

Frequently Asked Questions: New Women's Correctional Facility

What:

- **Who will be housed at the facility?**

The facility will house Vermont's female incarcerated population, which currently averages between 100 and 130 women.

- **How big will the facility be?**

Approximately 115,000 sqft combined (correctional and reentry facility)

- **How much will this cost?**

The project is expected to cost about \$70 million. The majority of funding would come from the [capital bill](#), which is being collected over multiple years.

- **Why does the State of Vermont need to build a new facility? Wouldn't an older building work?**

A correctional facility, particularly a modern, trauma-informed model, must be purpose-built with specialized construction to most fully meet the needs of those who will live there. Estimates show it would be *more* expensive to convert an existing vacant structure, like a former college dorm, into the specific building needed for this facility campus.

- **Who owns the land for the proposed facility?**

- The state owns the land currently under consideration for the proposed facility.

- **Who is leading this project?**

The Department of Corrections (DOC) and the Department of Buildings and General Services (BGS) are collaborating to lead this project.

When:

- **What is the project timeline?**

The project's timeline depends on the funding for the project. The Vermont Legislature has dedicated bonding capacity to the new facility, and the state estimates it will be about five years before construction begins.



Why:

- **Why do we need a new facility?**

The current women's facility, Chittenden Regional Correctional Facility, was never intended to accommodate women for lengthy stays and does not have the programming space needed to support their development and rehabilitation. Furthermore, many of the building systems are reaching end-of-life, and maintenance costs are significant—about \$3 million per year. This is an opportunity to create a modern facility that supports the Department of Corrections' goals while saving taxpayers in staffing and operational costs.

- **Why Essex?**

The state always looks to site facilities on state-owned land to lower the cost to taxpayers. The state also worked with real estate consultants and conducted a comprehensive public search for private land to consider for this facility.

Essex is situated on public transportation and has businesses where women in the reentry program can find employment. Additionally, building on state-owned land in Essex means savings for Vermont taxpayers.

The Department of Corrections prioritized locating the facility in the greater Chittenden County to preserve existing partnerships with community organizations located in the Burlington area and limit the burden of relocation on current CRCF staff.

Keeping the facility in Chittenden County will also support connection to family and loved ones for incarcerated individuals, provide access to public transportation, and offer employment options for women in the reentry program.

- **What will the facility look like?**

Designed to support better outcomes for justice-involved women and for Vermont, the new facility will utilize more humane, supportive and empathetic practices than the traditional "prison" model. An example of this is the [Southern Maine Women's Reentry Facility](#). A newly introduced mental health space, River Valley Therapeutic Residence in Essex, follows this model, too.

The Vermont corrections philosophy relies heavily on rehabilitative programming, and relationships with community service providers with dedicated missions and trauma-informed practices are vital to success. This includes vocational training, high school and college-level education, domestic/sexual violence counseling, parenting support, and substance use/peer recovery programming



Important aspects of the building plan:

- Direct cooperation with community providers to create the best overall physical plant possible
 - Trauma-informed design
 - Nontraditional institutional aesthetics and architecture; forward-thinking design
 - Specialized acoustics
 - No slamming doors, bells, loud announcements
 - Sound dampening finishes
 - Calming atmosphere
 - Natural light, calming color scheme
 - Ties to the outside and brings in natural elements.
- **What is the proposed bed count for the new facility?**

The Chittenden Regional Correctional Facility, known as CRCF, was built as a temporary, short-term detention center for men. Currently it accommodates up to 177 women.

The new, proposed facility, will be built with incarcerated peoples' specific needs, programs and services in mind, and will house:

- 128 women in a secure, residential setting
 - It is a more secure setting, but with a trauma-informed, gender-responsive design to create a supportive environment
 - 30 women in a re-entry setting
 - Allowing women to leave for work and prepare for their return to community life
- **How can I learn more, give feedback, or stay updated?**

We look forward to a robust engagement process with the Essex community and will engage in the normal permitting processes required to build in Essex, which includes public hearings. You can also contact the project team directly at AHS.DOCWomensCorrectionalandre-entryFacility@vermont.gov.

- € **How will the Town of Essex benefit?**

When siting large state facilities, there are often necessary improvements to municipal infrastructure, such as expanding sewer capacity or fiber internet or improving roads, that benefit the community.



€ **Will the state pay property taxes?**

For facilities sited on state-owned land, municipalities are entitled to [General Payment in Lieu of Taxes \(PILOT\)](#).

€ **What will happen to my property value?**

Although there is no research on the impact of such buildings on property values in Vermont, past experiences suggest that property values will not be adversely affected. [Peer-reviewed research](#) published in the journal *Sociological Perspectives* found the following: “Housing outcomes in neighborhoods with correctional facility sitings did not differ from what would be expected if such establishments were not created. This finding held regardless of the correctional facility type. The concern of declining property values as a result of the introduction of correctional group quarters populations in neighborhoods is generally unwarranted.”

● **Will Essex residents interact with the women in the facility? How?**

Essex residents will have the opportunity to interact with women in the facility through several avenues. There are many volunteer opportunities for individuals interested in volunteering. Additionally, women in the reentry facility may obtain employment and work in the surrounding community.

● **Will there be an impact to public safety and EMS?**

Per standard practice statewide, Vermont State Police has jurisdiction over any public safety incidents that occur within correctional facilities.

● **Will there be any noise or light from the facility?**

Modern facilities do not use alarms, bells, or announcements. For safety, outdoor areas and parking lots will have downlights. They would comply with all town and state lighting ordinances.

€ **I own or lease a neighboring property. How can I reach you to discuss my concerns?**

Please feel free to contact the project team directly at ahs.docwomensfacility@vermont.gov

