

Airy Street Prison

Online Survey Report

October 2024



Photo courtesy of the Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia

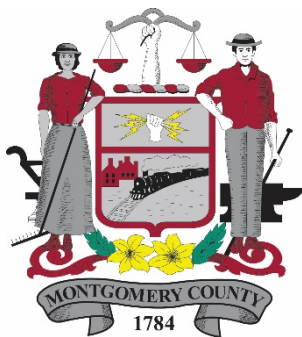


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Overview

Introduction

The Montgomery County Planning Commission (MCPC) administered the Airy Street Prison online survey from June 5 to August 16, 2024 through the County's interactive Engage Montco website. The goal of the survey was to gauge public sentiment on the potential preservation and reuse of the Airy Street Prison. The survey consisted of multiple choice and open-ended questions asking participants how important it was to preserve or demolish the structure, the significance of the structure's historic features as well as potential uses for the site. The survey was shared through social media platforms, press releases, newsletters, email blasts, posters and flyers, among other outlets.

This report consists of three main sections: an analysis of the survey responses, a comparison of results between Norristown residents and nonresidents, and participants' frequency into Downtown Norristown , and the inventory of responses from open-ended questions.

These survey results will aid the eventual Request for Expressions of Interest (RFEI) as an expression of public interest, while still recognizing that any development may veer from the most popular sentiments based on any number of financial factors.

Methodology

Survey results were imported into Excel and sorted using various data analysis tools. Questions pertaining to the importance of the site, elements to preserve, reasons for demolition and use preference were cross-referenced by Norristown residents and non-residents, frequency travelling to Downtown Norristown and race. Questions allowing multiple responses were calculated as a percentage of the total number of **participants**. Consequently, the percent breakdown for these survey results differs from the report generated on Engage Montco, which calculated results as a total number of **responses**. The method used for this report more effectively highlights any majorities and pluralities resulting from the questions.

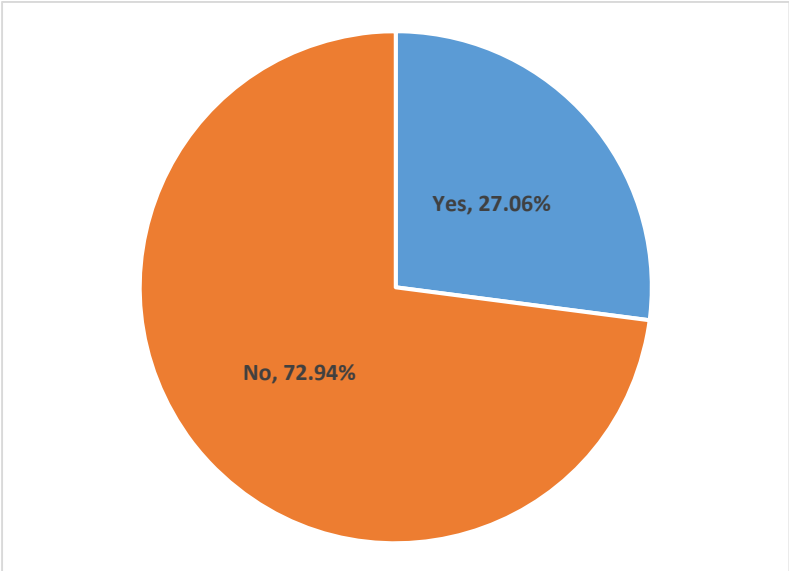
Survey Participants

A total of 691 people participated in the survey. As the data indicates, most respondents lived outside of the Norristown boundary. There was a range of frequencies in which people visited downtown Norristown, from a few times a year to daily. Most were visiting either for work, to use the County facilities and/or to frequent restaurants and shops.

