

## **WMAC: New York Welcomes Ideas For Mount McGregor**

By Lucas Willard

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Big changes are planned for the site of a recently closed prison in Saratoga County.

Mount McGregor prison in Wilton was closed last July as part of an initiative by Gov. Andrew Cuomo's office to right-size New York's correctional system.

While the executive branch has hailed the savings associated with the closures, due in part to a decrease in inmate populations, local leaders protested the closure of Mount McGregor for months, saying the loss of prison jobs would be a blow to the area.

Less than a year after the prison's shuttering, Empire State Development announced that it has issued an RFP for the purchase and redevelopment of 325 acres at the site that sits in the hills of Saratoga County.

Alexis Offen, Vice President for Real Estate Development at ESD, said the agency is casting a wide net.

"This is a very unique property, both for its location, its size, and its history. Saratoga County is a major economic hub, one of the fastest-growing counties in New York state, attracting people for both business and pleasure, and we think this site could serve either function."

There are more than 100 buildings on the site, some eligible for the National Register for Historic Places, in addition to the historic Grant Cottage.

The 325-acre parcel also includes an undeveloped lake and views of the Green Mountains and Berkshires and the Hudson Valley.

Local leaders are sharing some of their own ideas of what they'd like to see on the site.

Art Johnson is supervisor for the Town of Wilton.

"I would love some type of recreation use. A hotel, like a Gideon Putnam-type place, with potential to have a golf course and recreation. With the views up there it would be just a tremendous site for something like that," said Johnson.

While the RFP is wide-open, one requirement is that the site must create jobs – something Johnson says is needed.

“We lost 300 jobs when the prison closed, and you’re always looking to replace to those jobs and it will have such a financial impact on the town and the surrounding areas if new business comes in there and hires a good number of people.”

The Town of Moreau had considered siting a casino resort at Mount McGregor in the race to secure a Capital Region gambling license last year.

Town of Moreau supervisor Preston Jenkins has other ideas.

“I’ve toured it and my opinion would be that it would be a great likely place for a potential private school or an extension of a college, possible, or it could be something, some kind of healthcare facility that doesn’t require a lot of transportation issues, because it’s a long ways up,” said Jenkins.

Jenkins said there is a need for improvement of the roads leading up to the site.

In addition to ESD looking to redevelop the site, State Parks announced that 750 acres of the surrounding property will be transferred to Moreau State Park.

Jenkins said the expanded park would help bring more visitors to the region, as the town works to expand its own trail system.

“We have a plan that where we’re going to be running trails some time in the next four or five years hopefully will be completed that will run from the bridge in Glens Falls all the way through the park an beyond,” said Jenkins. “We’re excited. We have great river-frontage. We have a beautiful river, nobody knows that because they don’t really get a good look at it. But if you walked along it or took a boat ride from Nolan Road to past the Northway it’s about 4 miles. It’s beautiful riverside. Gorgeous.”

Empire State Development will offer public tours of the Mount McGregor site on June 2nd. For more information