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Transforming Closed Youth Prisons

Repurposing Facilities to Meet Community Needs

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States and localities across the United States are increasingly shifting away from incarceration and embracing more rehabilitative, community-based alternatives for justice-involved youth. Between 1999 and 2015, the number of youth detained or placed out of home declined by more than half,[1] leading to hundreds of facility closures. Upon closure, taxpayers are often left funding the maintenance and upkeep of unused facility land while community members and other stakeholders grapple with what to do with these spaces. The vacant facilities bring a range of public health and safety concerns to communities and can be physical reminders of the harmful impact of incarceration. And, if left vacant and unchanged, youth facilities are susceptible to being reopened as correctional facilities, missing the opportunity to contribute to positive local development and meet demonstrated social needs.

This brief examines how former youth prisons can be used for new, economically viable purposes outside the field of corrections and highlights innovative examples of repurposing efforts in six communities. Drawing from qualitative interviews with stakeholders involved in repurposing efforts, it provides an overview of lessons learned and key considerations for transforming former youth prisons into sustainable economic developments designed to benefit communities. In this brief, "youth prisons" includes both correctional facilities where youth are placed after disposition and detention centers where youth are held while they await trial.

BOX 1

Methodology

The Urban Institute collected information for this report using the following methods:

- A document review of publicly available information, including annual reports, news sources, and materials related to land purchases and repurposing efforts.
- Semistructured qualitative interviews with 41 stakeholders from repurposing efforts across 12 sites, including juvenile justice professionals (*n* = 10), county and city officials (*n* = 10), representatives from community organizations (*n* = 9), business representatives (*n* = 4), elected officials (*n* = 4), state officials (*n* = 2), and other relevant experts (*n* = 2).

This brief is not a comprehensive, national accounting of repurposed youth facilities. The selected examples are secure, out-of-home facilities for youth that were repurposed into new entities that do not house justice-involved youth or adults out of home. All information in this brief was confirmed through interviews with stakeholders. To maintain confidentiality, we do not reveal stakeholders' identities or organizations or cite information from interviews that could be linked to individuals. Where applicable, we link to relevant news articles as resources for readers.

The Changing Landscape of Youth Incarceration

Over the past two decades, youth incarceration in the United States has declined considerably. Between 1999 and 2015, the number of youth detained or placed out of home fell by more than half.[2] While this trend can be partially attributed to declines in youth arrests, several other factors have contributed. Among them is a growing awareness from policymakers, justice-system actors, and affected communities that youth incarceration is ineffective at reducing recidivism or improving life outcomes for youth. In fact, research shows that diverting youth from the juvenile justice system prevents delinquency more effectively than formal system processing (Petrosino, Turpin-Petrosino, and Guckenburg 2010). Research further shows that youth who do require more supervision are typically better served in community settings that support their healthy development and address the underlying root causes of misbehavior than in traditional confinement settings (Fabelo et al. 2015; NRC 2013; Ryon et al. 2013).

Recognizing the research on what works to improve outcomes for youth, policymakers and the public have become increasingly supportive of community-based alternatives to incarceration. A national poll commissioned by the YouthFirst Initiative in 2017 found that nearly 8 in 10 Americans support shifting the juvenile justice system from a focus on incarceration and punishment to a focus on prevention and rehabilitation.[3] The public and policymakers have also become increasingly critical of the high costs of operating youth prisons. The cost of youth incarceration varies considerably across states, but large institutional placements (i.e., facilities that house 100 youth or more) considerably outweigh the costs of diversion, probation, and other alternatives to incarceration. Across the country, states spend anywhere from tens to hundreds of thousands of dollars annually to hold a single young person in a correctional or residential facility (The Pew Charitable Trusts 2015)—despite research

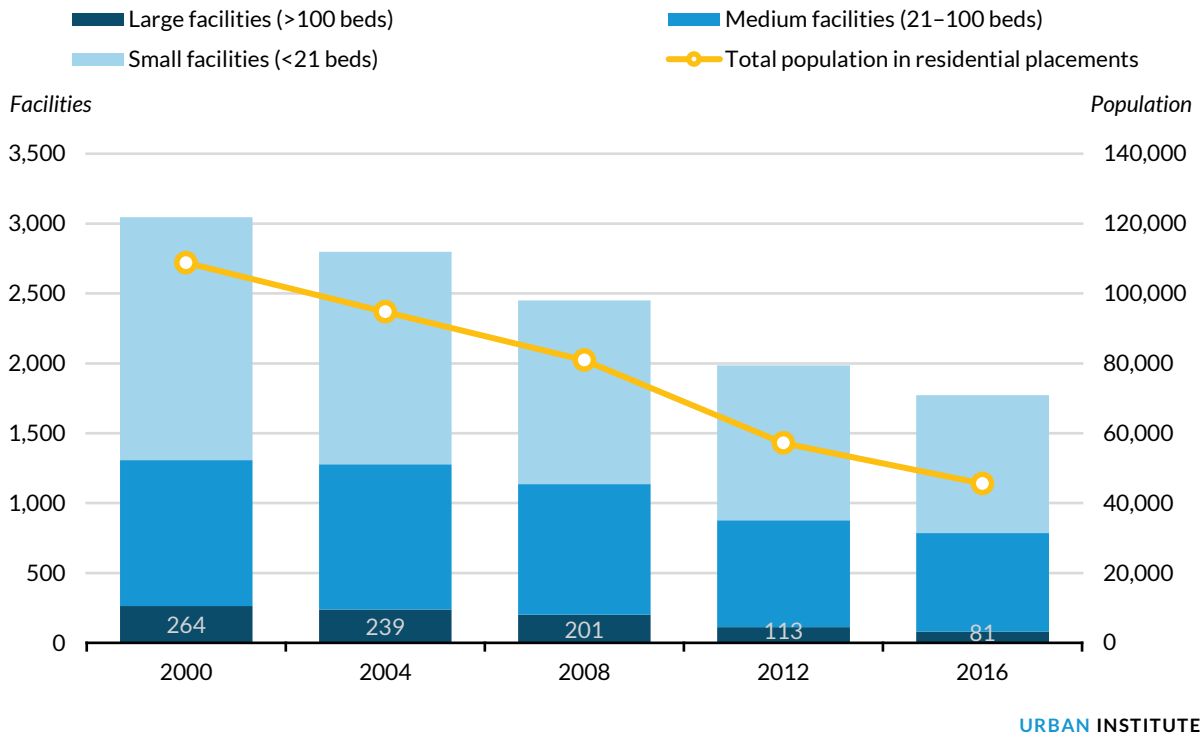
demonstrating that correctional facilities are not the most effective method for promoting public safety. For example, in Kansas, 7 of every 10 juvenile justice dollars in 2016 were spent on out-of-home placements at a cost of $294 per youth per day, compared with just $18 per day to supervise a youth on probation (Love and Harvell 2017). Similarly, Virginia spent $15 on youth incarceration for every $1 spent on community-based services in 2016 at a staggering cost of more than $170,000 per youth per year (Durnan and Harvell 2017).