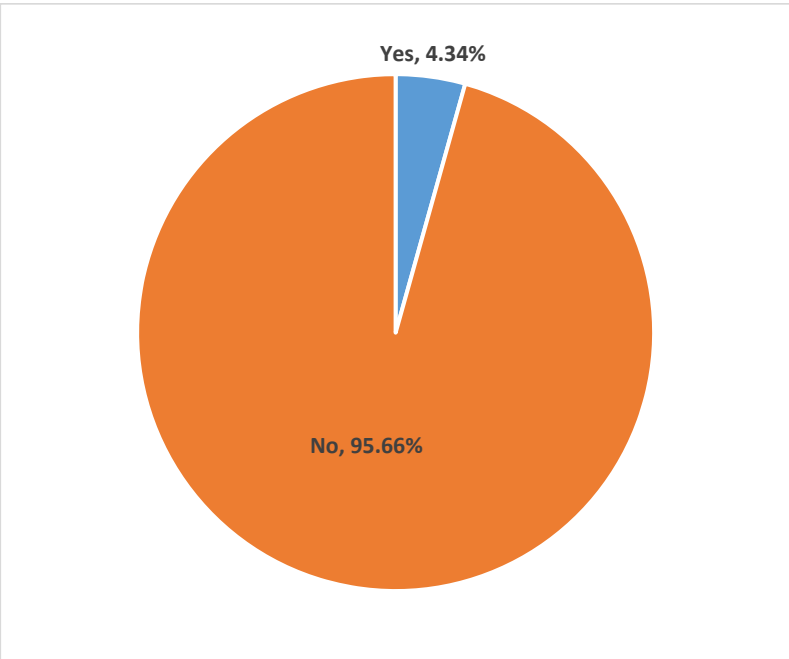
NOTE: The number of participants who answered any individual question is given as $N=x$, where x is the number of respondents.

Survey Questions

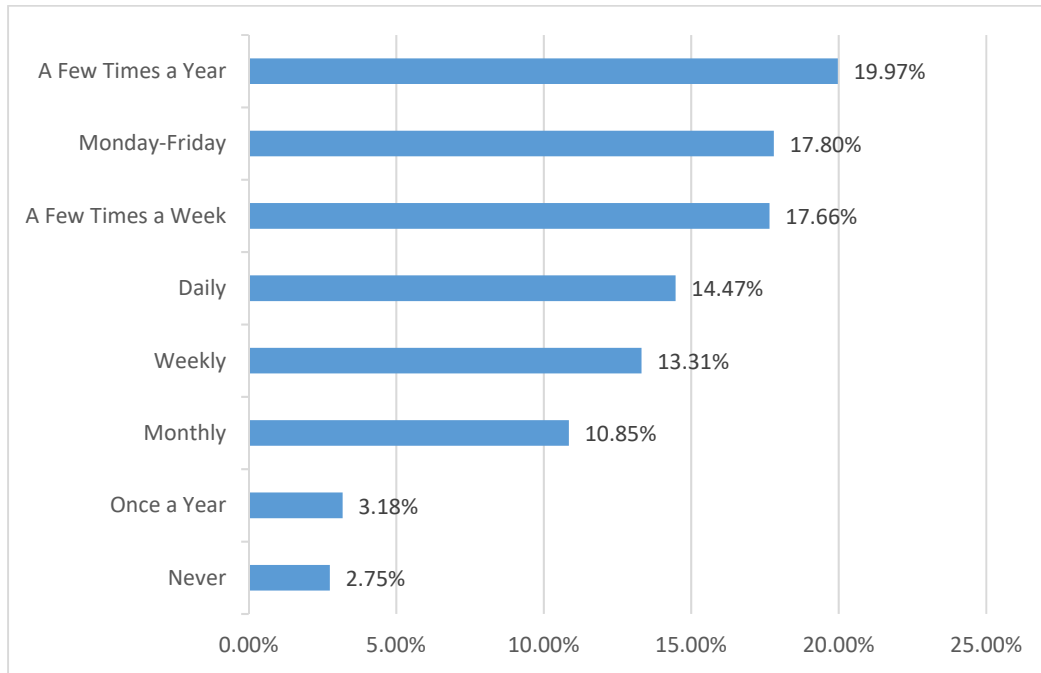
Q1. Are you a resident of Norristown? *N = 691*



