Delinking Economic Development and Mass Incarceration: Imagining New Futures for Rural Communities

by

Insiyah Mohammad Bergeron
Bachelor of Arts, Bennington College (VT)

Submitted to the Department of Urban Studies and Planning in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master in City Planning at the

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Author
Insiyah Mohammad Bergeron
Department of Urban Studies and Planning
May 18, 2016

Certified by
Karl Seidman
Senior Lecturer
Thesis Supervisor

Accepted by
P. Christopher Zegras
Associate Professor Chair, MCP Committee
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Abstract:
Until recently, prisons were considered an economic development strategy particularly in rural communities struggling with the loss of manufacturing jobs. However, many studies have shown that prisons often have weak linkages to the host community, and sometimes have negligible or even negative impacts on rural economies. A combination of factors including changing sentencing laws, inadequate conditions in older facilities, fiscal conservatism, and increasing reliance on community based alternatives to incarceration are now leading to prison closures all around the country. In this changing context, this thesis explores: (i) What are the real and perceived impacts of prison closures on local economies in small rural counties?; and (ii) Where communities are redeveloping old prisons to boost their economies, how are local needs, politics, and project constraints (related to design and finance) shaping the transformation of these sites? By focusing on two cases where former prisons are being reused for community and economic development, this thesis explores how rural communities might transition to new ways of employing people and generating wealth after a local prison closes.

Thesis Advisor: Karl Seidman
Reader: Justin Steil
Acknowledgements

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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

1.1 Seeing Prison Closures Through an Economic Development Lens

Since the early 1970s, more than six hundred prisons have been built in the U.S. “Three strikes” laws and mandatory minimum sentences for drug offenses flooded incarceration facilities with people, prompting states to build more to avoid overcrowding. While mass incarceration in the United States continues to be a critical issue, some communities are now, sometimes simultaneously, grappling with a new kind of problem: prison closures.

A variety of factors, often in combination, are influencing these closures including changing laws around sentencing, inadequate conditions in facilities, states downsizing corrections funding and increasing reliance on community based alternatives to incarceration. According to a report by the Sentencing Project, seventeen states announced the closures of seventy prisons around the country between 2011 and 2013. In New York State alone, sixteen adult prisons and thirty juvenile prisons have been closed since 2009. North Carolina similarly has at least twenty-five decommissioned incarceration facilities scattered throughout the state.

Prison closures have been getting some attention recently, particularly since there is a perception that many rural economies with these facilities are heavily dependent on them for local jobs. However there is also emerging evidence that prisons have not contributed as much to local economies as was hoped, suggesting that these closures, especially in isolation, may not have the devastating impacts that are often publicized.

Since many prison campuses are currently vacant around the country, and more facilities are expected to close as criminal justice reform increasingly becomes a bipartisan issue, this thesis explores the following questions: (i) What are the real and perceived impacts of prison closures on local economies in small rural counties?; (ii) Where communities are redeveloping old prisons to boost their economies, how are local needs, politics, and project constraints (related to design and finance) shaping the transformation of these sites.

I used a comparative case study approach to research the above questions in two communities: Fulton County, NY and Scotland County, NC. Both places have experienced a correctional

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1 These laws, enacted on the state and federal levels, limited judicial discretion by mandating life sentences for anyone convicted for a serious violent crime (including drug offenses) with two or more prior convictions.
facility closure since the year 2000, and are using different approaches to utilizing local physical, financial and community assets to redevelop the former prison sites.

I chose to compare the two projects in Scotland County and Fulton County because they are both in predominantly rural communities, a factor that places constraints on redevelopment. However, the two communities are different in ways that are also important to consider. Scotland County, NC has a poverty rate of 29.0%, which is the highest in the state (the national poverty rate is 13.5% for comparison). The median income in the area is $30,958, compared to $53,889 nationally. Fulton County, NY is comparatively a wealthier rural community with a median household income of $46,969 and a poverty rate of 17.9%. The two communities also have very different racial compositions. While 95.2% of the population in Fulton County identifies as ‘white alone’, only 46.1% of the population falls in this category in Scotland County.

In addition to these basic demographic differences, the two communities are also taking radically different approaches to redeveloping their former prison sites. In Scotland County, NC, a grassroots organization, GrowingChange—which consists of formerly incarcerated youth, farming enthusiasts, criminal justice stakeholders, and military veterans—is leading redevelopment. The site plans include spaces for farming, sound design, museum exhibits, climbing walls, and vocational training. The state’s Department of Public Safety is an important partner in this work, and nearby educational institutions are providing technical assistance with site redesign and youth programming.

In contrast, the redevelopment in Fulton County is being led by local and regional economic development stakeholders, with some financial assistance from the state government. In New York, state funding has been earmarked to assist local communities that have experienced a prison closure. For instance, $32 million was allocated to assist four communities that experienced a prison closure in 2014, through the state’s Economic Transformation Program which aims to “create or retain jobs, prevent, reduce or eliminate unemployment or underemployment, or increase business activity in an Economic Transformation Area” (Economic Transformation Program Fact Sheet, 2014). In Fulton County, local economic development stakeholders were able to appropriate over $2 million in state funds to transform the former prison into a technology park, where one of the first occupants is a company that manufactures medical cannabis products.
Through conducting twenty-three interviews with local stakeholders, and exploring newspaper articles, historical archives, and economic and demographic data, I attempted to gauge the real and perceived economic impacts of prison closures on these two counties. I also used these resources to understand how redevelopment of the former prison sites is taking place in these two contexts. Specifically, I was interested in the goals of the stakeholders who are supporting these projects, and the assets and challenges shaping redevelopment in each context. Ultimately I was curious to know if, and how, communities can disentangle the complex relationship between economic development and mass incarceration, and transition to other ways of employing people and generating wealth after a local prison closes.

1.2 Literature Review: The Link Between Economic Development and Mass Incarceration

At the beginning of the twenty first century there were 1,023 prisons nationwide, almost double the number that had existed in 1974 (Glasmeier and Farrigan, 2007). Enforcement of harsh sentencing laws led to sharp increases in state prison populations, and many towns, particularly in rural areas, saw this as an economic development opportunity. Communities that had few prospects for economic growth otherwise strove to make themselves attractive for the siting of a prison. This included offering incentives like infrastructure subsidies and land free of cost. Some communities even expended precious tax dollars to construct prisons themselves (Glasmeier and Farrigan, 2007). For instance, in Abilene, Texas, the town offered the state an incentive package of over $4 million, which included a 316 acre site and more than 1,100 acres of farmland adjacent to the site that could produce $500,000 worth of cotton a year. The town government also offered to build roads to the facility, provide housing for staff, allow access to a private plane and hangar for state officials, and upgrade communications and public infrastructure connected to the facility (Campbell & Samoza, 1992).

Many rural communities jumped at the opportunity to ‘host’ a prison to spur local economic growth, and reduce unemployment and poverty. However, the evidence on whether these goals have been realized is inconclusive at best. Glasmeier and Farrigan (2007) compared fifty-five rural counties with prisons constructed between 1985 and 1995 to a control group of similar counties without prisons. Their study found little evidence of prisons fostering economic growth especially in persistently poor communities. Hooks et al. (2010), studying the effects of a new or existing prison on local employment, found that prisons have not played a significant role in economic growth in rural counties. The same study found that in areas experiencing relatively
low growth in higher educational attainment, prisons actually seem to be obstructing employment growth.

King, Mauer and Huling (2003) compared unemployment rates and per capita incomes for rural counties with and without adult prisons in New York State over 25 years, controlling for historical trends and county specific factors. Their model demonstrated no significant difference between the unemployment rates of rural counties that had built prisons since 1982 and those that have not (Figure 1.1). Further, this study found virtually no difference in per capita income of counties with prisons and those without (Figure 1.2).

**Figure 1.1: New York State Unemployment Rates**

![Unemployment Rates Graph](source)

*Source: King, Mauer & Huling (2003), p. 8*
One of the explanations that King et al. give for these trends is the hiring policy for correctional officers in New York State. The system depends on long waiting lists and seniority levels. New correctional officers cannot choose a facility and are instead assigned to one that does not have a pre-existing reassignment list. This usually means that new officers are assigned to a less desirable facility like Sing Sing downstate, where working conditions are extremely difficult and staff apply to transfer out as soon as possible. Correctional staff are transferred from one facility to another and there is a massive backlog for people who want to work in their local communities in rural upstate New York. Because of this system, many correctional officers do not live and spend money in the local community. According to King et al., “The job creation effect of a prison in a community is largely artificial in nature and amounts to an employment transplant” (King et al, 2003).

In a recent article for the Marshall Project, Meager and Thompson (2016) discuss a number of reasons why a prison siting is not a ticket to economic development. Consistent with the King et al. research, this article states that many prison employees are not hired from the host community.
community and do not spend their wages or pay taxes locally. Moreover, prisons often do not attract other types of businesses that could boost the reputation of the area. Hooks et al. (2010) discuss that big box stores like Walmart and fast food restaurants are often the only employers that follow prisons into communities. These employers bring low wage jobs and lead to the demise of small local businesses that cannot compete with these chains.

Additionally, local businesses are often not in a position to offer goods and services to prisons because they have to compete with large companies that are based elsewhere. Examining contracts for prison building and maintenance in New York State, King et al. found that much of the money for these jobs leaks out of the host counties. For instance, for the Upstate Maximum Security Correctional Facility that opened in Franklin County in 1999, the $21 million construction contract went to a firm in Syracuse, the $8.2 million heating and ventilation contract went to a firm in Albany, and the $2.1 plumbing contract also went to firm in Syracuse. No Franklin County firms won contracts in the competitive bidding process.

Given that prisons often have weak linkages to the host community to begin with, and sometimes have negligible or even negative impacts on rural economies, what can we expect when a local prison closes? This is a difficult question to answer since the trend of prison closures is relatively new and has not been studied extensively through an economic lens. There is often much news coverage when a closure is imminent, discussing the devastating economic impacts that a closure is expected to have. The big focus of these articles is often the number of jobs lost, without any nuanced analysis of who might be occupying those jobs. Moreover, these news articles rarely discuss opportunities that could emerge as a result of a closure.

Since academic literature on the impact of prison closures is sparse, it is helpful to consider changes in other industries to understand how a prison closure might impact the community around it. Military bases are particularly useful for comparison because of how similar they are to prisons in terms of local economic linkages (or lack thereof). Supplies for military bases are often not procured from local businesses. Military workers and retirees tend to be “unusual economic agents” since they do not spend a significant portion of their earnings at local businesses (Hooker and Knetter, 2001). Bases have commissaries and healthcare facilities on site that cater to their basic needs. And when military bases close, most military personnel are transferred to other locations, which also seems to be the case for corrections staff.
Studies have shown that base closures have not had the devastating impacts on local economies that were expected. While jobs are lost locally as a direct result of closures, most military personnel are transferred to a different base. Bradshaw (1999) studying a closure in Merced County, CA, found that employment remained stable because as military workers moved out of the county, and the jobs vacated by their spouses became available to people not previously in the labor force. Moreover, Hooker and Knetter’s study on the local impact of fifty-seven closed bases found no evidence of closures being associated with indirect job losses in the community. Instead, closures were associated with a creation of indirect jobs since retired military personnel actually began spending money in the community instead of at base commissaries and health facilities.

Hooker and Knetter argue that advocacy against base closures overlooks the opportunity cost of the resources that bases occupy. Closures could benefit communities if the land, buildings, and workers associated with bases are successfully transitioned to other, possibly more productive sectors. The experience of communities with base closures leads us to consider that prison closures may be associated with new economic opportunities. These opportunities could be realized through careful planning that considers the skills and needs of the people in these communities, and the potential of former prison sites to serve a different set of economic goals.
CHAPTER 2

Understanding Two Contexts: Fulton County, NY and Scotland County, NC

This chapter gives an overview of the locations and demographics of the counties where my two case studies are located: Fulton County, NY and Scotland County, NC. Both counties experienced a prison closure since the year 2000, and are in the process of redeveloping their former prison sites. The information in this chapter will provide context for later sections that explore the industrial histories of each place, the impact of the prison closure on the local economies, and the goals and constraints that are driving redevelopment in each place.
Figure 2.1: Case Study Locations

Relative Location of Sites

Former Tryon Residential Center (Fulton County, NY)

Former Wagram Prison (Scotland County, NC)
Table 2.1: Population and Density at a Glance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Fulton County, New York</th>
<th>Scotland County, North Carolina</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total population</td>
<td>53,992</td>
<td>35,509</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of households, 2011-2015</td>
<td>22,281</td>
<td>12,996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population/square mile, 2010</td>
<td>112.1</td>
<td>113.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land area in square miles, 2010</td>
<td>495.47</td>
<td>318.85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ACS 2015 five-year estimates, Decennial Census 2010

Fulton County, compared to Scotland County, has a larger population though both places have similar population densities. The two countries diverge on a number of important demographic characteristics that are highlighted below.