Declines in youth incarceration have contributed to numerous facility closures across the country (figure 1). OJJDP's census of youth facilities documented a 42 percent decline in the number of youth residential facilities nationally between 2000 and 2016, representing 1,275 fewer facilities.[4] The steepest decline was among large facilities that house more than 200 youth.[5] During the same period, the number of youth in residential placements dropped 58 percent.[6]

After facilities close, however, states continue to spend taxpayer dollars on ongoing maintenance. Between 2008 and 2016, for instance, California residents spent an estimated cumulative $5.6 million to maintain the empty El Paso De Robles Youth Correctional Facility.[7] The Los Pinos Conservation Camp in California[8] and the Corsicana Residential Treatment Facility in Texas incurred similarly high

FIGURE 1

Trends in Youth Facilities and Residential Populations



Source: Juvenile Residential Facility Census Databook, 2000–2016, National Center for Juvenile Justice, updated March 27, 2018, https://www.ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/jrfcdb/.

monthly maintenance costs after closure.[9] These costs can represent significant financial burdens to states, without producing any benefits for their residents. Further, unused property can be linked to increased crime rates (particularly arson), declining property values, increased risk to public health and welfare, and increased costs for municipal governments (HUD 2014). Thus, as policymakers and the public continue to embrace juvenile justice reform and alternatives to incarceration, states and localities must determine how best to use former facility structures and land in ways that benefit communities and reduce cost burdens for residents.

What Can States and Localities Do with Closed Youth Prisons?

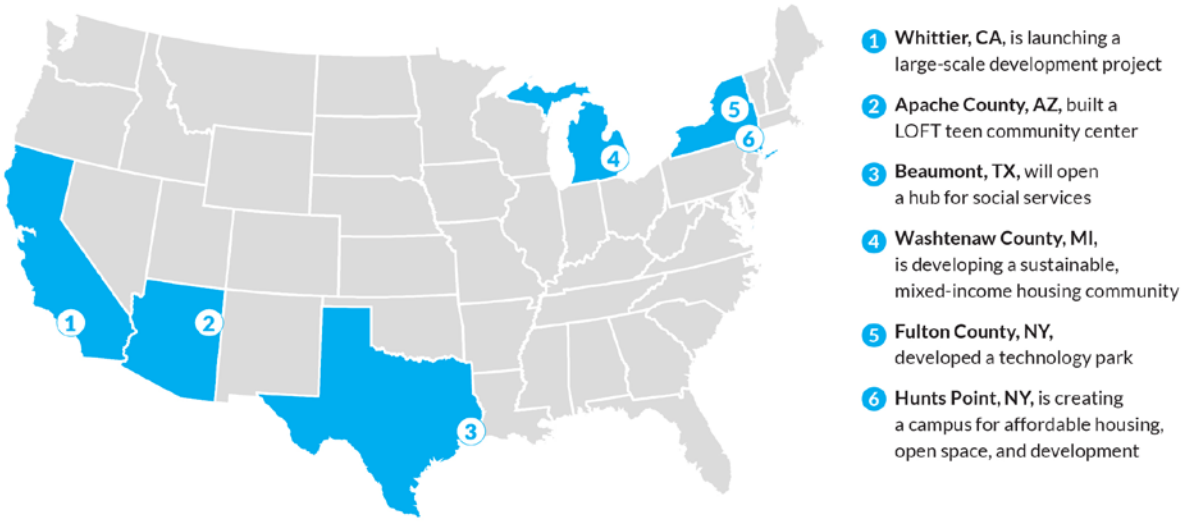
Communities often view prisons (for both youth and adults) as tools for job growth and economic development, particularly in rural areas. The idea that prisons bring jobs and prosperity to underdeveloped communities remains prevalent, even though no empirical evidence indicates that prisons usher in lasting economic growth (King, Mauer, and Huling 2003). In fact, one study comparing 55 rural counties with prisons constructed between 1985 and 1995 to a control group of similar counties without prisons constructed found little evidence of prisons bringing economic growth to communities (Glasmeirer and Farrigan 2007). Another study found that prisons do not play a significant role in improving local employment in rural counties (Bergeron 2017; Hooks et al. 2010). Some research suggests that prisons can actually slow growth in some municipalities and that the long-term economic impacts of increased incarceration (including rising income inequality and concentrated poverty) can outweigh any benefits (Kirchhoff 2010). Furthermore, most public prison jobs often go to veteran correctional personnel from other jurisdictions, not community residents (Huling 2002). This hiring pattern can cause spikes in housing prices in rural communities in particular and may place additional burdens on poorer members of communities (Huling 2002). In recent years, the ramifications of relying on relatively unstable prison economies for growth and prosperity have become salient for many communities, as closures (when not paired with accompanying plans for repurposing) can bring job losses and costly empty facilities.