Q2. Are you a business owner? *N = 691*



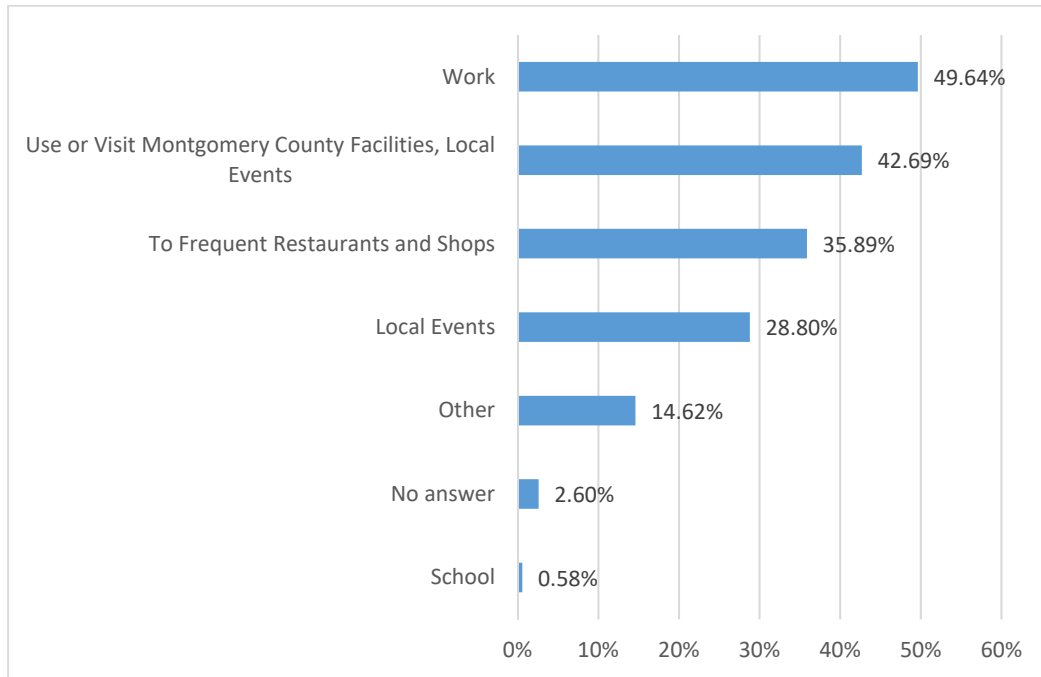
Q3. How often do you visit Downtown Norristown? $N = 691$



This question provided a wide spectrum of frequencies for which participants could choose. It was generally understood that “Daily” referred to every day of the week (including weekends) and “Weekly” was generally intended to mean 1-2 times a week, while “Monthly” referred to 1-2 times a month. “A Few times a Week” generally meant at least three days per week.

As the chart shows, the largest single response was from those who visited Downtown Norristown “A Few Times a Year” (19.97%). However, when including the choices “Daily”, “Weekly”, “A Few Times a Week” and “Monday-Friday”, it’s clear that the majority of respondents (63.24%) came to the area **at least** once a week.

Q4. What are your reasons for visiting Downtown Norristown? *N = 691*



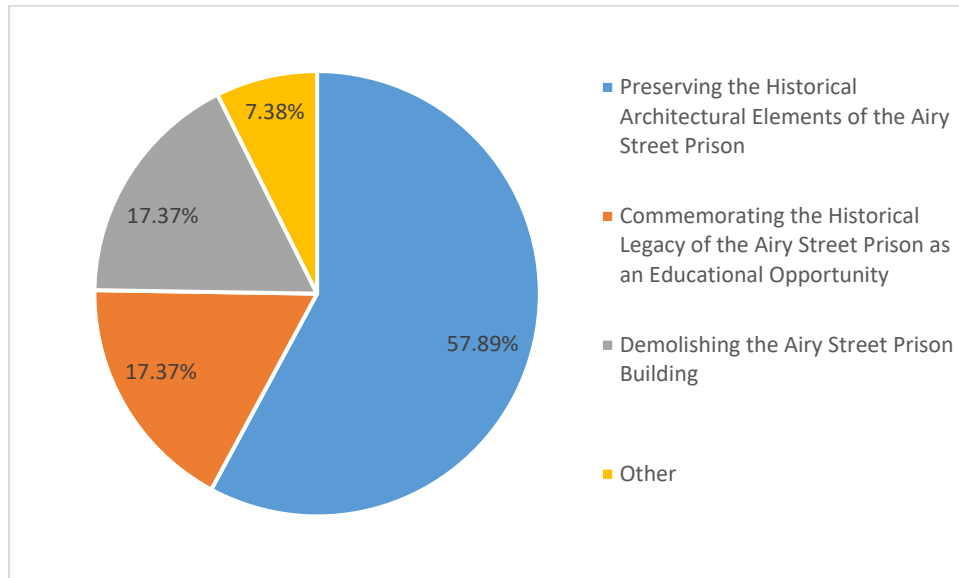
Note: Respondents could select multiple choices, so the total percentage is greater than 100.