**Age**

Fulton County has a median age of 42.8 years and a higher proportion of people who are 45 years or older, compared to people in the U.S. and Scotland County. Scotland County has a younger population, with a median age of 39.1 years, which is closer to the national median age of 37.6 years.

**Figure 2.2: Age Distribution by Location**

Source: ACS 2015 five-year estimates
**Race**

Fulton County has a very high percentage (95.2%) of people who identify as “white alone”. In comparison, Scotland County has a much more racially diverse population. Forty six percent of the population identifies as “white alone”, and 38.5% identifies as “black or African American alone”. Also notable is the high percentage of people who identify as “American Indian” in Scotland County (10.4% in Scotland County, vs. 1.2% in North Carolina, and 0.8% in the U.S.).

*Figure 2.3: Race by Location*

Source: ACS 2015 five-year estimates

**Income**

Scotland County, NC is a much poorer community compared to Fulton County, NY. The median household income in Scotland County is $30,958 compared to $46,969 in Fulton County and $53,889 nationally. 16.9% of the households in Scotland County make less than $10,000 annually, and this is the income bracket with the highest proportion of households in the county (see Figure 2.4). In contrast the most common income bracket for households in Fulton County is $50,000 to $74,999. The persons in poverty rate for Scotland County is 29.0%, compared to 13.5% nationally, and 17.9% in Fulton County.
Figure 2.4: Distribution of Household Incomes

Source: ACS 2015 five-year estimates

Educational Attainment

Scotland County has a high percentage of people over the age of 25 who do not have a high school diploma or equivalent qualification (21.3%). Generally the population in Scotland County seems to be much less educated compared to Fulton County and the nation. Fulton County has a higher percentage of people with high school degrees compared to Scotland County, but a lower percentage of people with Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees compared to the nation (see Figure 2.5).

Figure 2.5: Educational Attainment for Population 25 Years and Over

Source: ACS 2015 five-year estimates
**Unemployment Rates**

The unemployment rate in both Scotland County, NC and Fulton County, NY has generally been higher than in the U.S. as a whole from 2000 to 2016 but this difference is much more exaggerated in Scotland County. The rate of unemployment in Scotland County peaked in 2011 when it was 18%. Since then the rate of unemployment has improved and is currently at 9.2%. Fulton County’s unemployment rate peaked in 2012 when it was 11%, and is currently at 5.7%.

![Figure 2.6: Unemployment Rates (2000 - 2016)](chart.png)

*Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics- CPS and LAUS (2016)*

**Summary**

This chapter provided an overview of the types of community level factors that stakeholders have to consider when thinking about a new redevelopment project or transitioning an existing workforce to a new industry. These factors will come up again in chapter 4 which discusses the motivations behind the two redevelopment projects in Fulton County and Scotland County. In general, stakeholders in Scotland County are planning for a population that is young, poor and racially diverse, with low educational attainment numbers. In contrast Fulton County is grappling with an older population, in an area where there is a high proportion of middle class white families. While high school attainment is high in Fulton County, only a small fraction of the population has advanced degrees, which is another consideration for economic development planning.
CHAPTER 3: Impact of Prison Closure on Rural Communities

This chapter provides background information about when and why prisons proliferated in New York and North Carolina. It also explores the significance of prison jobs in Scotland County and Fulton County compared to jobs in other industries. Finally, with the backdrop of historic and recent economic conditions in these two counties, it reflects on the likely impact of lost prison jobs in the two places and strategies for thinking about transitioning local workers and physical assets to serve different sets of economic goals that are not linked with mass incarceration.

3.1. Fulton County, NY

3.1.1 Prison Construction and Closure in New York State

In the early 1970s, fewer than 200,000 people were incarcerated in state and federal facilities nationwide. By the year 2000, this number rose to 1.5 million, with 7 million people under some kind of state supervision (probation, parole, prison, jail). New York state mirrored these national trends, and saw a huge boom in its prison population from the late 1970s to the early 2000s. By the end of the century, 73,000 were incarcerated in the state, compared to 14,000 in 1970. New York was one of the first states to impose harsh sentencing laws related to drug crimes, which had a huge impact on the size of the prison population.

New York was also one of the first states to boost the construction of prisons starting in the mid-1970s, trailing only Texas and Florida (Martin, Eason and Gonzales, 2016). Many new prisons were constructed in rural areas in clusters (Figure 3.1). The town of Malone (near the Canadian border), for instance, has three prisons, while another seventeen localities have two prisons each. These prisons also happen to be located in overwhelmingly conservative political districts. In 2003, ninety eight percent of the state’s prison population was housed in Republican Senate districts. The average prison in New York state housed about 900 people at an annual cost of $60,000 per person, and employed almost 400 people.
The demographics of the towns where these ‘new’ prisons were constructed are also interesting to note. Martin, Eason and Gonzales (2016) state that the type of town where prisons were sited began to shift in the 1980s. Compared to towns where prisons were built in the 1970s, towns where prisons were constructed in the 1980s and 1990s had significantly smaller populations and higher percentages of people of color. The towns that were chosen for prison construction in the 1980s and 1990s also showed greater signs of economic distress with higher levels of poverty and unemployment.

As in other parts of the country, the prison boom in New York state was followed by a bust. A combination of fiscal conservatism and advocacy around criminal justice reform seems to be driving expectations for a smaller system, with fewer people being incarcerated for nonviolent offenses. Sixteen adult prisons have been closed since 2009. Additionally, thirty juvenile facilities, including ‘placement’ and ‘detention’ facilities (youth equivalents of prisons and jails respectively), have been closed including the Tryon Residential Center in Fulton County.

According to Martin, Eason and Gonzales (2016), the decision-making around which prisons should be closed did not involve any public process or input from city officials. The decision was made by the Governor’s office, and while cost savings and efficiency were often cited as criteria, the final results seem to not necessarily match up with these factors. Older facilities built in the
nineteenth or early twentieth century (e.g. Attica, Auburn and Sing Sing) stayed open while some newer facilities were closed down. Prisons in remote locations that appear to be more expensive to run remained open. Martin, Eason and Gonzales (2016) observe that many (though not all) of the prisons that closed were in or close to urban centers. They also note that small towns with little political leverage were particularly vulnerable to closures. In the case of Tryon, a federal investigation on human rights violations within the facility was part of the decision-making around the closure, as will be discussed in the following sections.

3.1.2 The Troubling History of Tryon

The Tryon School for Boys\(^2\) is known to be the place where Mike Tyson first learned boxing. When the facility opened in 1966, it was a very different place than what it was in 2011 when it closed. There was initially no fence wrapping around the facility and the youth were allowed to leave to go to the movies or rollerskate in the community. The youth were treated more like residents than prisoners, but this culture was short lived. Tyron started to become a more punitive environment in the 1970s, when a former warden of Shawangunk prison took over as the deputy director of rehabilitative services:

> It didn’t take long before New York’s juvenile facilities began to feel not all that different from Attica or Sing Sing or Shawangunk. Boys in uniforms marching around. No more home visits. No more field trips. No more staff playing basketball with the kids. If a kid had to go off campus—for a doctor’s visit or to court—he had to wear shackles and handcuffs. Employees who had come to Tryon because they wanted to help kids suddenly found themselves cast in the role of prison guard (Gonnerman, 2010, p.3).

This was the reality of Tryon when Commissioner Gladys Carrión of the Office of Children and Family Services, charged with running facilities like this one, pushed for its closure. Kids who came to Tryon, some as young as 12, did not have access to a decent education; the school at the facility was not accredited. The U.S. Department of Justice had threatened to take over facilities for young people in New York state after investigating three facilities including Tryon and finding a number of instances where the constitutional rights of youth had been violated. Many kids had concussions and broken teeth and bones from being forcefully restrained by employees. In November 2006, fifteen year old Darryl Thompson lost his life while being pinned to the ground with extreme force by correctional staff. The death was ruled a homicide but no staff members were indicted.

\(^2\) The facility was, at first, only open to boys. It was later renamed the “Tryon Residential Center”. A girls wing was added in 1987.
Tryon’s closure seems to have been a perfect storm of social justice and fiscal factors. Besides being under pressure for a host of human rights violations, the Tryon facility was costing taxpayers $210,000 per youth per year. And investment in facilities like Tryon in New York State was not yielding much success in terms of keeping communities safe and rehabilitating young people. Eighty nine percent of the boys who were being incarcerated in New York State prisons were rearrested before they turned 28 years old. Instead of being the model for rehabilitation that it was designed to be initially, Tryon became part of a punitive system that trapped many young people in a lifelong struggle with criminal justice and incarceration.

3.1.3 Contextualizing Prison Jobs in Fulton County

To understand the impact of the Tryon’s closure on the local economy, it is important to consider the history of jobs in the region as well as the current local and regional industrial landscape.

Fulton County’s two ‘major’ cities are Johnstown and Gloversville. Though Tyron is technically located in the town of Perth, which is more rural, it has a Johnstown address. Fulton County until the 1970s was considered the ‘glove making capital of the world’, and produced 90% of men’s gloves sold in the United States. A website called Glovers and Tanners traces the fascinating history of the area:

Johnstown and Gloversville were not only the center of the glove industry, but these were the first places in the United States where gloves were manufactured.

The settlers had learned the crude process of tanning deer skin from their fathers and the Indians. The tanned skins were placed on basswood boards, and on them were traced the outlines of gloves, mittens and moccasins.

The skins were then cut around the outlines with sharp sheep shears, and sewed with a three edge needle and homespun hempen thread. Nearly every home became a miniature glove factory. Some of the people became peddlers and in sleighs and wagons carried their gloves to distant points. From such simple beginnings came the great glove industry of Gloversville and Johnstown. (Glovers and Tanners, n.d.)

Companies in Gloversville (which got its name from this industry) and Johnstown employed thousands of people in leather tanning and finishing, and glove manufacturing. Tanneries used abundant local hemlock to process leather for gloves that were shipped around the U.S. and abroad. The glove industry had an impact on many households in these cities. Traditionally the
men would cut gloves from leather in the factories and women would sew them by hand at home, though with the invention of the sewing machine, many women moved to work in factories. Many ancillary businesses developed around this industry. The Glove Theatre, a prominent performing arts venue that opened in 1904 in Gloversville, was named after the region’s biggest industry.

The decline of the glove industry came in the 1970s. According to Ron Peters, President and CEO of the Fulton County Center for Regional Growth, this decline was associated with the introduction of EPA regulations which required companies to treat wastewater and other industrial by-products. Many companies moved abroad to avoid the costs associated with these regulations and employ cheaper labor, leaving vacant factory space and environmental contamination in Johnstown and Gloversville. According to an article in the Times Union, the Cayadutta Creek, that winds through Johnstown and Gloversville “changed colors day to day based on the dyes dumped in the water; suds reaching heights of 10 feet floated on top of the creek, which was barren of fish and other aquatic life for decades” (Snyder, 2016). Since then the cities have worked hard on remediation; the Creek has been repopulated with fish but some parts of it are still contaminated with sediment.

Besides glove manufacturing, dairy farming which was an important sector locally also seems to be on shaky grounds. Between 2002 and 2007, the number of dairy farms in Fulton County decreased from 44 to 28. According to The Leader Herald, “costs, profit margins, dairy pricing and lack of interest in farming among younger generations” are some of the factors driving this shift (The Leader Herald, 2016). The demand for milk to make yogurt has increased in the area with the Chobani and FAGE plants which have opened up in recent years, but selling to these industries is not proving to be as profitable for small dairy farmers. Greg Fagan, the Supervisor of the Town of Perth who worked on his family’s dairy farm in Fulton County close to the Tryon site, shared:

Fulton County only has a handful of dairy farms left. On Route 20, which is the state route between Johnstown and Perth, there were eleven dairy farms in a 5 or 6 mile stretch when I was a kid. Now there are none. Over the past 20 to 30 years it’s really changed. You’re getting more dairy farming maybe in the western part of the county. But by us in the three towns—Perth, Broadalbin and Mayfield—I can only think of 4 or 5 dairy farms left.
Current Private Employment

BLS data from 2015\(^3\), show that Fulton County had an annual average employment of 16,998. These jobs were associated with 1,202 employers in the county. Figure 3.2 shows how employment has changed in Fulton County over time. The overall number of jobs in the county has declined since 2000; there was an especially steep decline right after the 2008 financial crisis and the economy has recovered slowly, but not fully since.