The research base on repurposing prison land is limited, but research on other vacant and unused properties suggests that while vacant properties can serve as a drag on the local fiscal health of communities, they can be transformed into potential assets for job creation, neighborhood revitalization, and business growth (Mallach and Vey 2011). In the wake of facility closures, state and local decisionmakers have unique opportunities to transition vacant land into lasting, sustainable projects that produce economic growth, fulfill a community need, and serve residents. While prison land typically requires large-scale structural transformations, it is often expansive and inexpensive, making it viable for many different uses, such as community centers, housing developments, and social service organizations. Research has documented successful prison repurposing efforts with adult prisons,[10] and states and localities are beginning to recognize opportunities to transition former youth prisons into sustainable outlets for community development. Publicly available information on such efforts is incredibly limited, however, and little is known about successes or lessons learned from youth facility

repurposing efforts. Further, with the large number of youth prison closures over the past decade, more documentation is needed on the status of these facilities and any ongoing efforts to transform these sites. This brief focuses solely on youth facilities, and we highlight six successful repurposing efforts (figure 2).

FIGURE 2

Snapshot of Youth Prison Repurposing Efforts in Six Communities



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Apache County, Arizona, Built a LOFT Teen Community Center

In September 2017 the former Apache County Juvenile Detention Center was converted into the LOFT Legacy Teen Center, which offers communal space, free internet, a music room, and other entertainment for young people who have finished eighth grade but not yet graduated high school. Apache County had closed the detention facility in 2015 following statewide declines in youth incarceration. At the time of closure, the facility held an average of 1–2 youth per day and cost approximately $1.2 million a year to operate.[11]

Apache County is a small, rural county that previously lacked adequate social services for youth in need. The county's detention center had an average daily population of just over one youth and would sometimes go weeks without any youth in custody. Recognizing the gap in services and lack of need for a detention center, the county's Superior Court judge ordered the closure of the costly detention facility to repurpose the grounds into a teen center. Costs for repurposing were minimal, as much of the remodeling work was done in house by probation staff.[12] It was also collaborative; 12 students from a nearby high school offered ideas and suggestions on renovations.

This repurposing effort is also part of a larger statewide effort across Arizona. Before the creation of the LOFT teen center, the Chief Justice of Arizona entered an administrative order and established a

task force to develop recommendations for repurposing unused detention pods and centers that were either closed or would be closing. The Task Force ultimately completed a report and presented findings to the Arizona Judicial Council.[13] As Arizona looks to repurpose multiple former detention centers across the state, Apache County is an example of how such facilities can be used to fulfill a social need.

Whittier, California, Is Launching a Large-Scale Development Project

In June 2016, the city of Whittier, California, approved a repurposing plan for the Fred C. Nelles School estimated to generate over $1 million in profit each year and create approximately 650 jobs. Opened in 1891, the Fred C. Nelles School once incarcerated nearly 1,000 youth, before declining to an average daily population of 439 and eventually closing in June 2004.[14] As the longest-running juvenile correctional facility in California, it was registered as a historical landmark in 1982 and is still protected through the office of historical preservation.[15] While operational, it was known for mistreatment and unnecessary use of force with residents.[16]

After an unsuccessful attempt to repurpose the site for an adult correctional facility, Fred C. Nelles School was declared state surplus property, and the state began accepting bids for the land in 2009.[17] Brookfield Residential, a California-based land developer, won the bid for the property and the land was approved for development by the Whittier City Council in June 2016.[18] Despite several unexpected obstacles during the development of the site,[19] Brookfield Residential recently finalized a plan to develop the 74 green acres into approximately 200,000 square feet of commercial space and as many as 750 homes. In total, stakeholders estimate the group will invest around $300 million in the site, and fiscal analysis estimates an anticipated net revenue of $1 million annually to the city of Whittier.[20] This plan is in part a response to a housing shortage identified by city leaders, who believe the residential development will help the city navigate the housing challenges dominant throughout the Los Angeles region.[21] These efforts will require extensive structural transformation of the site, including 18 months for demolition and several years for construction of homes and commercial structures, but they are expected to have the long-term benefit of adding jobs and tax revenue to the city.

Washtenaw County, Michigan, Is Developing a Sustainable, Mixed-Income Housing Community

In 2017, Washtenaw County approved a plan to repurpose the land that previously held the Washtenaw County Juvenile Detention Center into a mixed-income, net-zero sustainable living community. After operating for more than three decades, the Washtenaw Juvenile Detention Center was closed in 2003. The building, along with an office building that shared the 13.5-acre property, was demolished in 2013.[22]

Faced with a valuable plot of public land, Washtenaw County began discussions about how best to use the site, including the possibility of using the property to address the need for more affordable housing in the Ann Arbor community. Through a multitude of community engagement efforts—which included town halls, public information efforts, a community advisory committee, and a three-day design and planning workshop (or "charrette")—Washtenaw County explored uses for the property that would benefit the community. The outcome was a concept plan that called for a mixed-income housing community with a minimum of 50 affordable housing units. Additionally, the plan called for a commitment to sustainability and the inclusion of a community center or other amenities that facilitate connections between new residents and surrounding areas. The concept plan was included in a request for proposals (RFP) that was released in 2016.[23] In August 2017, the Washtenaw County Board of Commissioners selected THRIVE Collaborative's proposal to create Veridian @ County Farm.[24] The proposal included a letter of support with approximately 100 signatures from neighbors of the site.[25] In partnership with local housing developers and other organizations, THRIVE Collaborative plans to repurpose the land into a net-zero, sustainable living community that includes 125–150 homes. Approximately 40 percent of the homes will be affordable housing units.[26] A significant portion of the landscape will be dedicated to food production, and the site will include a multifunctional community center with storefronts where local farmers can sell their produce.[27] THRIVE Collaborative's proposal offered a purchasing price of $500,000 but noted an additional $4.935 million in sustainability benefits to the community.[28] As of May 2018, the county is negotiating a purchasing agreement with THRIVE, after which discussions with the city of Ann Arbor about zoning and other considerations will begin.