Just under half of respondents travelled to Downtown Norristown for work. About 42% came downtown to use or visit Montgomery County Facilities or for local events. Many participants frequent the area for multiple reasons, such as to work and patronize restaurants and shops. Some respondents may patronize restaurants on their lunch break or after their business at a County facility is complete.

According to the open-ended responses, these were the top reasons for visiting downtown Norristown:

- Transportation and Trails (SEPTA, passing through Downtown, etc.)
- Visiting family and friends
- Leisure/errands
- Religious Services
- Volunteering

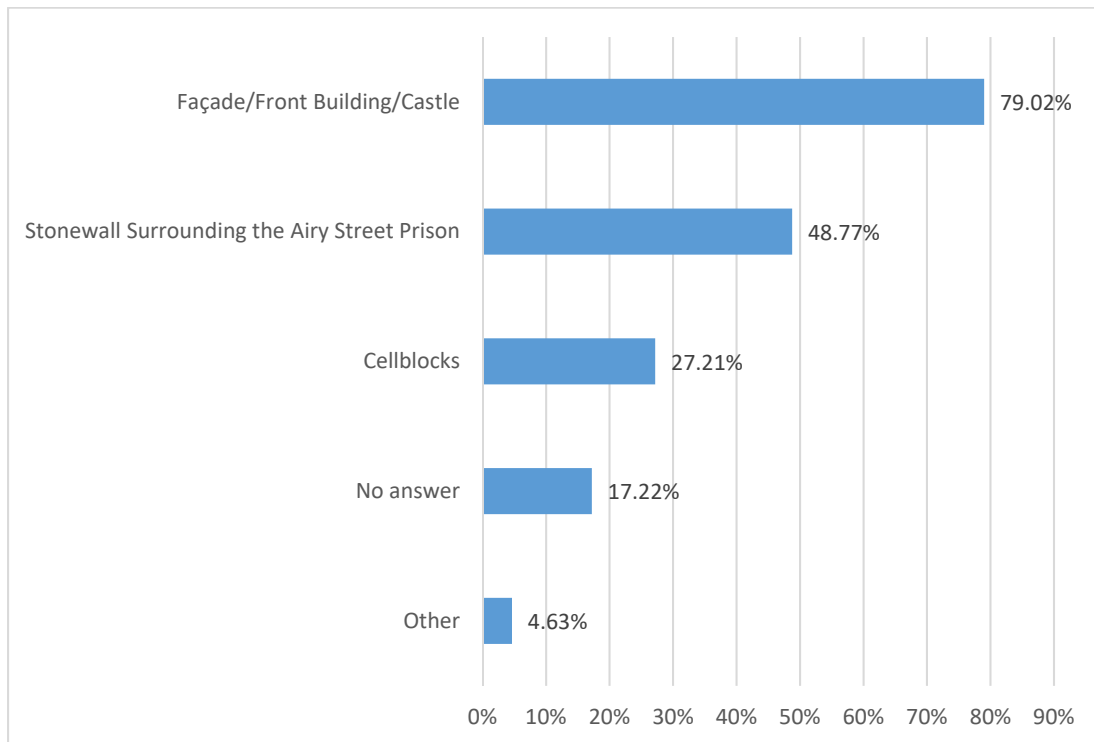
Q5. When it comes to the future of this site, what is most important to you? *N* = 691



The majority of respondents supported preserving the Airy Street Prison, with an additional 17% supported using the prison’s legacy as an educational opportunity. Another 17% felt the prison should be demolished. Respondents who selected “Other” expressed an array of opinions in the open comment portion that are summarized below, ranging from concerns to specific ideas for use.