![Figure 3.2: Average Annual Employment- Fulton County, NY](image)


Table 3.1 shows the distribution of workers by industry in Fulton County\(^4\), as well as the location quotients indicating which industries are dominant in the region. Based on the location quotients and number of jobs, it seems that Fulton County is dominant in the following four sectors: manufacturing, retail trade, transportation and warehousing, and health care and social assistance. Data are not available for NAICS sector 11—Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting—because there are only ten employers in this category in Fulton County.

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\(^3\) Most recent year for which BLS data is available on the county level.

\(^4\) In the private sector, excluding NAICS sectors for which data was suppressed.
Table 3.1: Private Sector Employment by NAICS Sectors, Fulton County, New York (2015)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAICS Sector</th>
<th>Annual Establishments</th>
<th>Annual Average Employment</th>
<th>Annual Wages ($)</th>
<th>Annual Average Weekly Wage ($)</th>
<th>Annual Wages/Employee ($)</th>
<th>Annual Average Employment LQ^5</th>
<th>Annual Wages Location Quotient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>23 Construction</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>378</td>
<td>16,475,063</td>
<td>837</td>
<td>43,546</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>0.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-33 Manufacturing</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>1,785</td>
<td>72,093,052</td>
<td>777</td>
<td>40,396</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>1.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44-45 Retail trade</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>2,243</td>
<td>63,472,946</td>
<td>544</td>
<td>28,299</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>1.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48-49 Transportation &amp; warehousing</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1,445</td>
<td>58,259,966</td>
<td>775</td>
<td>40,314</td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td>2.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51 Information</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>316</td>
<td>19,673,540</td>
<td>1,197</td>
<td>62,242</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>0.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52 Finance &amp; insurance</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>292</td>
<td>17,156,963</td>
<td>1,129</td>
<td>58,723</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>0.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53 Real estate &amp; rental &amp; leasing</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>4,211,803</td>
<td>644</td>
<td>33,493</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54 Professional &amp; technical services</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>9,345,852</td>
<td>760</td>
<td>39,545</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55 Management of companies</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>9,907,393</td>
<td>951</td>
<td>49,455</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>0.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56 Administrative &amp; waste services</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>493</td>
<td>10,741,581</td>
<td>419</td>
<td>21,810</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>0.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61 Education</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>193,920</td>
<td>281</td>
<td>14,635</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>62 Health care &amp; social assistance</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>3,458</td>
<td>127,817,810</td>
<td>711</td>
<td>36,966</td>
<td>1.54</td>
<td>1.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>71 Arts, entertainment, &amp; recreation</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>1,124,537</td>
<td>282</td>
<td>14,652</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>0.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>72 Food &amp; Accommodations</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>1,108</td>
<td>16,822,597</td>
<td>292</td>
<td>15,184</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>81 Other services, except public administration</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>762</td>
<td>16,337,106</td>
<td>413</td>
<td>21,452</td>
<td>1.45</td>
<td>1.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>99 Unclassified</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>464,305</td>
<td>417</td>
<td>21,680</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>0.45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Figure 3.3 shows trends over time in the four industries that are important to Fulton County: manufacturing, retail trade, transportation and warehousing, and healthcare and social assistance. Of these four sectors, transportation and warehousing, and healthcare and social assistance have been on the rise. Retail trade appears to have declined slightly in the last fifteen years, and manufacturing has seen a significant decline since the year 2000.

---

^5 LQ= Location Quotient
Despite the overall decline in manufacturing, there are some positive recent developments within this industry that are worth noting. Drilling down to the three digit NAICS codes, it appears that food manufacturing is an important sector in Fulton County, employing about 423 people with a location quotient of 2.30. This data seems to be consistent with anecdotal information from county officials, who emphasize the importance of the following companies which have recently located to the county: FAGE USA Dairy’s yogurt manufacturing facility, Euphrates Inc.’s feta cheese plant, CG Roxane’s bottling and shipping facility (for Crystal Geyser® Alpine Spring water), and Pata Negra’s speciality sausage facility.

While manufacturing related to leather products does not dominate the economy in Fulton County as it used to in the past, there is still some concentration of leather and textile manufacturing, providing over six hundred jobs in the area (Table 3.2).
Table 3.2: Fulton County Leather and Textile Manufacturing Jobs in 2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAICS Sub-Sector</th>
<th>Annual Establishments</th>
<th>Annual Average Employment</th>
<th>Annual Wages ($)</th>
<th>Annual Average Weekly Wage ($)</th>
<th>Annual Wages/Employee ($)</th>
<th>Annual Average Employment LQ</th>
<th>Annual Wages Location Quotient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>313 Textile mills</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>3,045,858</td>
<td>546</td>
<td>28,378</td>
<td>7.52</td>
<td>6.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>314 Textile product mills</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>4,535,986</td>
<td>652</td>
<td>33,914</td>
<td>9.52</td>
<td>11.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>315 Apparel manufacturing</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>1,320,055</td>
<td>397</td>
<td>20,626</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>2.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>316 Leather and allied product manufacturing</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>333</td>
<td>13,572,796</td>
<td>783</td>
<td>40,708</td>
<td>94.81</td>
<td>123.67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


As noted above, health care and social assistance is also a dominant sector in Fulton County that has been growing in recent years, especially with regard to services for the elderly (Table 3.3).

Table 3.3: Fulton County Healthcare and Social Assistance Jobs in 2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAICS Sub-Sector</th>
<th>Annual Establishments</th>
<th>Annual Average Employment</th>
<th>Annual Wages ($)</th>
<th>Annual Average Weekly Wage ($)</th>
<th>Annual Wages/Employee ($)</th>
<th>Annual Average Employment LQ</th>
<th>Annual Wages Location Quotient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>621 Ambulatory health care services</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>911</td>
<td>35,342,597</td>
<td>746</td>
<td>38,778</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>623 Nursing and residential care facilities</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>1,035</td>
<td>28,758,541</td>
<td>534</td>
<td>27,782</td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>3.47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The large employment numbers in the transportation and warehousing sector in Fulton County include employment at Walmart’s Regional Return Center (which opened in 1995) and Northeast Regional Food Distribution Center (which opened in 2000). Walmart’s operations in Fulton County employ more than a thousand people.

State Government Employment
Table 3.4 highlights employment in state government in Fulton County. NAICS sector 92 includes employment in correctional institutions under the 6 digit code 922140. Data is not available for employment specifically in corrections for Fulton County since there is currently only one employer in that category.
### Table 3.4: Fulton County State Government Jobs by NAICS Sectors in 2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAICS Sector</th>
<th>Annual Establishments</th>
<th>Annual Average Employment</th>
<th>Annual Wages ($)</th>
<th>Annual Average Weekly Wage ($)</th>
<th>Annual Wages/Employee ($)</th>
<th>Annual Average Employment LQ</th>
<th>Annual Wages Location Quotient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>92 Public administration</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>355</td>
<td>23,976,707</td>
<td>1,300</td>
<td>67,619</td>
<td>1.63</td>
<td>2.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>922110 Courts</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>3,818,036</td>
<td>1,476</td>
<td>76,744</td>
<td>4.14</td>
<td>7.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>924110 Air, water, and waste program administration</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>2,881,223</td>
<td>901</td>
<td>46,849</td>
<td>12.14</td>
<td>11.95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


#### 3.1.4 Impact of Prison Closure on Fulton County’s Economy

Whenever a prison closes, the data point that gets the most attention in local media and among government officials is the number of jobs lost. In the case of Tryon, 325 jobs were lost when the facility closed in 2011, and this number was circulated widely in news stories about the closure. But putting this number in context, if Tryon was open today its jobs would constitute only 1.9% of the total employment in the county (if we assume that the number of jobs would have stayed the same). In terms of total jobs, this percentage does not seem very significant. It could, however, be considered significant in the context of local government jobs since currently there are only 355 jobs in public administration in the county.

But measuring the impact of a closure is, and should be, more nuanced than counting the total number of jobs lost. It is critical to understand who the workers were that filled these positions and what happened to them after the facility closed. From reading news articles and interviewing local economic development stakeholders, I was unable to get a clear answer on how many of the 325 employees at Tryon lived in the local community. I received conflicting information on this point, sometimes even within the same conversation. One local government stakeholder said that he knew at least twenty local people who worked at Tryon, but later also mentioned that he was aware of people driving an hour and a half to get to the facility to work. This implies that some percentage of workers lived outside Fulton County since the county itself is small geographically, but the magnitude of this issue was difficult for me to determine.

The question of where workers lived is important to unpack when looking to understand the impact of a prison closure because it can give a sense of what percentage of the payroll was spent in the local community and had multiplier effects that benefited other local industries. Many of my interviewees talked about Tryon employees spending money in Johnstown and
Gloversville on supplies like coffee and gas. But they were not certain about the magnitude of these sales and the impact that local businesses felt when the facility closed. Knowing where workers lived is also important to help estimate what percentage of employees contributed to the local government’s revenue through paying property taxes.

Economic development stakeholders in Fulton County hypothesize that a combination of these three things happened to the Tryon workers when the facility closed: some were laid off, some were transferred to other state correctional institutions, and the remaining employees likely retired early. If many of Tryon’s workers lived in Fulton County and were laid off, this would have bigger ripple effects on the economy than if most workers commuted to Tryon and were transferred elsewhere.

The facility’s procurement practices could be another area of investigation for understanding the impact of a closure. One interviewee mentioned that the local hardware store received business from Tryon because constructions crews for the site would buy supplies locally. In contrast, King et al. (2006) found that small retailers in rural counties often do not carry supplies needed for prison construction, and construction and maintenance labor contracts for prisons in New York state often go to large companies that are not based in the host community.

Future research should look to investigate, in greater depth, how procurement works at closing prisons and the various ways in which state money might be leaking to other communities besides the host. Further research should also include interviews with local business owners to understand the loss in revenue when a local prison closes. This information could help expose whether there is a difference between the real and perceived impacts of a prison closure, and the magnitude of this difference.

3.2 Scotland County, NC

3.2.1 Prison Construction and Closures in North Carolina

In 1931, the North Carolina General Assembly enacted the Conner Bill, which enabled the state to take over control of all prisons and inmates. The condition of prison facilities and the need for inmate labor for highway construction led the General Assembly to consolidate the State Highway Commission and the State Prison Department.
“Road camps” were constructed throughout the state to provide prison labor for building highways. Road camps were designed to house 100 inmates or less. These minimum-security camps were located throughout the state, primarily for the convenience of road building and repair.

This relationship between the State Highway Commission and the State Prison Department continued for more than 25 years until 1957 when the General Assembly finally voted to separate the two departments. As part of this change, the Council of State recommended consolidation of prison operations, resulting in the closures in Ashe, Beaufort, Brunswick, Chatham, Cherokee, Craven, Edgecombe, Hertford, Jackson, Macon, Perquimans, Pitt, Surry, Transylvania and Wilson counties. But many small prisons continued to operate. In 1992, North Carolina had 91 prisons that housed less than 110 inmates, much more than any other state (other states had an average of 24.5 such units).

In 1992 the Government Performance Audit Committee made a number of recommendations to cut costs. One of these recommendations was the closure of thirty small facilities, including the Wagram prison\(^6\) in Scotland County. At the time, NC had the largest number of prisons compared to all other states. Small facilities, such as the one in Scotland County, had high staffing levels and were much more expensive to run than larger facilities. According to the audit report, North Carolina had the eighth highest corrections staffing level in the nation and low prison efficiency as measured by inmates per correctional officer compared to states in the southeast. Based on this audit, it was decided that the Wagram facility in Scotland County be closed to save money. The process was completed in 2001 when the Wagram prison finally closed its doors.

Since then closures have continued, even as some large prisons have been constructed to reorganize the prison population in the state for efficiency. For instance, two years after the Wagram prison closed in Scotland County, the Scotland Correctional Institution opened less than ten miles from it, with a capacity of 1,756 beds (more than ten times the size of the old facility).

