



Manchester Bidwell Corp. voids deal to buy SCI-Pittsburgh



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Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

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SEP 18, 2019

5:27 PM

Manchester Bidwell Corp. on Wednesday said it has voided an agreement with Pennsylvania to buy State Correctional Institution-Pittsburgh.

The corporation [had a deal in place with the state to buy the former penitentiary](#) in Marshall-Shadeland for \$1, contingent upon a number of factors, such as additional studies on the property and the approval of the state Legislature, state officials said in May.

The nonprofit training organization had a 270-day due diligence period for the 22-acre site that was set to end in October.

Manchester Bidwell said in a statement that it “conducted an extensive due diligence process on the premises that included expert opinions, discussions with programmatic consultants, and tests from developers and environmental specialists.

“MBC’s Board of Directors reviewed the data and after careful consideration, MBC has decided to void the agreement of sale. MBC will not move forward, and the Commonwealth will remain the owner of the site.”

The corporation said in May that it had been working on a business plan to expand its job training programs, which provide “industry-based skills training as well as employment opportunities for the community.”

Joel Mora, a spokesman for Manchester Bidwell, said there wasn’t one thing in particular that caused the corporation to void the deal.

“There really isn’t anything specific,” he said. “We did our due diligence and felt we had to pass on the opportunity the state gave us.”

Troy Thompson, a spokesman for the state’s Department of General Services, which oversees commonwealth properties, said it was disappointing that Manchester Bidwell backed out, but the state will continue to explore opportunities for the site.

“We’re going to continue to work with the community to identify viable options,” he said. “We know the channels we have available to us.”

SCI-Pittsburgh, known previously as Western Penitentiary, has been shuttered since mid-2017.

SCI-Pittsburgh’s closure was expected to save the state \$81 million a year. It was chosen for elimination based in part on the perception that, with its location in a city, it might be easier to reuse than a rural lockup.

State, city, county and Urban Redevelopment Authority officials met regarding the site last year.

At that point, officials said the state could sell the property to the Urban Redevelopment Authority, or conduct a competitive sealed bidding process. Then, the state Department of General Services said it costs around \$2.2 million a year just to maintain the site.

Around the country, former prisons have found diverse second lives: social service sites, a small farm incubator, a museum, a movie studio.

The closed SCI-Greensburg sold in 2015 for \$950,000, and SCI-Cresson in 2017 for \$600,000.

City Councilwoman Darlene Harris, whose district includes the former SCI-Pittsburgh, said she would like to talk to state officials to help determine the future of the site.

“I would like to make sure that the state is well aware of some issues that I don’t want to talk about right now,” she said.

State Sen. Wayne Fontana, D-Brookline, whose district includes the site, could not immediately be reached.

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First Published September 18, 2019, 5:27pm