- The structure should be at least partially preserved.
- The site should benefit the surrounding community.
- Utilize the site for Housing/Resources for the Homeless
- The site should generate revenue and tourism
- The site is **not** worth preserving.
- Possible uses
 - Parking
 - Affordable Housing
 - Resources for youth

Q6. What historic elements should be maintained? *N* = 572



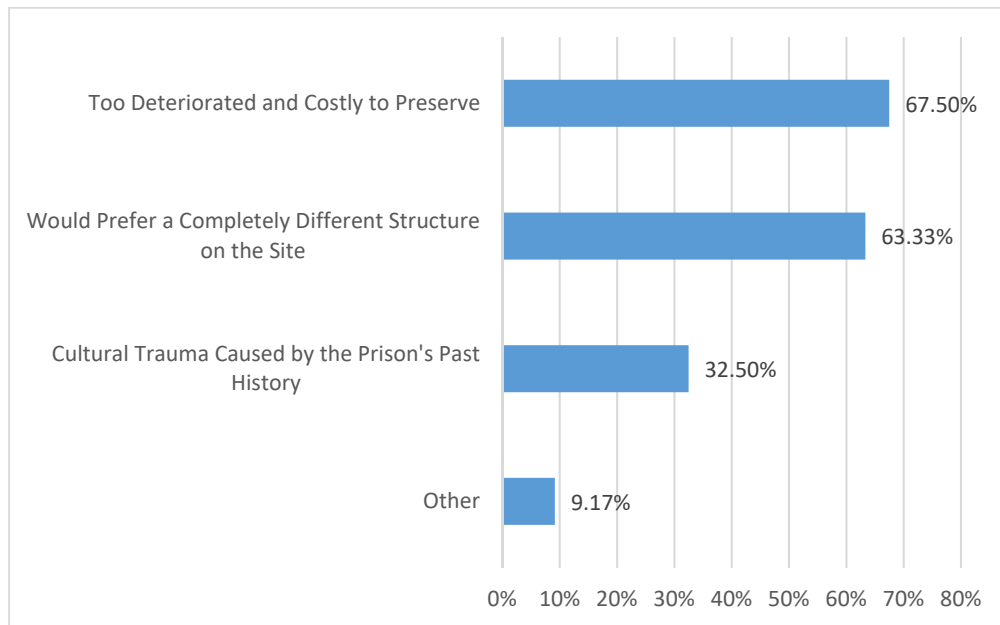
Note: Respondents could select multiple choices, so the total percentage is greater than 100.

When it came to historic elements, the majority of respondents acknowledged multiple architectural features worthy of preservation. Nearly 80% of survey respondents stated that the Façade/Front Building/Castle (the original section of the structure) should be preserved. In addition, 48% believed the stonewall surrounding the prison should be retained. Just over a quarter selected “Cellblocks”.

The open-ended responses are summarized below:

- The entire structure should be preserved.
- Only portions of the cellblocks should be preserved.
- The history should be commemorated even if the structure is not preserved.
- Stonewalls should be preserved.
- Preserve open space on the lots.
- Unsure/demolish it.