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\(^6\) I refer to the closed prison in Scotland County as the “Wagram prison” (it is in the town of Wagram). Its official name was the Scotland Correctional Center. I avoid calling it by its official name because less than ten miles away is a facility that opened up two years after this one closed, called the “Scotland Correctional Institution”. I use “Wagram prison” to avoid confusing the two.
In 2013, Governor Pat McCroy announced five more closures to save money, including one in Robeson County that neighbors Scotland County. All five prisons required expensive renovations and repairs, and are no longer needed, given that the state’s prison population has been shrinking. The N.C. Sentencing and Policy Advisory Commission attributes this decline in the prison population to 1) the decrease in population growth in the state (especially for males ages 16-24, the group most likely to be arrested), 2) continued nationwide declines in crime trends, and 3) policy changes like the state’s Justice Reinvestment Act (2011) that aim to reduce dependence on incarceration and reinvest in community based alternatives.

In general, the story of the last decade in NC corrections has been as much about consolidation and reorganization of facilities as decarceration. Efficiency and cost savings for the state seem to have important motivators in the total reduction of prison beds and the reorganization of the prison population in favor of fewer, larger facilities.

3.2.2 Contextualizing Prison Jobs in Scotland County

Downtown Laurinburg, less than ten miles from the Wagram prison site is the historic center of Scotland County. The downtown was first developed during the Civil War when railroad shops were relocated here from Wilmington, NC. Since a great deal of war action was centered around Fort Fisher on the coast, the shops were moved inland to Scotland County to be in a safer location. However, this relocation of shops by railroad officials was only meant to be temporary, feeding a constant sense of economic uncertainty for locals. According to a quote by a local, Mr. Maxey John, on the Scotland County official website, "During all these years the fear of disaster should the shops move, was so apparent that even those who were able to build largely and permanently refused to do so."

The railroad, which became operational in Laurinburg in 1861, continued to be an important asset to the community. It allowed hundreds of loads of watermelons and cantaloupes to be transported from Laurinburg and neighboring communities. In the early twentieth century, Laurinburg called itself “The Capital of the Cantaloupe World.”

The railroad shops that were central to the development of Laurinburg eventually left in 1984, but the void was filled by textile manufacturing. But manufacturing in Scotland County expanded beyond textiles especially in the 1960s when companies like Campbell Soup and Abbott Laboratories located operations there. Products like mobile homes, hospital equipment, cabinet accessories, golf club grips and transportation equipment were made in the county.
Employment in manufacturing peaked in 1996; at that point nearly half of all the jobs in the county were in this sector. Since then manufacturing jobs have been on a steep decline (Figure 3.4). Scotland County lost more than 5,400 jobs in manufacturing between 2001 and 2014. While the state lost manufacturing jobs as a whole during that time, the percentage loss in Scotland County was much higher (Figure 3.5). This loss is apparent as you drive around the county; many spaces previously occupied by manufacturing are now vacant.

**Figure 3.4: Manufacturing vs. Non-Manufacturing Jobs in Scotland County (1990-2012)**

![Chart showing manufacturing vs. non-manufacturing jobs in Scotland County from 1990 to 2012.](source)

**Figure 3.5: Manufacturing Job Losses (2001-2015)**

(Scotland County suffered deeper losses than NC or the U.S.)

![Chart showing manufacturing job losses in Scotland County, North Carolina, and the United States from 2001 to 2015.](source)
Current Private Employment

BLS data from 2015\(^7\), show that Scotland County had an annual average employment of 11,779. These jobs were associated with 636 employers in the county. Table 3.5 shows that the most dominant sectors in the economy, which provide significant employment, are manufacturing, retail trade, and healthcare and social assistance.

### Table 3.5: Private Sector Employment by NAICS Sectors, Scotland County, NC (2015)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAICS Sector</th>
<th>Annual Establishments</th>
<th>Annual Average Employment</th>
<th>Annual Wages ($)</th>
<th>Annual Average Weekly Wage ($)</th>
<th>Annual Wages/Employee ($)</th>
<th>Annual Average Employment Location Quotient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11 Agriculture, forestry, fishing &amp; hunting</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>$2,096,591</td>
<td>$550</td>
<td>$28,622</td>
<td>0.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23 Construction</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>344</td>
<td>13,481,228</td>
<td>755</td>
<td>39,247</td>
<td>0.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-33 Manufacturing</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>2,149</td>
<td>101,656,029</td>
<td>910</td>
<td>47,306</td>
<td>2.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44-45 Retail trade</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>1,635</td>
<td>35,370,777</td>
<td>416</td>
<td>21,628</td>
<td>1.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48-49 Transportation &amp; warehousing</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>321</td>
<td>14,870,322</td>
<td>892</td>
<td>46,365</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51 Information</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>3,301,017</td>
<td>1,005</td>
<td>52,259</td>
<td>0.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52 Finance &amp; insurance</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>10,569,665</td>
<td>888</td>
<td>46,156</td>
<td>0.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53 Real estate &amp; rental &amp; leasing</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>2,331,744</td>
<td>628</td>
<td>32,650</td>
<td>0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54 Professional &amp; technical services</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>4,899,524</td>
<td>822</td>
<td>42,728</td>
<td>0.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55 Management of companies &amp; enterprises</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>1,706,754</td>
<td>853</td>
<td>44,331</td>
<td>0.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56 Administrative &amp; waste services</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>664</td>
<td>16,749,525</td>
<td>485</td>
<td>25,244</td>
<td>0.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61 Educational services</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>259</td>
<td>8,148,189</td>
<td>605</td>
<td>31,470</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>62 Health care &amp; social assistance</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>2,030</td>
<td>85,461,233</td>
<td>810</td>
<td>42,099</td>
<td>1.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>71 Arts, entertainment, &amp; recreation</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>1,148,438</td>
<td>393</td>
<td>20,447</td>
<td>0.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>72 Accommodation &amp; food services</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>1,121</td>
<td>14,110,078</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>12,582</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>81 Other services, except public administration</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>3,264,785</td>
<td>420</td>
<td>21,838</td>
<td>0.41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


\(^7\) Most recent year for which BLS data is available on the county level.
Drilling down to three digit NAICS codes, we see that there is a high concentration of jobs in transportation and equipment manufacturing in Scotland County, with 893 employees and location quotient of 6.59 (Table 3.6). This subsector alone makes up more than 40% of the manufacturing jobs in Scotland County.

**Table 3.6: Scotland County NAICS Sector 33 (Manufacturing) in 2015**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAICS Sub-Sector</th>
<th>Annual Establishments</th>
<th>Annual Average Employment</th>
<th>Annual Wages ($)</th>
<th>Annual Average Weekly Wage ($)</th>
<th>Annual Wages/Employee ($)</th>
<th>Annual Average Employment LQ</th>
<th>Annual Wages Location Quotient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>332 Fabricated metal product manufacturing</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>7,302,874</td>
<td>1,219</td>
<td>63,366</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>1.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>336 Transportation equipment manufacturing</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>893</td>
<td>43,262,658</td>
<td>931</td>
<td>48,433</td>
<td>6.59</td>
<td>6.68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


A large number of people are also employed in retail; a significant percentage of those people work in stores related to construction and home furnishing (Table 3.7).

**Table 3.7: Scotland County Retail Subsectors in 2015**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAICS Sub-Sector</th>
<th>Annual Establishments</th>
<th>Annual Average Employment</th>
<th>Annual Wages ($)</th>
<th>Annual Average Weekly Wage ($)</th>
<th>Annual Wages/Employee ($)</th>
<th>Annual Average Employment LQ</th>
<th>Annual Wages Location Quotient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>442 Furniture &amp; home furnishings stores</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>258</td>
<td>5,892,328</td>
<td>439</td>
<td>22,831</td>
<td>6.54</td>
<td>6.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>444 Building material &amp; garden supply stores</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>4,377,077</td>
<td>466</td>
<td>24,216</td>
<td>1.73</td>
<td>1.95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Healthcare and social assistance is also a dominant sector, with 76 employers falling within this category in the county (Table 3.8).
### Table 3.8: Scotland County Healthcare and Social Assistance Jobs in 2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAICS Sector</th>
<th>Annual Establishments</th>
<th>Annual Average Employment</th>
<th>Annual Wages ($)</th>
<th>Annual Average Weekly Wage ($)</th>
<th>Annual Wages/Employee ($)</th>
<th>Annual Average Employment LQ</th>
<th>Annual Wages Location Quotient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>621 Ambulatory health care services</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>583</td>
<td>34,637,348</td>
<td>1,142</td>
<td>59,370</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>1.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>623 Nursing and residential care facility</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>393</td>
<td>9,421,257</td>
<td>462</td>
<td>24,003</td>
<td>1.42</td>
<td>1.73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Unfortunately it is not possible to obtain Bureau of Labor Statistics data on state government employment for Scotland County as it was for Fulton County. Data are suppressed for this category since there are only ten employers that fall within NAICS sector 92 in Scotland County, which includes jobs in public administration.

### 3.2.3 One Closes, Another Opens: Impact of Prisons on Scotland County’s Economy

When the Wagram facility closed in 2001, locals estimate that there were only 50 or 60 jobs that were lost. According to Director Bill Stovall at the Department of Public Safety in North Carolina (which handles state corrections), those who worked at the facility were offered jobs at a different facility within ‘reasonable commuting distance’, which is loosely defined as no more than sixty miles away.

Some correctional officers who lost their jobs at the Wagram prison were offered jobs at the Scotland Correctional Institution (SCI), which opened in 2003, just a few miles away from the old Wagram prison. It has capacity for over 1,700 beds, and employs close to five hundred people. In this case, even though there was some lag time between the old facility closing and the new one opening, there was a large net gain in correctional jobs in the county since this prison employed ten times as many people. According to Director Stovall:

> Our last three governors emphasized that these new facilities be sited in counties that were economically depressed recognizing that a lot of our manufacturing jobs and base had left the state, and here was an opportunity to bring in near recession proof jobs with decent benefits to very poor areas of our state.
In this recent round of constructing large prisons, North Carolina’s siting strategy was to go where local counties invited the state in, as opposed to siting prisons based on convenience for road construction and repair (which was the case in the 1930s). The state built these prisons in communities like Scotland County, where the county provided the land and necessary utilities free of cost in exchange for what are described as “recession proof jobs.”

The 505 jobs currently at SCI constitute about 4.3% of the total employment in the county. But only 138 of these 505 jobs (27%) are held by Scotland County locals. According to county leaders, SCI does not have a preference for local hiring. One county official remarked that all kinds of professionals are needed to run prisons beyond correctional officers, including electricians, plumbers, doctors, nurses etc. However, there is a sense locally that when a new prison opens, many staff are hired from other facilities and from within other parts of the system, and that superintendents "bring in their staff...like the president." Director Stovall remarked that it can be difficult to find local candidates to fill positions that require more specialization and education. However, based on the current number of local employees, it seems that even correctional officers—and not just highly educated professionals (e.g. doctors)—are being hired from outside the county (since those are the majority of jobs in a prison, likely more than the 138 local hires).

**Summary**

In many rural communities in the U.S. where manufacturing jobs were on the decline, prisons were seen as a way to save the economy and plug the vacuum. In the case of both Fulton County and Scotland County, however, the presence of a prison was not enough to mitigate the decline of the economy overall. While prisons certainly provide some jobs, they constituted a small portion of the total number of local jobs in both cases. The Tryon facility in Fulton County, if open today, would have only provided 1.9% of the jobs in the county. In Scotland County, the small Wagram prison from the 1930s would have provided 0.5% of the local jobs and the newer Scotland Correctional Institution currently provides 4.3% of jobs in the county.

The presence of these positions is even less significant for the local economy if county residents do not fill them. In both places, there is evidence to suggest that locals did not fill many of the jobs at the facilities. The extent of this problem was difficult to ascertain in Fulton County, but in the new newer facility in Scotland County we know that only 27% of the 505 facility jobs are
filled by locals. This means that a significant portion of the salaries made by corrections staff are spent outside the host community, with limited multiplier effects for the local economy.

Through this study I was unable to explore, in depth, the current procurement practices for facilities in New York and North Carolina. Other literature suggests that in order to cut costs, prisons often contract with large companies for goods and services that are not based in the host communities. This is another possible way in which wealth associated with prisons may be seeping out of the host county, and not delivering the results that are often promised during a prison siting negotiation.

