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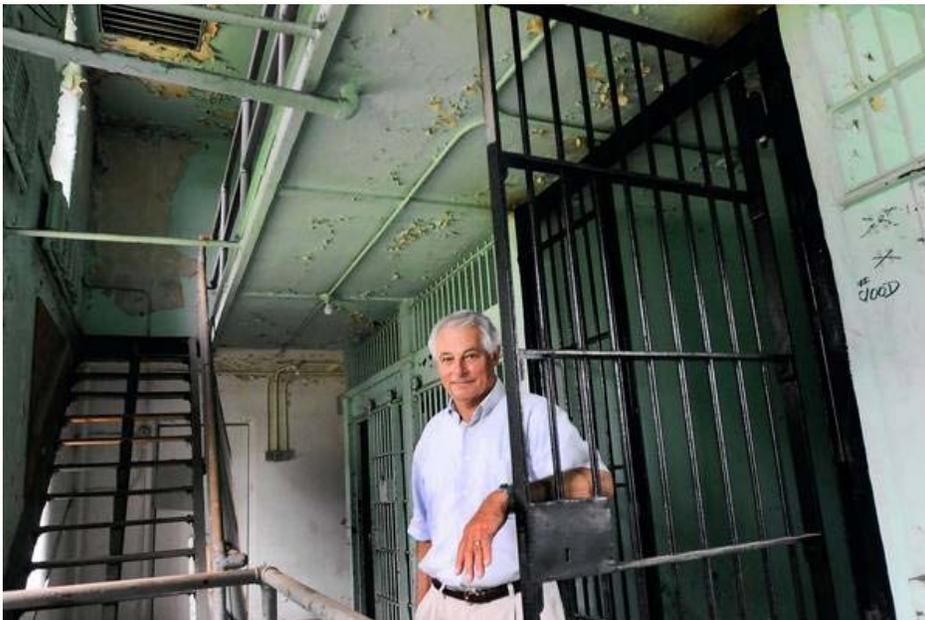
Lease would give redeveloper of old Towson jail oversight of swim club tract

Additional parking is only immediate plan, according to Azola

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Marty Azola, shown in a 2009 photo, stands near cells in the former Towson jail. Azola renovated the facility into office space in 2011. On Tuesday, Sept. 4, the County Council is expected to extend his long-term lease to include adjacent property that had been targeted for the Towson Swim Club. The swim center proposal failed earlier this year. (File photo by Steve Ruark / 2009 / June 12, 2009)

Maps

Bosley Ave & Towsontown Blvd W,
Towson, MD 21204, USA

By Jon Meoli, jmeoli@tribune.com
10:53 p.m. EDT, September 3, 2012

The Baltimore County Council is scheduled to vote Tuesday, Sept. 4, on a contract that would give full use of the former Towson jail property on Bosley Avenue to Towson Jail Associates, a company that has already restored the historic jail into an office building and

maintained the property since 2009.

Though the tract, on the northwest corner of Bosley Avenue and Towsontown Boulevard, is already widely known as the Towson jail property, the Towson Swim Club actually held the lease from the county for most of the land surrounding the old jail building.

But a new arrangement became available when the proposed Towson Swim Club project was terminated in March, after a last-ditch membership drive that was necessary to secure a loan for construction fell short.

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Martin Azola, president of Azola and Associates Inc, which created Towson Jail Associates to oversee the property, said the only plan the company has for the property is to "be good caretakers and good neighbors."

"We don't just do things that are not popular," said Azola, who grew up on nearby Dixie Drive. "We don't grossly rezone or tear down historic things to build an ugly high-rise. We're preservation-minded developers and builders."

In the case of the former swim club site, he said, doing nothing "is the right thing to do, with respect to the community and people on both sides of that equation."

In 2009, Towson Jail Associates took over the historic jail building from the county, renovated it and turned it into an office building that reopened in 2011 to positive reviews from the county and the business community.

Azola said his company had the "right of first refusal" to pick up the swim club's lease in the event the project failed. Soon after the swim club plans were scrapped, he expressed an interest in making the office building and the open land into one large property.

"The community has always been concerned that the jail property will be overdeveloped," said 5th District Councilman David Marks, who represents Towson.

One of the sticking points of the swim club plan had been its initial proposal to place some recreational features in or near the "green ravine," a segment of the property that neighbors consider a buffer between the tract and the residential community.

Marks said this that, "I'm downzoning the green ravine, and the county has given me assurances that the property will never be commercialized."

Therese McAllister, president of the Southland Hills Improvement Association, said Azola has been "very impressive" with his work in restoring the old jail building.

"He has good tenants there within the building, and we're hoping that he will do things to improve the landscaping on the outside so that it blends in more, aesthetically, to a residential neighborhood," she said.

The amended contract will be voted on by the County Council at its legislative session on Tuesday, Sept. 4, at 6 p.m. in the Council Chambers, in Towson.

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