Q7. What are the reasons for demolition? $N = 120$



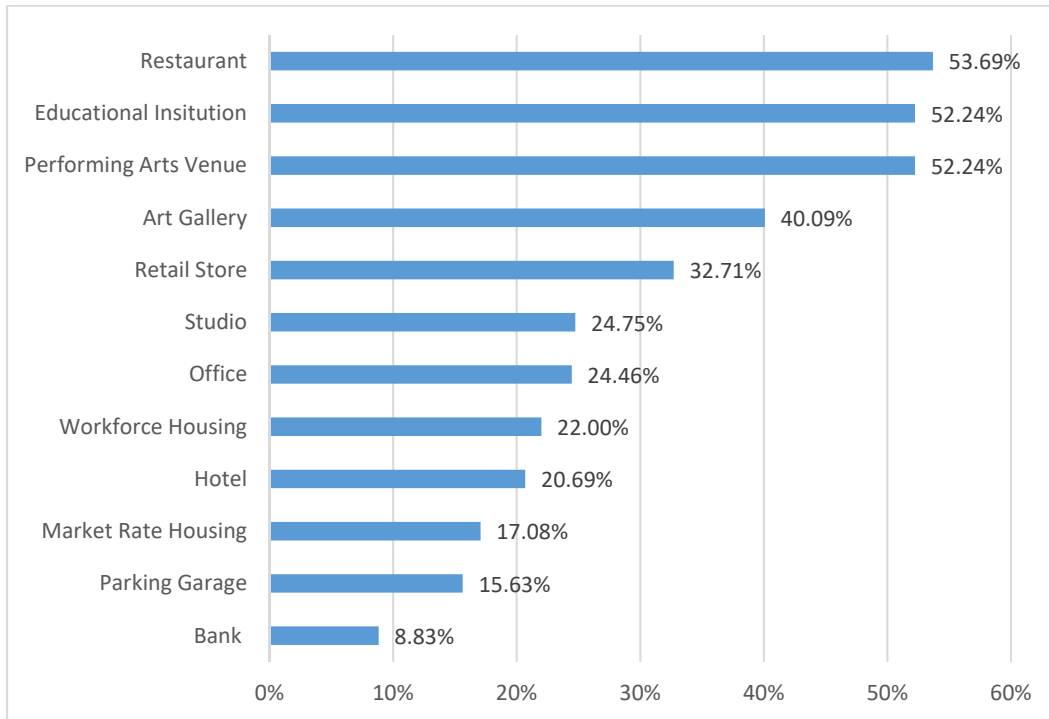
Note: Respondents could select multiple choices, so the total percentage is greater than 100.

Of the 120 participants who thought the structure should be demolished, the majority believed that adaptive reuse would be too costly, that the prison is too deteriorated, and they would prefer a different structure on the site. Roughly one-third of respondents believed cultural trauma from the site's history warranted its demolition.

The open-ended responses are summarized below:

- More effective uses for the site (newer residential/commercial, greenspace, parking, etc.)
- Impact on the surrounding community.
- Cost to rehabilitate the structure.
- Concerns about the legacy of the prison.

Q8. What use(s) would you like to see? *N* = 691



Note: Respondents could select multiple choices, so the total percentage is greater than 100.

While respondents selected a wide range of uses, the majority mentioned restaurants, educational institutions and performing arts venues as top choices. Art Galleries were a common preference as well, at just over 40%. Rounding out the bottom three choices were market rate housing (17%), parking garages (15%) and banks (8%).

As the percent breakdown suggests, many respondents selected multiple uses. Considering the high favorability of restaurants, educational institutions, arts venues and retail, a public market or multi-use space seemed an ideal option for many. More insight is provided in the open-ended responses to Question 9.

Q9. Additional use preferences $N = 209$

Museum/Interpretive/History/Education	56
Housing/Resources for Homeless	31
Public Market	24
Mixed/Multi-Use	17
Affordable Housing	16
Parks/Open Space	16
Restaurants/Retail	14
Community Space/Garden	13
Government Use	10
Studios/Work Space	12
Arts and Theatre	9
Recreation and Fitness	9
Education	9
Event Venue	7
Entertainment	6
Parking	5
Something that respects the integrity of the site	5
Businesses/Investment for Downtown Norristown	5
Mental Health Services	5
A use that benefits tourists and locals	5
Housing	4
Hotel	4
Nothing/demolish it	3
Youth Activities	2
Childcare	2
Religious	1

Note: Figures in the chart indicate the number of responses, not participants.

The open-ended responses centered on the importance of acknowledging the prison’s history, serving the less fortunate and providing amenities to residents and visitors. Many respondents wrote in multiple uses for the open-ended question, resulting in numerous preferences that were not necessarily evident in question 8.