Both Fulton County and Scotland County have been struggling with the loss of jobs in the last few decades, particularly in manufacturing, which has been an important sector in these localities. When Tryon closed in Fulton County in 2011, the county was already experiencing a downward employment trend (Figure 3.2). In Scotland County, the opening of the Scotland Correctional Institute barely made a dent in the unemployment rate over the long term (Figure 2.8). It is time we reconsidered prison building as a viable economic development strategy and think about long term, sustainable solutions for stabilizing economies that have been rattled by deindustrialization in the last few decades.
CHAPTER 4: Prison Redevelopment

This chapter explores two case studies—in Fulton County, NY and Scotland County, NC—where former prison sites are being reused to serve different goals for community and economic development. It discusses the perspectives of the lead redevelopment agencies as well as other project supporters and stakeholders. It also sheds light on the political, financial, logistical and design constraints that are shaping redevelopment in each case. And finally, this chapter discusses the challenges with prison adaptive reuse and ideas that could facilitate these transformations more quickly and efficiently on other sites in the future.

4.1 Tryon Technology Park, NY

The following section describes the process by which the Tryon Residential Center—a youth placement center in Fulton County, NY—was converted into a technology park with ‘shovel ready sites’ available for sale to private companies. The project was spearheaded by the Fulton County Industrial Development Agency (IDA). The IDA worked with the state government to get site control and financing for infrastructure improvements, and is currently in the process of recruiting companies for the technology park.

Figure 4.1: Former Tryon Residential Center, Now Home to Tryon Technology Park

Date of Prison Closure: 2011
Date Redevelopment Began: 2011
Total Size: 515 acres
Number of Buildings Originally: 55
Site History

In 2009, the Department of Justice found that the constitutional rights of youth at Tryon and three other juvenile justice facilities were being violated. According to the investigation:

Staff at the facilities consistently and excessively used a disproportionate degree of force to gain control of youths in nearly every type of situation, leading to concussions, broken or knocked out teeth, spiral fractures, and other injuries. Further, staff at the facilities overused restraints often causing severe injury to youths, including initiating facedown restraints through "hooking and tripping," a process where staff grab a youth’s arms and trip his or her feet from underneath, causing the youth to fall face-first on the ground. Additionally, the facilities consistently failed to investigate uses of force and failed to properly discipline staff found to have used excessive force. (Department of Justice, 2010)

In addition to this extreme and unconstitutional use of force, the investigation found that the facilities failed to provide adequate support for addiction and mental health issues. Psychotropic medications were being prescribed to youth without appropriate monitoring for dangerous side effects.

The then reform-minded Commissioner of the Office of Children and Family Services, Gladys Carrión, responded by closing Tryon and a number of other juvenile justice facilities in New York State. Commissioner Carrión had been deeply disturbed by the conditions in facilities like Tryon, and believed that a radical transformation of the juvenile justice system was necessary. She was reported to say, “I am not running the Economic Development Agency for upstate New York… I will no longer export black and brown kids to finance the upstate economy” (Dwoskin, 2010).

State law required that a one year notice be given to employees before the closure of a facility like Tryon. Despite this buffer, local economic development stakeholders seemed to have been blindsided by the decision to close the prison. The decision was especially shocking because major capital improvements were being made on the site as the closure was being implemented. A two million dollar renovation was made to the school building’s air conditioning system right before Tryon closed. It seems that there was little public participation involved in the decision to close the facility and the buildings were left without much consideration for their immediate or long-term future.
**Gaining Site Control for Redevelopment**

After closure of the prison, Fulton County quickly decided to capitalize on this opportunity and replicate a model at Tryon that had been successful on other large vacant sites in the county. Because the county had been heavily reliant on the leather and glove industries in the early twentieth century, the decline of these industries left the economy extremely vulnerable. To prevent history from repeating itself, local economic development stakeholders made a commitment to diversifying the economy, and this led to the development of two industrial parks—Crossroads Industrial Park in the late 1980s (55 acres) and Johnstown Industrial Park (300 acres) in the early 1990s. The inventory of small and large sites in these two parks led Fulton County to attract companies like Walmart, Benjamin Moore Paints, FAGE (yogurt manufacturing) and Euphrates (feta cheese manufacturing). But by 2011, when Tryon closed, the county was running out of its inventory of ‘shovel ready sites’\(^8\) for new companies. Tryon’s closure presented an opportunity to attract new companies to the county and further diversify the local economy.

In August 2011, only three months after the closure, Fulton County submitted a proposal requesting that the state deed the property over to the Fulton County Industrial Development Agency (IDA). The IDA is a public benefit corporation that was created in 1970 and is closely affiliated with the Fulton County Planning Department. The IDA has a board of seven members who are appointed by the County Board of Supervisors. The current Executive Director of the IDA, Jim Mraz, is also the Director of the Fulton County Planning Department. The request for transfer of the site to the IDA was strategic. Because of local laws, if the property was transferred either to the town or the county, any land that was sold within the site would have to go through a public auction and be sold to the highest bidder. The transfer to the IDA allowed the county to court specific companies for the site, and not worry about those companies being outbid by other potential buyers. The county wanted redevelopment on the site to be controlled, intentional and focused towards a cohesive vision. Based on the location of the site, its proximity to other manufacturing and technology centers in Syracuse and Utica, and Fulton County’s successful track record with industrial parks, Fulton County Government and the IDA jointly decided to repurpose the Tryon site into a technology park.

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\(^8\) These sites are connected to important utilities like water, gas, sewer and electricity, and are appropriately zoned for development.
Site transfer turned out to be a complicated and lengthy process, taking almost three years. The site was owned by the New York State Office of General Services, and operated by The Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS). Because of state laws, the Office of General Services could not sell public property to private companies, which was the premise of Fulton County IDA’s plan. So the property had to first be transferred to Empire State Development, which is New York state’s economic development agency, and is able to make transactions with private companies. This transfer was a time consuming process. Additionally, a great deal of time was spent trying to track down accurate information about the existing underground infrastructure on the site. For instance, the site previously had underground fuel tanks that had been removed but the formal documentation around this was difficult to find. Detailed official records that had been kept by those who had worked on the water, sewer and electric systems were not made available to the IDA when the property was transferred.

After a lengthy process, the property was finally transferred to the IDA in January of 2014 at no cost. The IDA gained control of 515 acres of land as well as fifty-five existing buildings of various sizes and configurations on the site.

Redevelopment Status

Fulton County, in partnership with the IDA, has been working to develop ‘shovel ready’ sites on the Tryon campus for sale to private corporations looking to move their operations to the area. ‘Shovel ready’ means that there are no significant barriers to pursuing a development project on the site. This includes documenting and addressing environmental issues, amending zoning to facilitate the desired development, and ensuring that the site is connected to water and sewer services, electricity and gas.

The redevelopment work on the site so far has happened in two phases. The guiding vision in Phase 1 was to functionally and cosmetically transform the site from a prison into a technology park. CT Male Associates, a local engineering and development firm was hired for the project. The firm began its work by surveying the site conditions and making an inventory of all its assets and challenges. Some existing water and sewer lines were updated and new lines were put in as necessary. Parts of the sixteen foot fence that was most visible driving up to the site was taken down to create a more inviting experience for a potential buyer. Four buildings were demolished to make way for a new loop road to provide direct access to the shovel ready sites. This internal access road has been designated County Road 117 and has been deeded over by
the IDA to Fulton County (see Figure 4.2). The County also re-paved County Road 107 leading up to the site. Much of the work for phase 1 was financed by a $2 million grant that the county received from Empire State Development. This money required a $1.1 million local match, which the county provided in the form of repaving Road 107. This was a project that needed to be completed anyway, and did not create an added or unexpected burden on local resources.

![Figure 4.2: Completed Loop Road on Tryon Site](https://example.com/image)

Photo by Jim Mraz.

Phase 2 involved additional work on the water and sewer system on the site. When Tryon opened in 1966, it was serviced by groundwater wells and an onsite wastewater collection and treatment system. In 1990 NYS Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS)'s Hale Creek Alcohol and Substance Abuse Correctional Facility opened up next to Tryon and was connected to municipal water and sewer infrastructure from the City of Gloversville. This infrastructure was extended to Tryon around this time. Unfortunately during Phase 1 of the Tryon Technology Park project, DOCCS notified Fulton County that it wanted to disconnect the municipal water and sewer system running from Hale Creek to Tryon. Thus a Phase 2 was necessitated, and included the installation of a new elevated tank and water pump station at Tryon. Larger wastewater pumps were also installed at Tryon. Phase 2 was completed in 2016 and cost approximately $2.1 million. $175,000 of this cost was covered by another grant from Empire State Development.
Alongside the infrastructure improvements, stakeholders from the town of Perth and Fulton County worked together on zoning and planning issues. Fulton County hired DCG Corplan, a firm based in New Jersey, to conduct a market analysis for the types of industries that could benefit from a site like this one. DCG Corplan’s analysis identified seven types of industries that would be well suited for the Tryon site:

1. Biomedical Research and Development
2. Food and Beverage
3. HQ and Business Services
4. Health Care Products and Services
5. Electronics
6. Renewable Energy
7. Software and Media

The Fulton County Center for Regional Growth has been working with Jim Mraz of the IDA to advertise the site to the types of companies identified in the market analysis. Ron Peters, President/CEO of the Fulton County Center for Regional Growth, has been promoting the site at trade shows and with site selectors. In 2013, the Town of Perth revised its comprehensive plan highlighting Tryon Technology Park as a significant priority to help stimulate local economic development. The zoning ordinance in the Town of Perth was also amended to incorporate a Business and Technology Zone (BTZ) to facilitate a variety of uses on the Tryon site including research and development, light industrial operations, assembly and manufacturing, medical facilities and educational facilities.

So far Tryon has one occupant, Vireo Health of NY, LLC, a pharmaceutical company that owns roughly 20 acres of the property and employs thirty people currently. Vireo Health of NY manufactures medicines from medical cannabis. Its parent company, Vireo Health, is based in Minnesota. It was one of five companies granted licenses by New York State to manufacture medicines from cannabis in the State. Tryon was also considered as a potential location for Fulton Montgomery Community College to run a trades program but that opportunity has not materialized. Tryon is also currently being considered as a potential site for a solar array.
Figure 4.3: Entrance to the Tryon Technology Park

Photo by Jim Mraz.
Perspectives of Key Stakeholders

Figure 4.3: Former Administrative Building, Now Occupied by Vireo Health of NY

Photo by Jim Mraz.

Vireo Health

Vireo Health, a medical marijuana company, is the first company to purchase property in the Tryon Technology Park. Vireo Health is one of five companies in the state of New York that has a medical marijuana license, giving it a significant monopoly in a highly lucrative field. Vireo’s operations on the Tryon site include cultivation, manufacturing and packaging of medical cannabis products, as well as all of the company's research operations. The company owns 20 acres (of the 515 total). Its operations began in a 21,000 sq ft repurposed building (see Figure 4.3) that was previously an administrative building for the juvenile facility. Josh O’Neil, the Chief Business Development Officer of Vireo Health clearly remembers his first impression of this building:

When I first went into what is our beautiful state of the art lab, it consisted of a number of prison cells, with a lot of really interesting writing on the wall. There was a wood platform bed, a wood desk and a bookshelf in every one of them (see Figure 4.4). What was a pretty troubling place is now a lab that manufactures and packages medical cannabis for some pretty sick people in the state of New York, so it’s a pretty cool reuse.
In addition to the reused lab building, Vireo Health also built a 20,000 sq ft greenhouse. They have recently gone through the entitlements process for a second greenhouse that will be connected to the first. Currently Vireo Health employs around 30 full and part time employees with a range of skills.

We have everything from part time security guards who have high school degrees all the way to PhDs who work in our lab. Our head scientist is also an attorney who has a masters degree from University of Pennsylvania in neuroscience. Our head cultivator has a Master’s degree. And we’ve got everything in between. We have a number of retired law enforcement officers and retired veterans that work in our security team. We’ve got some people with vocational degrees like our lab techs and people who work with packaging. So it’s really diverse and it works because everyone has their roles and ultimately it’s a team.