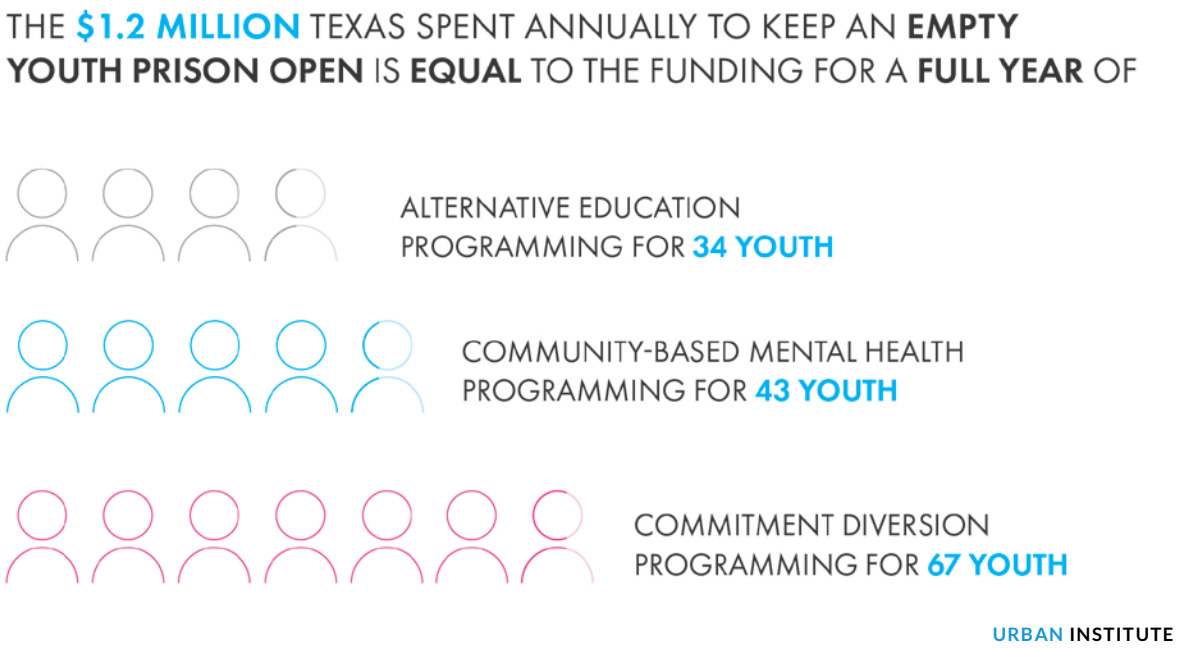
Beaumont, Texas, Will Open a Hub for Social Services

After remaining vacant for six years, the Al Price Juvenile Correctional Facility (Al Price) is being repurposed into a recovery center and "one-stop shop for social services."[29] The Beaumont Dream Center—a local, volunteer-driven organization—will use the buildings to provide social services, housing, and recovery support for residents in need, including people with substance use issues, at-risk youth, and veterans displaced after returning from service. Specific plans include a faith-based recovery program; vocational training; a drop-in center for veterans; a health center with volunteer chiropractors, dentists, and doctors; sports programs for at-risk youth; GED classes; and dorms for veterans returning from service. Harbor House, a partnering organization, will use a portion of the land to create "micro villages"—affordable mobile housing communities where residents have access to services like a life coach and gardening training.

Al Price opened as a juvenile correctional facility in 1995 but was defunded by the Texas Legislature in 2011 due to multiple factors, including budgetary constraints and a declining population. In 2014, the Texas Legislature transferred the land to Jefferson County, with the requirement that the land be used only for a public purpose.[30] Multiple groups expressed interest in the property, but the county was hesitant because of concerns about public benefit (such as interest from a private prison company) or inability to fund the restoration of the property (such as an offer from a charter school that failed to receive the anticipated legislative funding). During the multiyear process of searching for an occupant, the county reportedly spent approximately $100,000 annually to maintain the facility.

In October 2017, the Beaumont Dream Center, in partnership with the Harbor House Foundation, signed a lease for the property, providing an opportunity to fulfill a public purpose and relieve taxpayers of maintenance costs. The 20-year lease places the monthly rent at $1 and contains an option for two five-year renewals.[31] Additionally, after an initial grace period for utilities costs, the Dream Center will absorb all the maintenance and renovation costs, which will be funded through grants and donations.

FIGURE 2



Source: Texas Legislative Budget Board, *Criminal and Juvenile Justice Uniform Cost Report: Fiscal Years 2015 and 2016* (Austin: Texas Legislative Budget Board, 2017).