One of these was ‘Museum/Interpretive History/Education.’ To many respondents, this went beyond merely preservation, incorporating exhibits that illustrate the history of the structure, particularly the treatment of prisoners. Several entries mentioned Eastern Penitentiary, the London Dungeon and the Old Jail Museum (Jim Thorpe, PA) as potential inspiration. Finally, some felt it important to incorporate insight on prison reform to accompany the interpretive history components.

The second-most frequently-mentioned use was ‘Housing/Resources for the Homeless.’ This could consist of a shelter and perhaps transitional services. Some respondents included mental health and substance abuse assistance as homelessness resources as well. Public markets in the style of Reading Terminal Market and Ponce City Market (Atlanta, GA) were popular ideas as well.

Q10. Any additional comments or thoughts? *N* = 220

Preserve and acknowledge the site's history	97
Additional Use Suggestions (top 5 below)	89
Museum/Interpretive History/Education	
Housing/Resources for Homeless	
Restaurants/Retail	
Affordable Housing	
Arts/Theatre/Music	
The site should benefit the community	24
The site should not be preserved	18
The site should attract tourists	16
Concerns about redevelopment/reuse cost	11
Acknowledgement of County efforts	9
Preserving with sustainable methods	3
Concerns about area safety	3

Note: Figures in the chart indicate the number of responses, not participants.

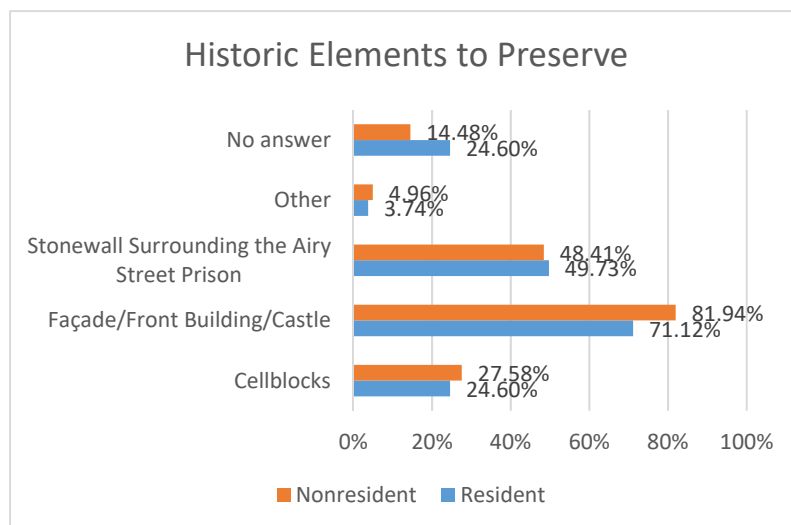
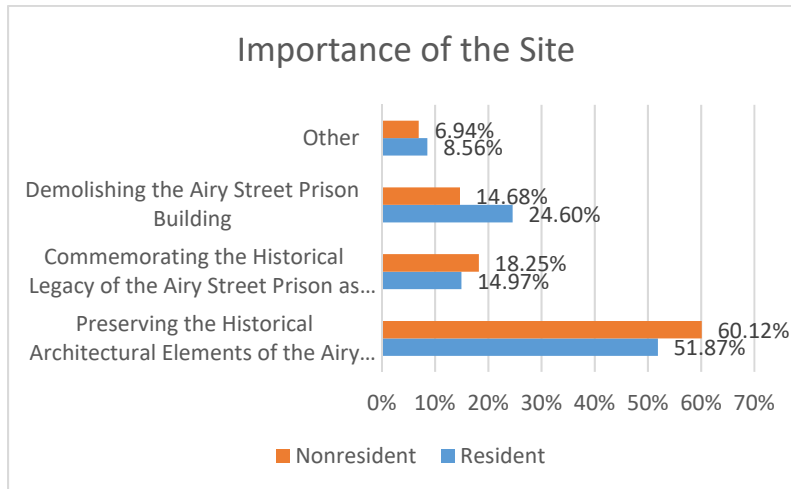
Almost half of the 220 open-comment responders stressed the importance of preserving the prison. Many saw it as a unique part of Norristown's character that could help revitalize the area and educate the public on the prison's history. They lamented that the potential demolition would result in another piece of historic fabric that Norristown has lost over the years. Participants believed the prison's architectural features were iconic, calling it a treasure and a gem that made Downtown Norristown stand out among other municipalities.