A number of factors led Tryon to be ideally suited for a company like Vireo Health:

- **Location**
  The site’s proximity to I-87 and I-90 provides access to major population centers in the state. Many of the consumers of Vireo Health’s products are easily within reach.
• Government Support
  ○ *Infrastructure Investments:* Vireo Health was drawn to the fact that the IDA had made significant investments in the site. Since Tryon already had access to electricity, water, sewer, and gas, the company was able to purchase a site that was ideal for its needs at a fraction of the cost of what it would have been anywhere else in the state. In particular, the site is connected to a reliable supply of electricity for high consumption uses, like cannabis cultivation.
  ○ *Political Support:* Since marijuana is still an illegal substance at the federal level, companies like Vireo Health often face a great deal of skepticism from local governments when trying to move operations to a new place. The company was reassured by the welcoming and supportive attitude of the IDA. According to Josh O’Neil, “The reality is that there is still stigma around cannabis and you have to work through it. The fact that that barrier didn’t exist for this property was a big deal for us. Fulton County IDA understood the nature of our business, and that we are a physician led organization.”

• Reuse Potential
  While Vireo Health was initially planning to demolish the buildings on its property and build from scratch, the company quickly realized that it could save money through adaptive reuse. One of the old administrative buildings that Vireo purchased had a good foundation and structure that could be adapted for a lab space. This renovation was much cheaper than demolition and new construction.

Fulton County is hoping to attract other companies like Vireo Health that are looking for shovel ready sites, are not bothered by the site being tucked away (or even benefit from its insular design), and can capitalize on the location of Tryon.

*Economic Development and Planning Leadership*

For economic development stakeholders in Fulton County, Tryon represents an exciting opportunity to boost the local economy, attract new people to the area, and retain the existing population. Fulton County has a stable but aging population and is yearning to attract jobs that will help keep young people in the community. Ron Cetnar, Chairman of the Town Planning Board who has lived in Perth all his life sees this as an important priority:
There’s no industry here now. There is nothing here to hold our youth. Our youth finish high school, and since there’s no industry here, they go to college elsewhere and move out. We’re trying to develop something to keep our youth here. In 1970 the Town of Perth had forty-two active dairy farms; it felt like a real community. Now we only have three and a lot of vacant land.

Greg Fagan, the Supervisor of the Town of Perth has similar thoughts about creating jobs that can help retain young people in the local community.

We are an aging community and that’s one of the main reasons we want something like Tryon to create jobs that can help keep our kids here. We have a lot of folks who grow up, get their degrees and move elsewhere because there isn’t much they can do here. Some of them move back once they start having kids because they realize this is a nice place to raise kids as opposed to larger cities. I have one son in Connecticut who has a good job there. I wish I could get him to move back. That’s one of our biggest motivations: trying to attract some businesses and industries that can employ some of our young people with good degrees.

If a project like the Tryon Technology Park is successful, it can also generate more revenue for the Town of Perth through property taxes. According to Greg Fagan:

The town board tries to keep a handle on taxes, which gets to be a bigger challenge every year. We are very supportive of Tryon because ever since the property was bought by the state in the 1960s, there’s been no tax revenues from that. If it goes from being non-taxable to taxable as a business property, which have some of the highest assessed land values, it’s going to be a big help to the town and the school district.

Having a company like Vireo Health locally will also help the local government collect excise taxes. Every time the $1.5 million business sells a cannabis product, the state collects 7% in excise taxes. 22.5% of this amount goes to the county where the product is produced, and 22.5% goes to the county where the product is dispensed. This could create a significant new stream of revenue for Fulton County. Ron Cetnar is hoping that the funds generated through property and excise taxes could help finance projects that the town has been hoping to do for a while. For instance, the Planning Board is interested in developing a new town center with a farmers market, a park and community center to bring people together.
**Challenges to Redevelopment**

While the IDA has been very successful in achieving some of its short-term goals, it continues to grapple with the following:

- One of the buildings that has not been demolished is a 75,000 sq ft facility that served as the educational and recreational center for the former Tryon Facility. This building contains offices, classrooms, a cafeteria, Olympic size pool, gymnasium and a 255-seat auditorium. The IDA would like to see this building repurposed. However, the facility and its HVAC, electrical, and plumbing systems have been shut off and unused for six years. It was too expensive to run these systems without an active user (an estimated cost of $5,000 to $10,000 a month). Putting this building back into use will be a challenge since it has suffered moisture damage and other decay from being unused.

- Because the buildings on site were built to be part of a prison, they are extremely sturdy. This can be both an asset and a challenge. Some of the buildings that are larger and have fewer partitions on the inside can be adapted for other uses. New users can benefit from the strong foundation and structures of these buildings. Vireo Health, for instance, was able to use this to its advantage. However, some of the former residential buildings are small and very subdivided on the inside (into small cells) and are less likely to be adapted for other uses and will need to be demolished eventually (Figure 4.5). Jim Mraz noted that typical concrete floors are 5-6 inches deep. The building that was bought by Vireo Health has concrete floors that are significantly thicker—almost 18 inches deep. Demolishing such buildings can be very time and resource intensive, and has been a slow process on the Tryon site.
So far the process of attracting new users to the site has been slow. There was some interest from the local community college to lease space but that possibility did not pan out. Currently the IDA is working with a private company to explore the potential for solar farming on the site. Jim Mraz noted that filling the other two industrial parks in Fulton County took almost twenty years. He is also aware that because the site has a lot of vacant land around it, it needs certain kinds of users who are not phased by, and could even benefit from, its isolation. Finding companies that are the right fit for this site will take time.
4.2 GrowingChange, NC

The following section describes how a local non-profit, GrowingChange, came to identify the vacant prison site in Scotland County as a potential redevelopment opportunity. This section is structured a little differently than the previous one since much of GrowingChange’s efforts so far have been focused on developing its program and gaining site control. Just this March (in 2017), GrowingChange was given permission to use the site for 2 years and 11 months by the North Carolina Department of Public Safety, the state agency that owns the site. While GrowingChange has been strategizing around using this site for a while, it has only just begun its redevelopment activities.

**Figure 4.6: Former Scotland Correctional Center, Now Home to GrowingChange**

*Date of Prison Closure: 2001  
Date Redevelopment Began: 2011  
Total Size: 67 acres  
Number of Buildings Originally: 10*
Planning for Redevelopment

In 2011, Noran Sanford, a social worker who was born and raised in Scotland County developed a clinical pilot program for young people who were struggling with the justice system and were at high risk of entering the adult incarceration system. North Carolina is the only state in the country where the age of juvenile jurisdiction is as low as 15. This means that for 16 year olds who are arrested, the consequences in North Carolina are particularly severe. Their cases are automatically processed within the adult criminal justice system (compared to the juvenile justice system) and become a permanent part of their criminal records. Noticing that many youth in the poor rural community of Scotland County who were getting in trouble with the law severely lacked adequate support systems and services, Noran decided to try a new approach.

Noran’s five-year clinical pilot program, funded by the region’s Juvenile Crime Prevention Council, combined cognitive behavioral therapy, professional development and service learning around work in sustainable agriculture. Noran’s group, that started with four young men and grew to twelve over the course of the program, worked together in a community garden learning principles of sustainable agriculture and growing food for needy families and organizations like
the Domestic Violence and Rape Crisis Center. This clinical pilot program was extremely successful in supporting young people who were in a downward spiral. 92% of the youth were prevented from entering the adult correctional system, a significant number for a population with difficult needs.

The humble program, that started at the community garden, received an enormous boost when Noran discovered the Cooperative Extension office in Laurinburg, that provides agriculture related programming, and research and technical support through the two land grant universities in North Carolina: NC State and NC Agriculture and Technical State University. Noran’s relationship with Cooperative Extension unlocked a new world of possibilities for the young people in the pilot program. For instance, Cooperative Extension’s Community Youth and Families at Risk (CYFAR) program funded all the youth to go to horticulture camp at NC State University and learn about crops, horticulture, and soil science from a Cooperative Extension Associate, Liz Driscoll.

Through Cooperative Extension and Liz Driscoll, Noran and his team were introduced to Tessa Thraves, a folklorist by training who was leading the Food Youth Initiative (FYI). FYI aimed at bringing together groups of young people who were involved in food systems work, and beginning to develop an understanding of the needs in their communities. Noran’s group was one of seven who participated in FYI trainings, that exposed young people to different kinds of storytelling media like photography, spoken word, video, audio, music, poetry and comic books. These regular meetings also enabled youth from different kinds of communities around North Carolina to learn about each other’s personal and historical narratives. While this wasn’t exactly what Noran had planned for his clinical pilot he quickly saw the natural alignments between Tessa’ work and his own, both aimed at elevating young people to be leaders and change makers in their own communities.

As a folklorist, I did a lot of teaching about oral history as a political tool. But through this project it came out really quickly as a need. It was a way to allow young people to tell their stories to be advocates for themselves and for youth at large. We were working with mostly youth of color who were facing a lot of struggle. We were constantly bringing it back to what this has to do with justice and how is this important, and also ensuring that the experience was not retraumatizing for individuals. (Tessa Thraves)

While the program at the community garden continued, Noran and the youth group began to scope out the abandoned prison site in Wagram that is under the ownership of the Department of Public Safety. At first the idea of reclaiming this prison for community use seemed totally
impractical and whimsical to most of the youth leaders. According to Terrance Smith, one of the youth leaders, “when Noran introduced us to it didn’t really strike us as exciting. We went out to the site and thought wow, that’s just a prison. But when we started going places and talking to people about it, that’s when it got real.” Noran initially worked with local law enforcement to get permission to do walk throughs of the site. When the idea started to become more concrete, the team approached the Department of Public Safety to develop a reclamation plan for the site. After a year of persistence and negotiation, the team was granted access to develop plans for the site and build a coalition of partners. At this point the idea of moving farming and entrepreneurship programs on site started to become a real possibility, and the non-profit “GrowingChange” was born to push this agenda.

Figure 4.8: The Grounds at the Former Wagram Prison
In 2016, the last year of the clinical pilot program, GrowingChange worked with Professor Celen Pasalar and her landscape architecture class at North Carolina State University to develop a design plan for the site. The connection to Professor Pasalar was facilitated through her work with Cooperative Extension. Professor Pasalar's team focused on making the design process as participatory as possible. The team held a community design workshop that was attended by over sixty people including representatives from over ten municipalities, community leaders, elected officials, neighbors of the site and the youth leadership team. GrowingChange had done some groundwork leading up to this meeting to ensure that Scotland County's racial and generational mix was reflected at the meeting. Through this process, the design team from NC State figured out how the goals of GrowingChange and the broader community could manifest physically on the site. The following ideals emerged to be the key components around which the design plan was structured: recreation, connection, education, transformation, and production. Proposals for the site include repurposing the guard tower to be a climbing wall, the hotbox to be a sound design studio, and the prison grounds to be a sustainable farm. This design plan won an American Society of Landscape Architecture award in December 2016.

**Current Implementation Status**

GrowingChange, supported by a number of key local institutional and government stakeholders, is beginning to implement its vision on site. This March, GrowingChange was granted a 2 year and 11 month temporary use agreement by the North Carolina Department of Public Safety that owns the site. GrowingChange recently installed temporary power on the site to allow for redevelopment to begin on one of the buildings so that it can be converted into an office for the organization and a residence for a farm manage. GrowingChange envisions that the site will be reclaimed in phases over the course of many years and the ideas around programming and uses on site will continue to evolve with the involvement of new partners. According to Noran, “We don’t want the site to be finished; we always want it to have an aspirational drive”
Perspectives of Key Stakeholders

GrowingChange

Initially GrowingChange was created to provide educational and economic opportunities to underserved young people in Scotland County. The youth leadership team that developed over the last five years has remained an important constituent in the redevelopment of the site. Recently, veterans affiliated with Fort Bragg, the largest military base in the country, located only 40 miles away have also become involved with redevelopment. Retiring veterans are often looking for second careers that allow them some flexibility and autonomy. Noran noticed that many of them are moving to Hoke County, that neighbors Scotland County, and buying small plots of land for farming. While land is becoming more scarce and expensive in Hoke County, Scotland County has an abundance of inexpensive and good quality small plots. GrowingChange will continue to serve young people but the organization is pivoting to include military veterans as one of the other key populations that it serves.

