

From: Jeffry Muthersbaugh Chair, Haddam Buildings Committee

RE: Jail Article

The November issue of the Haddam Bulletin had an article on the Old Jail. Unfortunately, the article was laced with inaccuracies.

As a lover of Haddam (my wife and I chose to move here from Fairfield County because we feel that this is the most beautiful part of our state) I was sad to read that Mr. Schwing has such a poor opinion of what's in our area for tourists (and locals) to see. In the list of "attractions" he takes his visitors to see, the Thankful Arnold House here in Haddam is prominently missing. He states that, "...we can't think of anything left standing here with any historical significance that would be of interest to visitors from out of town or out of state..." For someone who writes a "home town bulletin" that's a pretty low opinion of our town.

My wife and I run the B&B in town and we have visitors from all over the state, country and world who marvel at our town and what we have here. They love the high concentration of 18th century homes (many on the National Historic Register), the stone walls, the river views, the parks, the woods, the old cemeteries...need I go on?

I can't tell you how many people we get who are doing genealogical research. We send them to the Brainerd Library where the folks there are as helpful as can be to our guests. They visit our cemeteries and they visit the Thankful Arnold House where Lisa Malloy treats them like royalty. She has opened the museum more than once on days it was closed to assist our visitors.

As Vice Chairman of Connecticut's Central Regional Tourism District, I can (and do for our guests) quote chapter and verse regarding sites to see in the rest of our River Towns that can keep people busy here for weeks. Perhaps Mr. Schwing should call me next time he has visitors.

But his calling me would be a unique occurrence because, despite my being the Chairman of the Haddam Buildings Committee, which has spent countless hours on the Old Jail project, Mr. Schwing has never contacted me once to check status, direction or even to verify the information he put in his story; much of which is inaccurate. The HaddamNews has written no fewer than three stories on the Old Jail and has contacted me every time.

As Mr. Schwing states, there is no question that our Old Jail has unique historical significance. The question is, what is the best and most cost effective use of the building now that the town owns it?

Mr. Schwing states that, in 2015 when (former) First Selectman Melissa Schlag took office, she pursued the suggestion of turning the building into a prison museum with additional administrative and community meeting rooms made available for public use.

That's an interesting statement because I served on the "Jail Committee" as it was known then and the discussions were centered around using the \$300,000 grant from the State of CT. to assess the structural condition of the building, determine the extent of environmental contamination and determine the best use of the building via a marketing study. In fact, that's what the state gave us the grant for. It should not have been "pre-determined" what the building would be used for until that study was completed.

Interestingly however, Ms. Schlag and Mr. Schwing, who was also on the committee, discussed what could be done to circumvent the findings of the marketing study if it did not determine that the best use was a museum. It was pretty clear to me that, whatever the facts showed, they were bound and determined that the jail would be a museum.

Mr. Schwing goes on to "report" that, "...Schlag's efforts were cut short a few months later by the election of a new town administration. While Schlag had asked to continue serving on the committee, First Selectman Lizz Milardo decided not to appoint her to a new jail committee."

All I can say in response to this is that both events were in the best interest of moving the jail project forward. I have compiled a chronology of the timing of this project while Melissa Schlag was First Selectman and it was protracted. During the better part of two years, she never put the project out to bid. Despite my contacting her numerous times (by my own initiative and at the request of others on the committee) to ask when the project was going to move forward, little to no action was taken. In addition, since she had a pre-determined use in mind for the building with virtually no interest in exploring anything else, her presence on the "new" Jail Committee (later Buildings Committee) would certainly have been counterproductive.

Mr. Schwing reports that the Buildings Committee, along with the chosen consulting firm of Fuss & O'Neil, made a presentation at a public hearing on June 6, 2017 and that, although a museum was listed as an optional use for the building, "...the new committee had redirected their focus toward privatization rather than a public use of the building. As a result, the consultants looked at using the jail as a retail outlet or transforming it into a full-service restaurant. An upscale restaurant was the preferred option of some of the committee members, including chair Jeff Muthersbaugh."

Mr. Schwing's reporting is seriously flawed. First of all, the committee did not tell the consultants what the building should be specifically used for. Unlike the Schwing/Schlag committee that had already decided what it would be used for, the Buildings Committee gave the consultants the following guidelines:

1. As much of the building should be accessible to the public as possible, so, a use that would allow public access is important.
2. However the building is used, it should be self-supporting. In other words, the taxpayers of Haddam have been more than generous in repairing and maintaining the building but from here forward, it should not have to be supported by taxpayers

3. The Haddam Historical Society should have some space in the building for interpretive and other displays and possibly storage/office space.

The consultants did a marketing study to determine what could be supported in the building and, from all of the interviews and research they did, it was determined that a restaurant, preferably upscale, would have the most support.

The consultants reported this finding to the committee along with other possible uses. They determined that the cost of environmental clean-up and new mechanicals/septics would be quite costly (perhaps as much as \$3 million or more) and a museum would almost certainly fail because it couldn't charge enough to cover the costs of rebuild and operations.

Housing was also considered but it was rejected because it would not have allowed public access into the building.

Offices were considered and suggested for part of the building (the "right" side where there were no cells) since the historic cell portion of the jail would still be accessible to the public if the "left" side were used for a restaurant.

All of this was explained during the public hearing but, during that public hearing, Mr. Schwing emphatically urged that the building be used as a jail museum. When I specifically asked Mr. Schwing how the build out and maintenance would be paid for, since the museum would not generate the revenue needed to do it, he said, "the town". I said, you mean taxpayers...well, good luck with that one.

Again, since Mr. Schwing either doesn't know or chooses to ignore the facts, the Buildings Committee WILL NOT decide what the use of the Old Jail will be. Once the final report is presented by Fuss & O'Neil that lists in detail what the building will need to be rehabilitated and the costs, the Town of Haddam will put out a Request for Proposals to developers and interested parties to present their ideas for the jail. Those proposals will be reviewed for feasibility/acceptability and the people of the Town of Haddam will decide who to award a contract to.

As I said at the public hearing, I am the former Chairman of the CT Trust for Historic Preservation and I still serve on that board, now entering my 18th year. I would love nothing more than to see the jail turned into a museum that would be self-sustaining but the numbers aren't there. The CT Trust itself cautions against building museums because the majority of them fail and the buildings fall into decline. It is better to preserve the building via a viable commercial use.

Mr. Schwing states that the Buildings Committee "did not comment or act on" a proposal by resident Steve Rocco and his 120 page document that proposes turning the jail into a "Museum of Crime and Punishment". Quite the contrary, the committee did discuss it but it contains no

details on funding or how such a museum would pay for itself other than that “busloads of school children from all over the state” will come.

Mr. Schwing states that tourism yields three dollars back to the state for every dollar it spends and that, “while there are currently some serious state budget issues to be dealt with, in the long term there will be state, federal and other institutional grants and opportunities that will be made available again to help fund a project like this one.”

As Vice Chair of the Central Regional Tourism District, I could have told Mr. Schwing that the state has, year after year, cut the tourism budget. The Governor has zeroed out any funding to the regional districts. Since the state can't keep Old Newgate Prison open, it is a virtual certainty that they will not put any tourism dollars into our Old Jail.

But, with all of that said, it will be developers and other interested parties who will propose what should be done with the jail. There is nothing stopping Mr. Rocco and Mr. Schwing or others from proposing a plan for a self-funding viable museum. Just like there is nothing stopping anyone from proposing a viable restaurant, store or office complex. Any and all proposals will be reviewed with an open mind and presented to Haddam voters who will ultimately make the decision.