

**CARSON CITY CULTURAL COMMISSION
STAFF REPORT**

MEETING DATE: June 19, 2012

AGENDA ITEM NUMBER: 3B

APPLICANT: Vern L. Krahn, Park Planner
Roger Moellendorf, Parks and Recreation Director

REQUEST: **For Possible Action:** to use the Cultural Commission as a public forum to solicit ideas from the public regarding the possibility of converting the decommissioned Nevada State Prison to a museum or some other public purpose that celebrates the architecture and significance of the site in Carson City and Nevada history and the Cultural Commission's possible role in converting the prison to such a use.

GENERAL DISCUSSION: As the Commission knows, the State of Nevada had a decommissioning ceremony for the Nevada State Prison on Friday, May 18, 2012 (Exhibit A). City staff and a number of Cultural Commission members believe there is growing interest at both the State and City level to do something with the prison for future museum purposes.

There will be many challenges ahead to reach this goal. Some of those challenges are as follows:

- 1) Identify funds to keep the structure viable, even as the Nevada Division of State Lands starts to mothball the prison. No one wants to see this valuable asset decay and/or fall into a state of disrepair to a point where it would have to be demolished. Also, the more decay that happens over time the more expensive it will be to restore the structure when a use for the decommissioned prison is finally determined by either the State or City.
- 2) Identify funds to get the prison on the National Historical Register.
- 3) Identify funds to develop a master plan and an associated economic impact study for the proposed use of the decommissioned prison.

At this meeting, it is staff's hope to have a discussion with the Commission regarding the process to solicit ideas from the public on the conversion of the decommissioned prison into an museum or some other public purpose, capture those remarks, and develop them into a summary form for future action by the Commission.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: I move to use the Cultural Commission as a public forum to solicit ideas from the public regarding the possibility of converting the decommissioned Nevada State Prison to a museum or some other public purpose that celebrates the architecture and significance of the site in Carson City and Nevada history and the Cultural Commission's possible role in converting the prison to such a use.

NSP decommissioning to be May 18

BY GEOFF DORNAN
gdornan@nevadaappeal.com

5-10-12

Decommissioning ceremonies are set for May 18 for the historic Nevada State Prison.

Gov. Brian Sandoval has issued an open invitation to the public and former NSP employees to attend the 11 a.m. event.

NSP began operations as the Nevada Territorial Prison in 1862 and was in continuous operation until this past January, when the final inmates were moved out.

It still houses the license plate factory and prison print shop but is no longer home to any inmates.

The ceremonies will take place in front of the main

IF YOU GO

WHAT: Decommissioning ceremony for Nevada State Prison

When: 11 a.m., May 18

WHERE: Nevada State Prison

entry to the prison on 5th Street, just inside the main gate.

Sandoval, Director of Corrections Greg Cox, former director Glen Whorton and former state archivist Guy Rocha will speak at the event.

After the ceremonies, there will be tours of the prison. Attendees are encouraged to bring cameras.

At one time, NSP was home to more than 750 inmates. It was shut down to

save money because it had the highest operating costs per inmate of any institution in Nevada's prison system. Its old-fashioned design required nearly twice the number of guards the newest state prisons need to manage a given number of inmates.

Closing it was projected to save upward of \$17 million a year.



SHANNON LITZ / NEVADA APPEAL

Former Nevada Department of Corrections Director Glen Whorton speaks at the Nevada State Prison decommissioning ceremony on Friday.

Closing ceremonies draw over 500 to historic prison

BY GEOFF DORNAN
gdornan@nevadaappeal.com

5-19-12

"Today recognizes 150 years of the good, the bad and the ugly."

— GUY ROCHA
Retired state archivist

More than 500 people turned out for the formal decommissioning of the historic Nevada State Prison on Friday.

Many of those in the crowd were former guards, officers and wardens who worked there — some coming from as far as the East Coast. But the crowd also included numerous people, many of them women who live in the capital but never had the opportunity to tour the prison.

One former warden said there were even a few former inmates in the audience.

"I've got connections to this prison," said Phil Earl of the Nevada Historical Society in Reno. "My grandfather did about four and a half years."

He said his grandfather "got talked into taking part in a train robbery."

"There were seven of them. Two died of their wounds and five went to prison and they only got \$10 in the robbery," he said.

Gov. Brian Sandoval praised current Director of Corrections Greg Cox for handling the shutdown of the prison. Out of more than 170 employees who worked at NSP, Cox managed to reduce layoffs to 29.

"Director Cox is to be commended for mitigating the impact on staff," he said.

Retired state Archivist Guy Rocha told the crowd

See NSP, Page A3

NSP

From Page A1

the only prison west of the Mississippi older than NSP, which opened in 1862, is California's San Quentin, founded in 1852.

"Today recognizes 150 years of the good, the bad and the ugly," he said.

He also pointed out that the prison was home to a casino — unique in the U.S. — for inmates from 1932 when casino gambling was legalized until 1967 when the state shut it down.

Former Director of Corrections Bob Bayer said one thing many people don't know about NSP is that, until the first women's prison was built in 1964, it housed female inmates as well as men in a section above the administrative offices.

Former NSP warden and retired director of corrections Glen Whorton said he isn't nostalgic about the collection of buildings — some more than 100 years old.

"This is not exactly a monument to success," he said.