GrowingChange plans to provide training in agriculture and entrepreneurship to youth and veterans that would allow them to be self-sufficient and earn a living off of small plots of land. Additionally since many veterans are also training to be mental health clinicians at UC Greensboro close by, GrowingChange hopes to provide internship opportunities for them that allow them to practice their skills through working with youth who are part of the GrowingChange network. GrowingChange envisions that working side-by-side, strong intergenerational and mutually beneficial relationships will form between youth and veterans. Lastly, another important goal for GrowingChange that is achieved through repurposing this site, and others like it, is that fewer sites are then available to become for-profit immigration detention centers, a use that the legislature was considering for decommissioned sites in North Carolina.
last year. Noran and his team are passionate about preventing sites like these from slipping into punitive uses again.

**Justice System Stakeholders**

Mitchell McIver, a Juvenile Court Counselor in Scotland County, is one of the board members of GrowingChange. As a Court Counselor in Scotland County, which has the highest crime rate in the state, Mitchell works with youth who are facing a host of difficult situations at school, in their homes, and in court: “When I started this job, I didn’t know I would see so much death. But that’s the reality. I have been here nine years and I’ve seen a death every year—it’s kids that I’ve been in direct contact with. It’s hard, it makes you want to do something better.”

Mitchell sees GrowingChange as a different way of serving a population that has been forgotten:

> With this program kids get an opportunity to go out and do something different, and use their hands. There are not a whole lot of activities for youth around here—we don’t have recreational centers or swimming pools; there are one or two public basketball courts in the city but other than that, there isn’t much to keep kids active, and allow them to interact with one another. It’s a great opportunity for the county in general. Healthy eating will also be promoted especially with the involvement of Cooperative Extension since they push local food, and sustainability, provide kids with the skills they need to grow their own food. When these youth grow up they will know that instead of going to the grocery store you could have a garden in your own backyard. Generations could feed off of this project.

The Department of Public Safety (DPS), another critical stakeholder in this work since the site is currently under their ownership, sees this as a unique reuse opportunity. According to Director Bill Stovall at DPS, consolidating the prison population has left a number of small prisons available for other kinds of uses. In the last couple of decades, Director Stovall has seen the number of prisons in the state shrink from over 92 to about 56. Some of the closed facilities are being used for probation and parole, at times for activities that sound a lot like incarceration, but are not explicitly called that: “If someone is on probation and doesn’t follow the terms of their probation, they can get placed in one of these facilities for up to 90 days, to get their attention, to let them know that this is the type of conditions that they will end up in if they end up serving their sentence in prison.” Other facilities are being leased by local governments to supplement county jails or serve as emergency management response centers. The facility in Wagram is the only one that is being developed to provide educational programs for the local community.
The Department of Public Safety supports this project because its leaders are curious about this approach as a positive intervention for young people. They are also interested in it because besides the land, they do not need to provide any additional resources:

We were drawn to GrowingChange because it is a non-profit that is geared towards service to others. It’s going to teach youth sustainable farming practices, give them some sort of anchor in their life and increase the potential of them staying out of the criminal justice system. This is keeping with the direction that we’ve been given as an agency in terms of using these surplus properties as they become available. And there’s really no cash outlay on our part with regards to the taxpayers. Noran is proposing a sustainable operation in exchange for having a suitable site for doing this. So this is a low investment on our end as a state agency, which is also very attractive. And it has a positive message that we think, has the potential to be something that can be replicated over and over as interest in the program grows. (Director Stovall)

Local Economic Development Stakeholders

As the Executive Director of Scotland County Tourism Development Authority, Corey Hughes struggles with two issues: the lack of major attractions that would bring people to Scotland County and the underutilization of existing natural and historic assets. “I don’t have a liberty bell, a ski resort, or an ocean to work with here”. According to Corey, promoting tourism in Scotland County realistically has to be more focused on short trips as opposed to full fledged vacations. Corey is trying to get the community to notice and appreciate local assets since then they will be more likely to encourage their friends or family passing through to stop in town and spend money.

Many youth who have lived in Wagram have never been to the Lumber River (less than a mile from the GrowingChange site, Figure 4.10). Folks have never been to a lecture at the college, never gone to an athletic event, never taken any of the continuing education courses that Richmond Community College offers. People don’t know about these things or that many of them are free; or they just haven’t been given the motivation to do them.
Corey is involved with marketing local assets and organizing events to bring people out to places where they wouldn’t normally go. Under Corey’s leadership, the County developed the North Carolina Heritage Center, which is essentially a repackaging of existing historic buildings like the John Blue House, a Victorian home from the late 1800s, and a couple of other historic buildings and small museums around it. The county is also trying to promote the Lumber River. According to Corey, the river “is a unique being; you have to have the equipment to go on it and there is no place to rent a canoe, raft or kayak.” Corey collaborated with others in the county to organize the ‘Chalk Bank Challenge’ last year where contestants could participate in raft, recreational canoe or kayak races.

While the economy in Scotland County has historically been dependent on a few large manufacturing companies (most of which have now left), Corey believes that it is time to focus on diversifying the economy by “having many oars in the water.” GrowingChange is valuable to a place like Scotland County because “it’s churning out more productive viable members of society, and creating a positive environment for businesses by injecting the community with
some oxygen.” The group’s proximity to the Lumber River and aspirations to create a recreational program where youth leaders take different groups on tours of the river also directly benefits Corey’s work of drawing attention to local assets.

County Commissioner Betty Blue Gholston, who was born on the Wagram prison site since her father worked for the superintendent, has also emerged as a strong supporter of this project. Commissioner Gholston sees many local city stakeholders still trying to attract large industries to Scotland County but she thinks that those aspirations are unrealistic.

We’re not going to get big industry like Abbott Laboratories again, they are gone forever. Little Laurinburg is competing with big cities like Atlanta and Raleigh. Companies want a railroad line, an airport, a nice highway—we don’t have that here. We have to do smaller businesses, and get people involved with the hospitals, schools, social services. But instead everyone still wants to attract industry and give them tax breaks for 20 years. It doesn’t make sense.

For Commissioner Gholston, GrowingChange is the kind of initiative that Scotland County needs to help grow smaller business and create a sense of pride in the community.

I support this project because it gives something to the community. They’re going to have industry, a museum, a place for the veterans. And here’s a place that was completely run down, no one really wanted to bother with it. This is an opportunity to make Wagram look good.

*Educational/Institutional Stakeholders*

GrowingChange envisions the redeveloped prison site to be a playground for academics who are interested in testing different kinds of mutually productive projects. To serve this goal, GrowingChange has been actively cultivating a coalition of educational stakeholders and supporters. Through Cooperative Extension, the two land grant schools in North Carolina (UNC State and NC A&T) have been plugged into GrowingChange from the very beginning. UNC State has provided technical assistance in specialty fields like landscape design and vermicomposting. North Carolina Agriculture & Technology has been providing technical assistance in small business development through sustainable agriculture. UNC Pembroke has also been closely involved since one of the board members of GrowingChange is the Director of Sustainable Agriculture at the university. UNC Pembroke is expected to be an important connection for GrowingChange since it is ranked highly as a veteran friendly school and could provide a steady stream of veterans interested in collaborating and learning on the site.
Other nearby educational institutions have also been involved through specific projects. For instance, the youth leadership team worked with a graduate student in public history from UNC Greensboro, Kimber Hines, to create a travelling museum exhibit that documents the history of the site and the involvement of prison labor in highway construction around North Carolina. Recently faculty members at St. Andrews, a small liberal arts college that is based in Scotland County, have also become interested in collaborating with GrowingChange. St. Andrews is interested in buying produce grown on the former prison site and using its interdisciplinary Black Mountain Scholars program to build on Kimber’s museum project. A class at Duke University is currently developing a virtual reality program that will allow users to see GrowingChange’s final vision for the site. This program could serve as an important tool for GrowingChange’s fundraising and advocacy efforts.

**Challenges to Redevelopment**

While GrowingChange has achieved many victories, having developed a strong community of partners and gained site control (for now), it still has a long way to go to implement its vision. The following are some of the ongoing issues that GrowingChange faces:

- Many of the programs that GrowingChange is interested in require community involvement and visibility. The current site design is very insular. The site is barely visible from the street and is far from inviting (see Figure 4.11). The redesign process will have to actively work against this hurdle.

  **Figure 4.11: Approaching the GrowingChange Site from the Street**
GrowingChange currently has a 2 year 11 month temporary use agreement with the Department of Public Safety. This will allow the team a chance to fundraise and test their preliminary ideas. The end goal is to apply for a deed transfer but that will require approval of the NC Council of State that includes elected representatives. While the group’s positive relationship with the Department of Public Safety has led them to be optimistic about the transfer, achieving permanent site control is an ongoing challenge.

- So far funding for the project has been very piecemeal. To start making capital improvements, GrowingChange will need larger buckets of funds.

- The success of programs like ‘glamping’⁹, which GrowingChange envisions on site, will require demand. The group has yet to do a market analysis to see if these ideas are feasible.

- This kind of economic development is considered very out of the box for this area. While the group has garnered a lot of positive publicity, it does not seem to fit neatly with what more traditional economic development and city stakeholders are striving for (i.e. attracting big industry). It remains to be seen whether this program will be embraced by traditional local economic development stakeholders or operate within its own niche.

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⁹ A glamorous version of camping, where travelers can explore nature while having access to the comforts of a hotel.
### 4.3 Comparing the Two Cases

#### Table 4.1: Redevelopment Overviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Fulton County, NY</th>
<th>Scotland County, NC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Date of Prison Closure</strong></td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Date Redevelopment Began</strong></td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Size</strong></td>
<td>515 acres</td>
<td>67 acres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong># of Buildings Originally</strong></td>
<td>55</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Agency Leading Redevelopment</strong></td>
<td>Fulton County Industrial Development Agency (IDA), a public benefit corporation</td>
<td>GrowingChange, a local non-profit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vision for Redevelopment</strong></td>
<td>Technology park for private companies</td>
<td>Sustainable farm, recreational and educational center for youth and veterans in the community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Site Control Status</strong></td>
<td>Site transferred from Empire State Development (state agency), to Fulton County IDA in January 2014.</td>
<td>Temporary use agreement granted by the Department of Public Safety to GrowingChange in March 2017.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Redevelopment Status</strong></td>
<td>Completed: - Environmental review - Internal access road constructed - Connected to water, sewer, electricity &amp; gas - Zoning amended to be a Business and Technology Zone (BTZ) - Market analysis for industries on site - First company (Vireo Health) moved on site In process: - Marketing to more companies to purchase property on site - Ongoing demolition of buildings</td>
<td>Completed: - Community-driven landscape design plan - Site has temporary power to facilitate construction - Currently zoned for light industrial uses; does not require a zoning amendment In process: - A septic tank is in the process of being installed - The water lines on site are connected to county drinking water and will be reconnected once the septic tank is in place - Renovation of one building to be an office for GrowingChange and a residential unit for a farm manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Financing</strong></td>
<td>Acquired funding for necessary infrastructure improvements (combination of state and county funds).</td>
<td>Acquired funding from regional Juvenile Crime Prevention Council for clinical pilot program. Current operations financed by Soros Justice and Ashoka fellowships, as well as small private donations. More funds are needed for capital improvements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Site Infrastructure</strong></td>
<td>Site has access to water, sewer, and electricity.</td>
<td>Site does not yet have access to water, sewer and electricity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Location/Access</strong></td>
<td>10.2 miles to I-90 32.9 miles to I-87</td>
<td>13.3 miles to I-74 32.1 miles to I-95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In both Scotland County, NC and Fulton County, NY, local stakeholders have overcome significant barriers to begin implementing their visions for redevelopment on the former prison sites. One common challenge was achieving site control. In Fulton County, NY, finding appropriate documentation for infrastructure on site, conducting environmental reviews, and transferring the site through a number of different entities (so that the site could legally be sold to private companies) took almost three years. In Scotland County, NC, site control has been achieved incrementally. At first the non-profit only had permission to develop a coalition of partners for a potential redevelopment plan. Very recently GrowingChange was able to get a temporary use agreement for 2 years and 11 months. While this in itself is a huge achievement for the organization, a permanent deed transfer will require GrowingChange to quickly demonstrate success and continue to build more relationships especially at the state level.

