

Shuttered Bronx prison to be used as job-training and reentry center for the formerly incarcerated

Fulton Community Correctional Facility was once a church house and a synagogue

By Denis Slattery / NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

Thursday, January 31, 2013, 6:00 AM

This Bronx building is no stranger to second chances.

A 106-year-old Claremont building that has been by turns a jail, a synagogue, and a church house, could soon be reborn as a reentry facility for ex-prisoners.

The seven-story brick building at 1511 Fulton Ave., overlooking the southern expanse of Crotona Park, housed the Fulton Community Correctional Facility for 36 years before being closed by Gov. Cuomo in 2011.

According to Cuomo's 2013-2014 budget proposal, plans are in the works for the shuttered jail to be renovated and run by the Osborne Association, a non-profit that works with the formerly incarcerated and runs several programs on Rikers Island.

"This organization provides a valuable service that has widespread community support. Frankly, there is no better use for a former prison than using it to keep people from re-entering one," said Cuomo spokesman Richard Azzopardi.

Several local politicians, including State Sen. Gustavo Rivera and Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr., have backed the move.

"It's a great thing, a great thing for the Bronx. The issues of recidivism and reentry are so important to my constituents, and to myself," Rivera said of the facility.

Built in 1906, the stately structure was originally known as the Fulton Avenue Church House, a social gathering place for Episcopalians in the early 20th century.

In 1924 it housed the Bronx Jewish Center with a YMHA and a synagogue, and in the 1950s it transformed into a nursing home and later a drug rehabilitation center.

In 1975, the facility was converted into a minimum security correctional facility, which it remained until its closure in 2011.

"The building has such a rich history and we want to restore it to its role as a cornerstone serving the needs of the community, in particular those returning to the community," said Elizabeth Gaynes, executive director of the Osborne Association.

Osborne, whose main facility is located on Westchester Ave. in Melrose, has committed to making \$6 million in renovations to the facility.

"We will be operating as a transitional residential facility as well as focusing on workforce development; including job-training and transitioning people back into society," Gaynes added.

Despite a recent decline in crime, the Bronx still leads the city in the number of people either incarcerated or on parole.

As of 2011, more than 4,700 individuals from the Bronx are on parole and close to 10,000 are under probation supervision, according to the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services.

Neighbors along Fulton Ave. had mixed feelings about the latest reincarnation of the building, but most welcomed the change.

"The neighborhood will be all right with it," said Oliver Juan, 53.

"It's good for people just getting out to have a place to go, a place to help them get back on their feet."