be a wrecking ball.

But there is a glimmer of hope that the capital city icon can be saved.

A retired 77-year-old Douglas High School teacher who would like to take his students on prison tours has formed the nonprofit Nevada State Prison Preservation Society, whose goal is converting the facility into a museum.

Myron Carpenter is aware it's a long shot. But with donations, the help of volunteers and approval of a 99-year lease agreement with the state, he figures there is a 95 percent chance of opening at least sections of a prison museum by July 2014.

The archaic, shabby prison was the second-oldest operating prison - behind San Quentin - in the United States and the only prison where inmates ran their own casino.

Like the state Capitol, Nevada State Prison was built of sandstone quarried on the prison sites. At its peak, the prison housed 800 inmates at a time. They lived two to a 6-foot by 9-foot cell. Over the years, 54 inmates were executed, most of them in the nation's first gas chamber.

Besides touring the prison, Carpenter envisions visitors renting cells for the night and some people even marrying inside the prison. The prison dining area could become a restaurant and coffee shop. Basketball and volleyball tournaments could be held in the prison gym. Movies could be filmed there, as they have been in the past. And the visitors the museum attracts would help the local economy.

"People don't want to live in a prison, but they want to see what is inside them," said Carpenter. "Prison museums are becoming the No. 1 tourist attraction. It's

tough times, but we can save the prison."

But others are not as sure.

"With all due respect, these people are well-meaning but amateurs," said Guy Rocha, a state historian and former state archivist. "This is a professional project. You need professional fundraisers and marketers. You need a full-blown professional plan with the vision and costs. There will be liabilities. The group has to get insurance. I see years of work ahead."

SAFETY CODES

Peter Barton, the administrator of the state Division of History and Museums, has been working with the museum group, advising members on what they will need to do before opening.

"They have to bring it up to today's safety codes," he said. "It is going to take a significant investment, and they will need to phase it in over time."

He noted the state closed the prison in part because of a study that found it did not meet the Americans With Disabilities Act, which requires ramps to give handicapped people access to restrooms and other facilities, and current building codes. The state Public Works Board had estimated it would cost \$29 million to bring the prison up to code.

Attracting visitors to state-operated museums hasn't been easy in recent years. Barton said state museums last year showed a small increase in tourism, but because of the need to save money during the recession, state museums are open only four days a week, and staff members work 32-hour weeks.

The new Nevada State Museum in Las Vegas attracted 54,000 visitors in its first year of operation, less than the 120,000 estimates, which Barton considered much too ambitious. Admission fees were increased at museums in 2010, but because attendance fell short, the Legislature in 2010 approved \$150,806 to cover the shortfall.

The original prison, constructed in 1862, was destroyed by fire in 1867. Carpenter said they only want the oldest part of the prison, built after the fire.

The bill is still being drafted, and details will be debated in the Legislature, but the key portion is the Preservation Society wants a 99-year, \$1-a-year lease. The organization has already acquired nonprofit tax status.

He said the Preservation Society needs to build a "lift" or elevator to bring visitors up to the second floor which holds the execution chamber, but that should be the

only major cost.

He said his organization now has about 100 members, many of them retired prison workers, and hopes people from around the state will join.

Noting he has a talented group, he said they will go after grants and serve as the volunteer staff of the museum.

BILL WOULD ALLOW LEASE

Before they can seek grants, Carpenter said the state Legislature needs to pass the bill allowing the lease of the prison for 99 years.

The sponsor of that bill, Assemblyman Pete Livermore, R-Carson City, said a prison museum could benefit Carson City's economy.

He fears that if the state waits too long, the prison could suffer the same fate as the Virginia & Truckee Railroad roundhouse in downtown Carson City.

The 19th century building, with space for a dozen locomotives, fell into disrepair and became an eyesore after the railroad closed in 1950. At its peak, the V&T was the richest short-line railroad in the country. It carried gold and silver from Virginia City's mines to Carson City and Reno for shipment to San Francisco and passengers to Reno, Carson City and Minden. About 20 years ago, the railroad roundhouse, then privately held, was torn down, and the rocks of the structure were sold to California wineries.

"There is no money coming from the Legislature to do this (make a prison museum)," Livermore said. "It is going to have to come from fundraisers. I would rather it be reclaimed for the benefit of Carson City than just sit there."

Carpenter and former Corrections Director Glen Whorton have addressed the governor and other members of the state Board of Examiners about their hopes. Gov. Brian Sandoval noted that prison museums are becoming a national tourist attraction but made no promises of supporting the bill.

NEVADA PRISON: LOTS TO OFFER

Carpenter said the Nevada State Prison has a lot to offer visitors.

Known as "The Max" because it housed all state prisoners for 100 years and the state's most violent inmates until 1989, the prison was the site of the nation's first gas chamber execution. Gee Jon received the first lethal dose of gas in 1924.

It remains the only prison in Nevada with an execution chamber, but no inmates have been executed since 2006. Plans are progressing to build a new death

chamber at the Ely State Prison which now houses the state's Death Row.

In all, 32 inmates were gassed in the prison before the law was changed requiring executions by lethal injection.

Starting with the execution of Las Vegas killer Jesse Bishop in 1979, 12 inmates have received lethal injections. All but one decided to commit what some refer to legal suicide because they decided to die when they still had pending legal appeals.

Once Nevada legalized gambling, prison officials decided inmates might as well have a casino, too. The Bull Pen casino operated from 1932 until 1967. Former Mustang Ranch owner Joe Conforte, now a fugitive from justice, ran the casino in the early 1960s when he was an inmate.

The prison site contains a sandstone quarry where the rocks to build the Capitol, the prison itself and many historic local homes were mined.

There also is the sandstone "hole" where misbehaving inmates were kept in solitary confinement. Meals were lowered to the malcontents through a hole in the roof.

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Find this article at:

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