Despite some similarities in the work on these two sites, there are some key differences that are important to note. First, the stakeholders leading redevelopment in each case have very different affiliations, and this seems to be impacting the design of these programs. In Fulton County, NY the site’s redevelopment into a technology park is being led primarily by local and regional government officials in economic development and planning agencies. In Scotland County, NC the redevelopment process is being led by a local non-profit that includes formerly incarcerated young people, criminal justice stakeholders, military veterans and farming enthusiasts. From my interviews, I sensed that local government leaders in economic development in Scotland County are focusing mostly on attracting new large companies to the county. GrowingChange’s approach, which focuses on entrepreneurship and small business development, is a radical departure from other local efforts in economic development. In general, while Tryon relies on large companies from the outside coming in to provide jobs, GrowingChange, through sustainable agriculture and recreational programs, is looking to create jobs for specific populations with high needs by using existing local assets and tapping into niche markets.

Second, the approach that the two groups are taking to the challenging design of these sites is very different. In Fulton County, it seems that the IDA is embracing the insular design of the site, hoping that there are companies that can benefit from this layout. The section owned by Vireo Health, for instance, is enclosed by its own fence, and this seems to be an asset to the company in terms of security (Figure 4.12).
In Scotland County, the redevelopment program aims to bring the community together over education, recreation, and food. In this case the insular design works against the goals of GrowingChange and the organization has to actively work against this issue. One way that the group is thinking about tackling this problem is by organizing activities and events closer to the property line near the street to catch the curiosity of people passing by.

Third, the lead agencies in the two cases have had very different financial constraints. In New York State, Governor Andrew Cuomo set aside funds for redevelopment in places where a prison closed. This allowed the Fulton County IDA to spend over two million dollars (of state money) to improve the infrastructure on site, which was crucial to their vision of developing ‘shovel ready’ sites that are attractive to companies. In contrast, the program in North Carolina has been running on a lean budget that includes small private donations, funding from the fellowships that Noran has been awarded (Ashoka and Soros Justice Fellowships), and in kind donations from Cooperative Extension and educational institutions in North Carolina. The GrowingChange model relies on extreme local collaboration and leveraging resources from a large and vibrant network of loyal supporters. This also means that fundraising is an ongoing uphill battle for the small non-profit.
CHAPTER 5: Imagining New Futures for Rural Communities With Closed Prisons

As the problem of mass incarceration gets national attention, many advocates are calling for a drastic downsizing of the criminal justice system. JustLeadershipUSA, an advocacy group that empowers formerly incarcerated people to be a part of the criminal justice reform process, boasts the following mission statement: “JustLeadershipUSA is dedicated to cutting the US correctional population in half by 2030.”

Recently, Mayor Bill de Blasio of New York City announced the closure of Rikers Island, a notorious jail that sits on a 400-acre island and incarcerates an average of 9,000 people daily\textsuperscript{10}, many of whom are awaiting trial. While the closure is expected to happen over the next ten years, Rikers Island is already being considered for a number of other future uses including for an expansion of nearby LaGuardia Airport, water and waster treatment centers, research facilities and a public greenway. But while Rikers has the advantage of being part of New York City where the market is hot and land is scarce, many other prisons that may close in the near future in rural communities will face different, and possibly more severe, redevelopment challenges.

My research focused on prisons in rural communities, with the underlying assumption that areas with less development pressures will need to strategize differently around their closed prisons. I used the following questions to focus my inquiry, that are worth revisiting again in this chapter: i) What are the real and perceived impacts of prison closures on local economies in small rural counties?; ii) How are local needs, politics, and project constraints (related to design and finance) shaping the transformation of these sites.

For my first question, I found that there are gaps between the real and perceived impacts of prisons, and by extension prison closures, in rural communities. The actions of rural counties suggest that they expected great returns from investing time, energy and resources in scouting prisons. In Scotland County, for instance, the county actively courted the state to build the new Scotland Correctional Institute and provided land free of charge for the prison. The state, for its

\textsuperscript{10} This is a drastic reduction from about 21,000 people who were incarcerated daily at Rikers in 1990 (Goldensohn, 2015).
relatively recent round of prison construction, only sited facilities in counties like this one, that were desperate for some economic opportunity.

However, in both Scotland County and Fulton County, it appears that prison jobs were unable to compensate for jobs that were being lost in other sectors of the economy, particularly in manufacturing. And the impact of the jobs that were created was mitigated by the fact that many employees in large state prisons are hired from outside the ‘host county’. In some cases facilities are unable to hire from the local community because they need to fill positions that require skilled labor (e.g. for doctor or nurse positions). In other cases, staff for new facilities are simply transferred from other facilities based on waiting lists. Workers that live outside host communities are paying property taxes and likely spending significant portions of their paychecks in other places. It seems that local governments and businesses experience few benefits from the siting of a prison, and thus may be less affected by a closure than is perceived or publicized.

As for my second research question, I found that prison redevelopment projects in rural communities face some common challenges and limitations. Site control tends to be a big obstacle when local governments or community groups envision new uses for a former prison property that is owned by the state. Prison redevelopment projects also have to grapple with the design of these campuses in some way. Recognizing that these properties were designed to be hidden and isolated, redevelopment projects either have to embrace these conditions or actively work against them. Additionally in rural communities that are strapped for resources, funding redevelopment requires collaboration and imagination. In Fulton County, since the project was spearheaded by the local government and facilitated by a funding program at the state level, the initial stages of the project could move quickly after site transfer was achieved. In Scotland County, acquiring funding for large capital improvements through grant applications to state agencies and private funders is a slow process. Thus, moving from vision to implementation is a long, incremental process.

Economic development in rural communities does not need to be organized around incarceration, especially since the impact of this sector tends to be limited. Moreover, former prisons do not have to be adapted for other punitive uses (e.g. to become immigration detention centers) or lie abandoned. With creativity and hard work, these sites can become assets for the local community and places that spark sustainable economic development. However in order to imagine different futures for rural economies, it seems that both state and local governments
can play a more proactive role when a prison closure is imminent. State and local governments can help manage how communities understand the loss of a prison, and ensure that local physical, social and cultural assets can be efficiently transitioned to support new community and economic development goals. The following are some recommendations for state and local governments that are grappling with prison closures.

**Recommendations for State Governments**

**i) Conduct Impact Assessments to Plan for Transition**

As noted earlier in this paper, understanding the direct and indirect impacts of prison closures is not straightforward. While closures are often accompanied by a loss in jobs, it is important to put those jobs in context to understand the urgency and nature of a new economic development approach. Once a facility is slated for closure, state governments can conduct impact assessments to understand how many and what kinds of jobs are being lost, and how they could be replaced in the community over time.

Impact assessments can also look at how procurement worked for the closing facility and where workers live. This information could help determine if and how local businesses are likely to be affected by a closure. Official assessments of prison closures are not currently standard practice and the direct and indirect impacts are often over-inflated by opponents of the closures.

**ii) Begin Transition Planning Before a Facility Closes**

In both Scotland County and Fulton County, the two facilities suffered significant damage from sitting vacant over long periods of time. Prison redevelopment started three and ten years after closure in Fulton County and Scotland County respectively. In Fulton County perfectly functional buildings suffered severe moisture damage to the point where they may no longer be usable. In Scotland County anything of value that was left behind on the site was stolen over the years. State and local governments can collaborate to consider temporary uses on site before more permanent proposals shape up. Or allocate resources to maintain buildings that may be in good condition and have layouts that could be suitable for adaptive reuse (i.e. especially if they have wide, open floor plans that are easier to repurpose).

State governments can also make reuse easier by providing new users with accurate and detailed information about site infrastructure. In Fulton County, a great deal of time and effort was spent tracking down information about underground water and sewer lines because this
information was either not kept systematically or not provided to the new users for some other reason. Leaders at the Fulton County IDA stress that having this information would have greatly helped them, along with having a master key schedule which was also not provided for the fifty five buildings on site. In New York State since workers in corrections are required to be given a one year notice before their contracts are terminated, and in the case of Tryon many workers were on payroll even though there were no youth in the facilities for many months towards the end, some of this time could be spent documenting site infrastructure and compiling other information that could be helpful for a new user.

**iii) Allocate State Funding for Targeted Economic Development When Prisons Close**

In North Carolina, the recent wave of prisons were explicitly sited in communities that were desperate for jobs. Prisons are still seen in many communities as providers of ‘recession proof jobs’. When prisons close, particularly in rural communities with struggling economies, it is critical that states allocate resources for economic development. In the case of Tryon, Fulton County was able to spend over two million dollars of state money on improving the infrastructure on site so that companies looking for a new campus might find this to be an attractive option. Based on my interview with Vireo Health’s Chief Business Development Officer, it seems that this government investment was crucial to convincing the company to move on site.

In North Carolina there are at least twenty-five former prison sites that can be adapted for new uses. However, there is no state program to systematically support redevelopment on these sites. It may be difficult to replicate the GrowingChange model on other sites without state resources.

**iv) Create Technical Assistance Centers Specializing in Prison Redevelopment**

States that have had, or are anticipating, a number of prison closures could benefit from a central place that collects and shares information helpful in redeveloping closed prisons, to avoid reinventing the wheel every time a new prison site becomes available for other uses. These centers could be based in state universities and offer technical assistance to government officials or communities members who have ideas to redevelop a local vacant prison. These centers could document successes and challenges in prison redevelopment in that state; keep lists of individuals or agencies that fund work in criminal justice reform, prison abolition, and
adaptive reuse; and facilitate peer learning between groups that are working in this small but growing field.

**Recommendations for Local Governments**

**i) Spearhead Inclusive Community Planning Processes**

Local governments are often not invited to be a part of the decision making process when a state prison closure is being considered. Once a closure is announced, however, they can take a leadership role in collecting and developing ideas for reuse that reflect the needs and desires of the local constituents.

When prisons closed in Scotland and Fulton Counties, there was no local government led planning process in either place that involved the broader community. In Fulton County, the planning agency approached the state with a specific proposal without inviting other kinds of stakeholders to shape the redevelopment efforts. In Scotland County, it seems that the site was lying vacant until GrowingChange decided to reclaim it. In both cases, the closing of a prison could have been an opportunity for reflection: to understand the history and significance of incarceration in the community, and think about ways that the vacant site could serve different community and economic development needs that are collectively identified in the community. Additionally, in Fulton County, a community planning effort could also have sparked a conversation about the irony of a former prison—where many youth were likely incarcerated for drug-related charges—being used for medical cannabis production. An opportunity to collectively unpack the negative impact of the “war on drugs” on poor communities, and draconian sentences associated with the sale of a substance that is now being legalized in many states, seems to have been lost.

In both places, the lead redevelopment agencies are dealing with large sites, though the site in Fulton County is significantly bigger. Community planning processes might have created the space to brainstorm different uses on different parts of these site, or allowed a number of different stakeholders in the community to benefit from smaller sections of the site. Transfer of ownership to a specific agency without a public engagement process runs the risk of suppressing other possible ideas or outcomes on these sites.

Finally, a community planning process could help local governments be intentional about what sections of the local population they serve through reusing these sites. In both Fulton and
Scotland County very small percentages of the local populations have advanced degrees (15.1% and 14% respectively). In Scotland County 21.3% of people over the age of 25 do not have a high school degree or equivalent. In order to reduce unemployment and create pathways out of poverty, economic interventions need to be designed to meet people where they are. If successful, the GrowingChange program seems more equipped to provide pathways to economic empowerment for people with low educational attainment compared to the technology park in Fulton County. The Tryon model relies on attracting new companies to the county, but there is no guarantee that the jobs created can or will be filled by locals. People who live outside the county, for instance, fill a number of the highly paid positions at Vireo Health, and there is no local hiring policy in place. Community planning processes can help governments understand what kinds of jobs their constituents are interested in and qualified for, and collaborate with local stakeholders to develop training or apprenticeship programs that help locals gain skills and prepare for new jobs as they become available.

**Looking to a Different Future**

Incarceration has for decades been intertwined with economic development. This has taken many forms, from prison labor being used to build roads that facilitate trade, to prisons being built to fill gaps in employment, where manufacturing jobs are on the decline. Especially as racial inequities and human rights violations are exposed in the current system of mass incarceration in the U.S., necessitating a different response to crime in our communities, state and local governments must actively work together to disentangle our economic system from our prison system. And beyond this think about new futures for rural communities.

Perhaps in this process we can begin to tackle the following questions: Can closures be seen as opportunities to reflect on mass incarceration and imagine different economic paradigms that do not rely on oppression? And, can they make space for the development of other types of jobs and industries, that could benefit from the social and physical capital left behind by prisons? Imagining new futures for rural economies with closed prisons will require state and local governments to be more proactive about transitioning rural economies away from incarceration, towards more creative and sustainable economic development strategies.
References


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