He said it's "an old, tired facility" that has been replaced by much more efficient, safer prisons.

"I'm nostalgic about the people who were here," he said.

Whorton said when he started in 1973, most of the guards were veterans, many of them combat veterans.

"They were hard people but that's what they needed to be," he said.

"It was back in the day when there was no corrections. It was a prison. It was to contain and control."

In addition to Whorton and Bayer, former Corrections

Directors Ron Angelone and Howard Skolnick turned out for the event along with former wardens including John Ignacio, Mike Budge, Ed Pogue and Greg Smith.

Bayer said seeing all those people brought back "an awful lot of memories."

"I'm seeing people I haven't seen for years," he said.

He said he hopes some how the money to turn it into a museum can be found.

Budge said he was pleased such a large number of former co-workers and friends turned out.

He said his goal even when he was warden 20 years ago was to eventually turn the prison into a museum.

"Seeing everybody that worked this place is great," he said.

"I hate to see the place close," said Jerry Adamson who worked as a correctional

officer there from 1965 until retiring in 2008. But he said it was great to see so many former staff.

Robert Love, who retired after 33 years at NSP, said he is hopeful the state can do something like that.

"It's amazing to think this thing is closed," he said.

Jim McHugh, who worked at NSP nine years before retiring in 2006, said the closure was "kind of like losing a lady."

McHugh also helped open Ely State Prison, which replaced NSP as the maximum security prison in 1989, and, later, Lovelock, which has become home to most of the sex offenders in the system.

Only one part of the old prison will still be maintained in operating condition — the execution chamber — until a budget to build a new chamber is approved.



GEOFF DORNAN / NEVADA APPEAL

Five Nevada directors of Corrections spanning more than 20 years pose at the entrance to Nevada State Prison. From left: Howard Skolnick, Ron Angelone, Glen Whorton, Bob Bayer and current Director Greg Cox.

Exhibit A

From: Lee Plemel
To: Cultural Commission
CC: Chwalisz, Eva; Krahn, Vern; Moellendorf, Roger
Date: 3/27/2012 12:06 PM
Subject: Fwd: Nevada State Prison Follow-up
Attachments: NSP CCCC 3 27 2012.pdf

FYI

Cultural Commissioners:

Attached is a memo from Peter Barton following up on the discussion last night regarding listing the prison on the National Register of Historic Places. It turns out an application has already been set in motion. Good news.

Also, an official revised Cultural Commission roster will be sent out in the next week or two with Parks and Recreation Department contact information. In the meantime, Vern's contact information is:

Parks and Rec Dept. main line: 887-2262
 Vern Krahn, Park Planner
vkrahn@carson.org
 283-7343

Feel free to contact Eva or me, as well, over the next couple of the months as we transition things. It will take a few weeks before we really have all the past files and functions transferred over to Parks and Rec. We'll try to make it as smooth and transparent as possible to the Commission.

Lee

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From: Peter Barton <PBarton@nevadaculture.org>
To: "Lee Plemel" <LPlemel@carson.org>
CC: Eva Chwalisz <EChwalisz@carson.org>
Date: 3/27/2012 11:31 AM
Subject: Nevada State Prison Follow-up

Lee,

My apologies in advance for sending this to you. I do not have at the ready contact information for Vern at Parks & Recreation. The attached memo is a follow-up to last evening's CCCC meeting and concerns the Nevada State Prison. Lo and behold, an application for National Register status is already underway. That is a critically important step in my opinion as it opens the door for private investment and eases the way for any non-profit to come in and attempt a conversion to a museum.

If this could be shared as information to Commissioners, I think it would help ease some anxiety over what to do next.

Thank you again for all you do and for your support of the Cultural Commission.

Peter D. Barton
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**Brian Sandoval
Governor**

**Peter Barton
Administrator**

**Claudia Vecchio
Director**

MEMORANDUM

To: Carson City Cultural Commission

From: Peter Barton

Date: 27 March 2012

Re: Nevada State Prison

FYI

In follow-up to our discussion of last evening concerning the future of the Nevada State Prison complex, I did speak earlier today with the State Historic Preservation Officer, Ron James. I specifically addressed the matter of nominating the Nevada State Prison for the State and National Register of Historic Places. Successful pursuit of Register status would solidify the importance of the prison as significant in our national and state history. It would also lead the way to certain benefits for investors who might be attracted in some sort of yet-to-be-defined partnership.

Mr. James advised that in fact a nomination for the National Register has been prepared and submitted to his office by NDOT under a federally required mitigation program (related to the adjacent freeway construction). The SHPO found the application defective in a number of ways and NDOT is presently revising the application for resubmission. Presuming timely resubmission, this nomination could be considered by the State Board of Museums & History at their December 2012 meeting. That could lead to listing at the National level in the first quarter of next year, well in advance of conclusion of the current State budget cycle.

As mentioned last evening, a parallel effort to determine what sort of code requirements might be faced with the prison being used for a new public use seems prudent. A new public use would require issuance of a new certificate of occupancy and as a general rule, current life-safety and ADA codes would have to be met for that to occur. In the case of the prison, that could be a very costly retrofit. What is needed in my estimation is a serious and comprehensive review by an historic architect and engineer. Certain "waivers" could be sought but that is well beyond my skill and understanding. I will pursue seeking this analysis through the State Public Works Board and their available consultants. I will keep you all posted on what I learn.