Fulton County, New York, Developed a Technology Park

The Tryon Juvenile Detention Facility, which opened in 1966 and formally closed in 2011,[32] was repurposed into the Tryon Technology Park in 2015. While operational, the facility faced serious consequences following its poor treatment of incarcerated youth. In 2010, Tryon and two other New York juvenile detention centers were placed under federal oversight after Justice Department investigators found staff caused dozens of serious injuries, including broken bones and teeth, when they routinely used force as a primary way to restrain youth.[33]

Upon learning about the facility's closure, Fulton County officials approached Governor Cuomo and legislators with a plan to transform the facility into Tryon Technology Park. In 2012, Governor Cuomo announced that the Empire State Development board of directors had authorized the transfer of the Tryon Facility to the Fulton County Industrial Development Agency (FCIDA) for redevelopment at no cost.[34] In 2014, Senator Schumer visited the proposed Tryon Technology Park and called on the Northern Border Regional Commission to give federal resources to Fulton County to repurpose the Tryon facility.[35] In September 2015, the regional commission granted $184,153 in federal funding to

Fulton County.[36]The Fulton County board of supervisors, in partnership with the FCIDA, completed the transformation of the facility into Tryon Technology Park. The county secured a $2 million Empire State Development grant to construct a new county highway into the site to provide direct access to all sites in the Park and to reconfigure municipal water and sewer infrastructure. The county invested an additional $2 million to install a new water pumping station and elevated water storage tank to ensure the availability of a reliable source of water for companies in the park.[37] In June 2015, Vireo Health of NY, LLC, was granted one of five statewide licenses to manufacture and sell medical cannabis. Vireo Health chose Tryon as home for its pharmaceutical manufacturing facility.[38] The park is entrusted to the FCIDA, who has a mandate for the property to create industrial and commercial jobs and promote new investment in the Mohawk Valley.[39]

Hunts Point, New York, Is Creating a Campus for Affordable Housing, Open Space, and Industrial and Commercial Business Development

In March 2018, the New York City Council approved plans to repurpose the Bridges Juvenile Justice Center (more commonly known as the Spofford Detention Center) into a $300 million, five-acre campus that will include approximately 700 units of affordable housing, ground-floor retail, light industrial manufacturing space, and other amenities.[40] Spofford Detention Center, built in the South Bronx community of Hunts Point in 1957 and renamed the Bridges Juvenile Detention Center in 1999,[41] was known for its poor conditions and brutal treatment of youth from all over New York City.[42]

The detention center closed in 2011 after decades of campaigning by activists and community residents. Community members then successfully rallied public support to prevent the land from being converted into another correctional facility.[43] Their suggestions for repurposing efforts included arts, recreation, and residential space to benefit Hunts Points residents. In June 2015, the New York City Economic Development Council (NYCEDC) issued a request for expressions of interest to redevelop the vacant site. After reviewing several proposals, NYCEDC chose the Peninsula, LLC, a joint submission by Gilbane Development Company, Hudson Companies and Mutual Housing Association of New York.[44] All the proposed 700 housing units will be income restricted, with apartments reserved for those making from 30 percent to 90 percent of the area median income, and 75 units set aside for homeless people. The Peninsula development will occur in three phases: phase I will be completed in 2021, phase II in 2022, and phase III anticipated for 2024. The project is expected to create 177 permanent jobs and more than 1,600 temporary construction jobs, and the development team has committed to a goal of ensuring 35 percent of businesses within the campus are minority- and women-owned. The development team will also participate in HireNYC, a free NYCEDC program that connects the city's workforce development services to various projects.[45] The development team is also working closely with community-based organizations, such as Sustainable South Bronx and BronxWorks, to ensure people from the Bronx community receive training and opportunities to obtain the jobs created by this project. The project is part of the mayor's Housing New York plan to address the city's housing affordability crisis by building or preserving 200,000 units of affordable housing by promoting mixed-use, mixed-income, and healthy communities.[46]

BOX 2

Context Matters: Repurposing Land in Rural, Suburban, and Urban Regions

Local context—including the political and economic landscape of communities, the availability of local resources, and the community's sociodemographic composition—shapes agencies' ability to repurpose and transform vacant properties. Cities with large populations and strong housing markets may face fewer barriers to commercial revitalization and repurposing efforts, whereas distressed neighborhoods with lower population density may face challenges attracting businesses and other economic developments to vacant properties (HUD 2014). An analysis of repurposing vacant commercial land in legacy cities (i.e., cities that once relied on industrial production and manufacturing as their economic base) found that such communities, which have experienced population and job loss, have unique repurposing challenges including poor investor perceptions of neighborhoods, limited access to capital, limited capacity and quality of business, and weak market demand (Eppig and Brachman 2014). In these and other communities with low population density, further efforts are needed to empower policymakers, investors, and community members to partner in repurposing efforts (Urban Land Institute n.d.; HUD 2014). Lessons from repurposing efforts in abandoned mine lands suggest that transforming vacant land in sparsely populated communities can be aided by sustained, active community involvement in the repurposing process, inclusive stakeholder engagement, and collaborative visioning sessions to determine plans for site reuse.[a] Further, preliminary findings from our interviews with stakeholders in rural regions suggest vacant properties in sparsely populated communities may offer unique opportunities for smaller community-based nonprofits to repurpose land at a reduced cost, given the low competition for land and the lower property values. Regardless of the facility type, there are distinct contextual differences to consider when repurposing land in rural and urban environments, both of which require sustained community partnerships to ensure repurposing efforts are adaptable and responsive to local community needs.

[a] "Abandoned Mine Lands: Revitalization and Reuse," US Environmental Protection Agency, last updated February 2, 2018, https://www.epa.gov/superfund/abandoned-mine-lands-revitalization-and-reuse#main-content.

