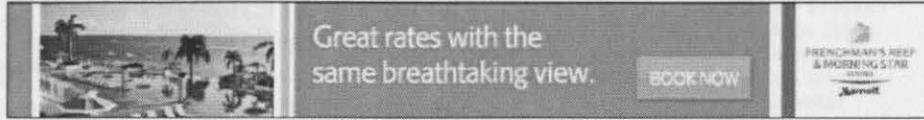


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### Need exists for new prison, but study all options

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We agree it's time Northumberland County officials give serious consideration to constructing a new county jail, as commissioners publicly stated this week they'd like to do.

That process, however, should involve a comprehensive look at the options: A new stand-alone facility? A regional facility involving neighboring counties? One large enough to house inmates from other locations? Those and many other questions should be considered.

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Talk of a new prison isn't new. The topic arises on a regular basis, often after there are complaints about conditions inside the walls of the existing 137-year-old building. There was a healthy discussion among the seven-member prison board as recently as 2010.

There have been a number of lawsuits regarding the conditions, but the prison has also made recent strides toward improvement, and less than two years ago was complimented by the Lewisburg Prison Project - an inmate advocacy group that had sued the county for \$1.5 million over jailhouse conditions - for improved air quality and temperature.

Still, the problems seem to stay one step ahead of repairs, and it's likely that trend won't be reversed as the building further ages.

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The idea of a regional prison, something Commissioner Rick Shoch believes should be explored, was discussed only a few years ago. Former Commissioner Frank Sawicki told us in October 2011 that commissioners from five counties met to discuss the idea, but it never went any further.

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If those same counties have continued to face the same overwhelming financial constraints as Northumberland has - and no doubt that's the case - perhaps it's time to organize another meeting.

Politics



Commissioner Chairman Vinny Clausi believes the county could turn the expense of a new prison into an opportunity for revenue if it's built large enough to house undocumented immigrants. That's a direction worthy of study, too.

On the issue of location, the site for a new prison is sure to create tension, but almost anything would be better than the current location smack in the middle of a residential neighborhood.

- Police Blotter: April 1, 2013
- Sound Off: Monday, April 1, 2013
- District Court: April 1, 2013

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• Why this interest in privatization?

It's easy to say taxpayers shouldn't concern themselves with the conditions of the prison; let the inmates deal with poor conditions. While the rights of the incarcerated sometimes seem to take precedence over the victims of crime, America simply doesn't operate with such disregard, no matter the institution. Prisoners deserve humane conditions.

Of further concern, however, is that much of the recent controversy regarding the prison has had nothing to do with its condition, and everything to do with the behavior of staff and inmates and even the practices of service providers. A new facility won't solve any of that.

Also, county commissioners have found themselves backtracking from some recent snap decisions, including senior action center closings and voting precinct reductions. They should be sure that's not allowed to happen with the prison.

Need exists for new prison, but study all options - Opinion - News Item

Besides, the current one has been in use since 1876. There's no rush to build a new one without a thorough study of the options regarding size, location and other important matters, and continued work to rectify the other current concerns.