Key Considerations for State and Local Policymakers to Support Repurposing Efforts

Our interviews with 41 key stakeholders involved in youth prison repurposing efforts pointed to several lessons learned and important considerations for improving the processes by which youth prison land can be repurposed. Below, we present two sets of recommendations: one for state and local policymakers and another for organizations interested in repurposing. While stakeholders' perspectives varied based on the unique context of their state and local area, the stakeholder recommendations summarized here are applicable across an array of jurisdictions.

Stakeholder Recommendations for State and Local Policymakers

- Consider the costs and missed opportunities of unused, vacant land
- Be intentional about priorities for the property early on, and clearly articulate requirements for potential occupants
- Consult with the community to identify local needs
- Facilitate partnerships with key stakeholders early and often
- Streamline the approval process for transferring land
- Educate and partner with community members during planning

Consider the Costs and Missed Opportunities of Unused, Vacant Land

Prior research and insights gained from stakeholder interviews suggest there are significant costs associated with leaving vacant youth facilities empty and unchanged. Unused vacant properties have been linked to increased crime rates, low property values, increased risks to public health, and increased costs for municipal governments (HUD 2014). Vacant properties can also serve as points of contention with community members, who may be concerned with the cost of unused land or may not want the physical reminder of incarceration within their communities. Furthermore, leaving vacant property unoccupied introduces moisture damage, asbestos, vandalism, and other signs of physical deterioration in properties themselves. To mitigate structural damages and associated costs, policymakers should take timely action to ensure vacant properties are repurposed into positive, community-approved developments.

- **The unintended consequences of empty land in Hunts Point:** In the four years between when Spofford Detention Center closed (2011) and NYCEDC released its request for expressions of interest for repurposing the site (2015), the vacant facility presented significant challenges for the surrounding community. The building attracted rodent infestations, drug use, crime, theft, and vandalism—ultimately increasing construction costs for the approved development team by approximately $1 million. In addition, the facility was reportedly a physical and emotional eyesore for community members, many of whom had been incarcerated in the detention center and were directly affected by its poor conditions.

Be Intentional about Priorities for the Property Early On, and Clearly Articulate Requirements for Potential Occupants

Finding an occupant for former facility space involves balancing several priorities, including using the land for public benefit, relieving economic burdens from taxpayers, responding to community needs, and taking timely action. Some states face legislative requirements for land transfers, whereas others experience community pressure to prioritize certain projects over others. Be intentional about priorities for the land, identify these priorities early on, and develop a transparent approach for placing the land on the market. If policymakers have specific requirements for the property, they should state

them clearly and explicitly, such as in an RFP. Requirements for potential occupants should also be clearly articulated in the request including, for example, a history of involvement in and commitment to the local community, a history of executing on similar plans, or secure financial backing.

- **Using land for a public purpose in Beaumont, Texas**: After maintaining the vacated Al Price facility for many years, the state transferred the land to Jefferson County through House Bill 1968. The bill included the stipulation that the land be used "only for a purpose that benefits the public interest of the state."[47] Although this requirement partially stems from state legal requirements, the county embraced this mission and prioritized the pursuit of an organization to occupy the space that would benefit both the community and the state. This priority sometimes came at the cost of other considerations, such as timing, but the legal requirement from HB 1968, along with the motivation of county commissioners, helped ensure that the facility eventually found a new purpose that would provide benefits and needed services to the Beaumont community and beyond.
- **Prioritizing community benefit in Hunts Point**: When releasing its RFP in June 2015, the New York Economic Development Council prioritized proposals that could demonstrate intentional community benefits for Hunts Point residents. Before publicizing the RFP, the council held meetings with Hunts Point community members to solicit their feedback on potential uses for the space; many identified concerns related to a lack of affordable housing and fears of anticipated gentrification. Within the RFP, NYCEDC included several requirements and guidelines to be responsive to community concerns, including stipulations that developers focus on local job creation and improving manufacturing employment opportunities. The winning proposal included an explicit plan to partner with trusted, long-standing Bronx-based organizations to ensure housing and job creation benefited members of the Bronx community. It also reserved affordable housing units for existing Hunts Point residents and incorporated a plan for light industrial space to create manufacturing jobs. Many stakeholders saw the Mutual Housing Association of New York as having a long, positive track record of providing affordable housing and meeting the needs of low-income New York residents; the association's participation in the development team, along with that of trusted Bronx-based organizations such as the Point, helped NYCEDC and community members trust in the plan's ability to produce benefits for current Hunts Point residents.

Consult with the Community to Identify Local Needs

Communities with closed youth prisons may have unmet social needs, such as affordable housing, job opportunities, and social services. In rural areas, stakeholders may experience difficulties attracting businesses to remote vacant properties; however, regardless of location, land can be used to fill a social need, such as providing a teen center or social services center where none existed before. In urban areas, business leaders may have significant economic interest in the property; however, policymakers should take steps to determine whether the property can fill a demonstrated community need, such as

affordable housing. Collaborating with community members and leaders to identify what social needs could best be filled by the available land is critical to successfully meeting this goal.

- **Pursuing affordable housing in Washtenaw County:** In 2011, Washtenaw County began discussions about potential uses for the 13.5 acres of land that held the soon-to-be demolished juvenile detention center. Informed by community input and a grant-funded study[48] that identified regional imbalances in the local housing market, the county recognized a need for more affordable housing in the high-cost city of Ann Arbor. A main barrier up to that point had been the land costs. Thus, county staff identified this vast, publicly owned site as an exceptional opportunity for a mixed-income housing development. The Washtenaw County Board of Commissioners established the Platt Road Community Advisory Committee to explore potential uses of the site. The committee produced a list of recommendations that prioritized affordable housing and sustainability, which the council adopted by resolution in February 2014. In August of the same year, the advisory committee and the county hosted a charrette to involve community members in brainstorming designs for the site that would incorporate the committee's recommendations. The county used the resulting concept plan, which suggested a minimum of 50 affordable housing units, as a basis for the RFP. This early and consistent drive to use the vacated land to fill the dearth of affordable housing in Ann Arbor eventually resulted in Veridian @ County Farm, which will include at least 50 affordable housing units. Other community needs and priorities identified through this extensive community input process—like environmental sustainability and the facilitation of community connections—were also incorporated into the RFP and are included in the current development plan.

Facilitate Partnerships with Key Stakeholders Early and Often

Repurposing efforts require ongoing communication among agencies. Form partnerships among state officials, local and county officials, prospective buyers, and other agencies needed to facilitate successful repurposing. Such partnerships can be used to help facilitate land transfer processes, provide funding, and ensure community support for repurposing projects.

- **Forming strategic partnerships among Fulton County and New York State:** Although county officials developed a repurposing plan early on, they could not execute their goal without ongoing collaboration among multiple agencies. Efforts to repurpose the Tryon Juvenile Detention Center were thus intentionally collaborative from the outset, requiring strategic communication between county officials, state agencies, and state and local policymakers. Immediately upon closure, Fulton County officials approached New York's governor and state legislators with a plan for the former facility. Because the state could not transfer land to the county easily, the FCIDA became the primary applicant. Once the state transferred the land to FCIDA at no cost, county officials received the support of state legislators, including Senator Schumer, to visit the property and advocate for funding. These efforts resulted in federal and state grants to FCIDA, including almost $200,000 in federal funding and approximately $2 million in state funding from the Empire State Development agency. Through proactive

collaboration, actively seeking state and local grants, and receiving the ongoing support of state officials, Fulton County successfully partnered to transform the vacant facility into a technology park.

Streamline the Approval Process for Transferring Land

Many stakeholders outside state agencies identified the lengthy and convoluted process of transferring the land to the vendor as a primary barrier for repurposing efforts. This holds significant ramifications for the implementation of repurposing projects; nongovernmental organizations and nonprofits may be discouraged by or unable to overcome the bureaucratic barriers to acquiring land and thus abandon projects that could meet a demonstrated social need. Policymakers should consider streamlining the bureaucratic processes for land transfer; if this is not possible, they should make information on the transfer process publicly available, accessible, and easily understood.

- **Streamlining entitlement processes in California:** After an extensive bidding process, developers entered into a purchase and sale agreement with the state for the Fred C. Nelles site in 2011. Work then began on the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) process, which took four years to complete. All in all, developers worked with the state over seven years to obtain entitlement for the site. While the concerns addressed through CEQA are crucial, the bureaucratic process involved was convoluted and slow, and introduced unnecessary delays in the repurposing process. If the state of California could streamline and more clearly define the CEQA process, mitigating the burden such approvals introduce while protecting the environmental impact protections, the state could help more efficiently repurpose public land. For instance, as currently written, CEQA involves approval from multiple parties across multiple strategies; by designating one point of contact for progress updates and approvals, California could make the entitlement process more efficient.

Educate and Partner with Community Members during Planning

Closing a facility does not erase the role it played in the community, often over decades. Community members can be negatively affected by closure, especially when it is accompanied by job loss or other economic detriments; such effects intensify the need to keep them apprised of new economic planning efforts. Other times, community members may have advocated to close the facility and may be invested in ensuring it is not used as a correctional facility again. When planning repurposing efforts, policymakers should invite community input into the process wherever possible. To encourage community involvement, policymakers have employed methods such as holding town halls for community members to express their opinions directly to elected officials and creating a mailing list for the distribution of information and documents.

- **Engaging the community in Washtenaw County:** Early on and throughout repurposing, Washtenaw County officials put concerted energy into public information efforts and community engagement. Over more than five years, the county used a planning and public awareness campaign to solicit community feedback. Public information efforts included

maintaining a mailing list with information on upcoming meetings and creating a public website (http://www.plattroad.org) where all public documents and information would be published. The community advisory committee and the county also held a three-day public charrette where hundreds of neighbors were invited to share their vision for the site. The Washtenaw County Board of Commissioners heard multiple hours of public testimony at its meetings, and commissioners held small group conversations with their constituents. During these meetings, officials were able to address neighbors' concerns head on, often by presenting research and data that could contradict emotion-fueled fears.

Key Considerations for Organizations Interested in Repurposing

Stakeholder calls also pointed to several key lessons for those looking to acquire and repurpose former facility land.

Stakeholder Recommendations for Organizations Interested in Repurposing

- Educate and partner with community members in your repurposing plan
- Be realistic about timeline, resources, bureaucratic processes, and structural issues
- Partner with formerly incarcerated stakeholders and be intentional about community impact;
- Collaborate with multiple stakeholders early and often

Educate and Partner with Community Members in Your Repurposing Plan

While community members often support new uses for empty land as a strategy for economic development, they need to understand the purpose of the repurposing project and have the opportunity to provide input. This is particularly true for cases when the building may be used for social services, such as homeless shelters or community centers for at-risk youth. It is also true for instances when vendors come from outside the community. Successful repurposing efforts have employed youth advisory councils, town-hall meetings, stakeholder advisory councils, active media campaigns, and other strategies to obtain community perspective.

- **A community effort in Apache County:** Justice system stakeholders in Apache County, Arizona, found themselves in a unique situation: faced with a highly underused detention center, a statewide push for localities to repurpose unused detention center land, and an unmet need for a communal safe space for teenagers, they chose to create a community center for teens in need. From the beginning of the project, repurposing champions intentionally collaborated with residents and attempted to make the repurposing project a community effort among a range of stakeholders. Champions consulted with a student advisory council to ask youth what services and equipment they wanted in the center, partnered with the local Boys

and Girls Club, and proactively educated and advertised to community members to assure them that the center would be a safe space for teenagers—not a detention center or probation requirement. Champions listened to community concerns that the center would "look like a jail" or remind youth of the detention center and took deliberate effort to remodel the facility into a positive and welcoming environment. Remodeling efforts were also a communal effort, supplied primarily by volunteers, probation staff, and other engaged community members. While Apache County's close-knit nature and small population may reduce barriers for involving community members, such tactics can be replicated in larger jurisdictions through town-hall meetings and other active media campaigns.

Be Realistic about Timeline, Resources, Bureaucratic Processes, and Structural Issues

Understand that land restrictions for government-owned property (including differences between public and private land use), potential structural challenges, and other logistical barriers will take time to resolve. Repurposing efforts may take longer than expected, so it is useful to be well-informed on bureaucratic processes and plan time for unanticipated barriers.

- **Resilient planning and support to overcome unexpected barriers in Whittier, California:** After entering into a land agreement with the state, stakeholders in Whittier, California, encountered an unexpected barrier when the Whittier Conservancy filed two lawsuits citing environmental and historic concerns against the project: one against the city, and one against the state. The lawsuits delayed the project timeline by roughly two and a half years, and they required substantial additional resources for legal processes. This delay did not, however, derail the development because the developers were able to execute on a flexible timeline and were persistent in their pursuit of the project. Community support was paramount to remaining resilient in the face of these barriers and was built through educational campaigning and many hours of community meetings. With community support and perseverance, developers were eventually able to address concerns, settle both lawsuits, and continue with progress as planned. Though delays are never without challenge, unanticipated barriers are to be expected with large projects of this kind, and persevering can pay off in the end.

Partner with Formerly Incarcerated Stakeholders, and Be Intentional about Community Impact

These facilities have in many cases had a large impact, for better or worse, on their communities, and it is critical to be conscious of the weight of that history when building movements to repurpose. In some cases, facilities have existed for more than a century, and created a large footprint in their communities. Stakeholders interested in repurposing facilities should partner with formerly incarcerated community members whenever possible to include their perspective, and maintain place consciousness as they think about what the facility will become and execute repurposing plans. In some cases, it may be seen as revisionary to replace the facility with a new building without acknowledging what the site once was.

Each case is different, but intentional and open engagement and partnership can help build more conscious, informed repurposing efforts that will satisfy the needs of the whole community.

- **Value of intentional community partnership:** While community engagement has been a central priority in several successful examples of facility repurposing, efforts often stop short of intentional, formalized partnerships in directly impacted communities, particularly with formerly incarcerated people. Because of the impact these facilities have had on their surrounding communities, simply demolishing or restructuring the facility to make way for new projects can be seen as an attempt to cover up, ignore, or minimize the harm done by incarceration. Without meaningful outreach and authentic partnerships with communities directly impacted by the facilities while they were operational, repurposing efforts can be misinterpreted or taken out of context.
- **Listening to community members in Hunts Point:** The repurposing effort in Hunts Point was largely driven by community demands and grassroots organizing. For decades, community organizers rallied for the closure of the Spofford Detention Center before it finally shut its doors in 2011. Community members came together again upon news of closure to push the city to repurpose the facility into something positive for current residents. Mothers on the Move, a nonprofit social justice group based in Hunts Point, was particularly instrumental in this effort: it gathered impacted community members and people formerly incarcerated in Spofford to attend community events and educate the larger neighborhood about the importance of repurposing the former facility. Community-based nonprofits, like THE POINT,[49] have worked closely with developers to ensure development plans are responsive to community needs. Throughout the RFP process and ongoing development planning, the leadership of Hunts Point residents and organizations has been instrumental in determining the success of the Peninsula.

Collaborate with Multiple Stakeholders Early and Often

Repurposing efforts require ongoing communication among agencies and community members. Form partnerships among state officials, local and county officials, community members, and other agencies needed to facilitate successful repurposing. Where possible, actively pursue collaborations with organizations that are trusted by the community and have a history of following through on plans.

- **Creating lasting collaborations among community organizations in Hunts Point:** Because of their neighborhood's proximity to rapidly gentrifying New York City neighborhoods, Hunts Point residents wanted to avoid repurposing projects that included market-rate housing units that might displace current community members and prioritize economic priorities over community needs. Ensuring that the winning proposal to NYCEDC could meet neighborhood housing and employment needs without displacing residents required deep collaborations among long-term community agencies, including The Point Community Development Corporation, Urban Health Plan, Sustainable South Bronx, The Knowledge House, Casita Maria, Rocking the Boat, and BronxWorks. Although the primary agencies that won the proposal are the Gilbane Development Company, Hudson Companies ,and Mutual Housing Association of

New York, their partnerships with the community agencies enabled the development team to respond to residents' concerns and offer affordable housing for residents and additional services, including a wellness center, a job training program, an arts education center, affordable food, banking opportunities for underbanked consumers, and technology training. These partnerships formed the basis of a winning proposal that was responsive to community needs and reflected the priorities of South Bronx residents.

Conclusion

While policymakers have made considerable strides in promoting juvenile justice reform and reducing youth incarceration rates, more can be done to ensure communities with vacant youth prisons have the lasting resources they need to thrive. With more than 1,000 closures over the past decade, there are currently a multitude of vacant facilities across the country, each of which presents an opportunity to reduce public maintenance costs, relieve residents of the reminders of incarceration, and fulfill a concrete community need. Youth prison repurposing is not without its challenges, but it offers a unique opportunity to leverage unused state land to fulfill a social need. Findings from stakeholder calls reveal that although repurposing efforts can be lengthy and encounter unanticipated challenges, they can also inspire lasting investments within communities and produce tangible benefits both economically and socially.

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