Many participants suggested additional use possibilities for the site. Similar to Question 9, the most common ideas were 'Museum/Interpretive History/Education' and 'Housing/Resources for Homeless', reflecting the importance of acknowledging the site's history and serving those in dire need. While public markets were not as frequently suggested as in Question 9, many mentioned 'Restaurants/Retail' as priorities. Some responders simply expressed that the site should benefit the surrounding community and not simply focus on generating revenue; others believed it could draw visitors to the area through Heritage Tourism.

Other participants did not believe the structure should be preserved, citing concerns about the potential cost to taxpayers, the prison's lack of aesthetic appeal and its unsavory history. Essentially, it would more worthwhile to demolish the site and start from scratch.

Cross-Reference Analysis

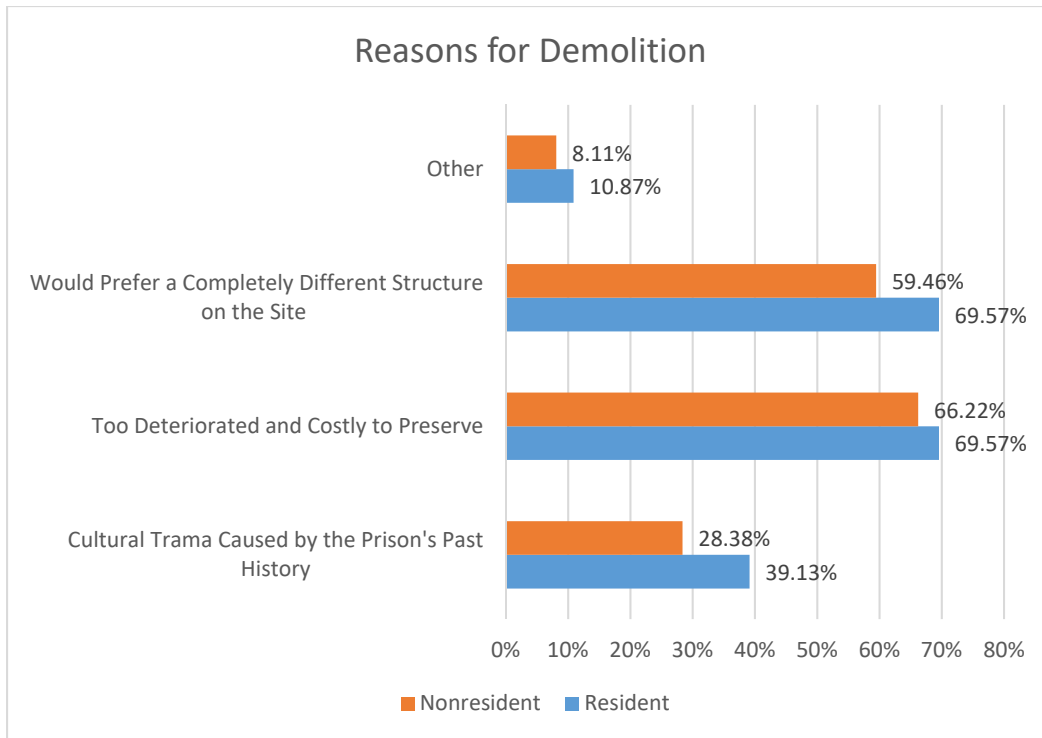
Residents vs. Nonresidents



Overall, the majority of Norristown residents and nonresidents supported preserving the Airy Street Prison. A similar percentage of residents and nonresidents (14% and 18%, respectively) wanted to commemorate the prison’s legacy. The biggest difference in perspectives was whether or not the prison should be demolished. Just 14% of nonresidents selected this option, while nearly a quarter of Norristown residents did.

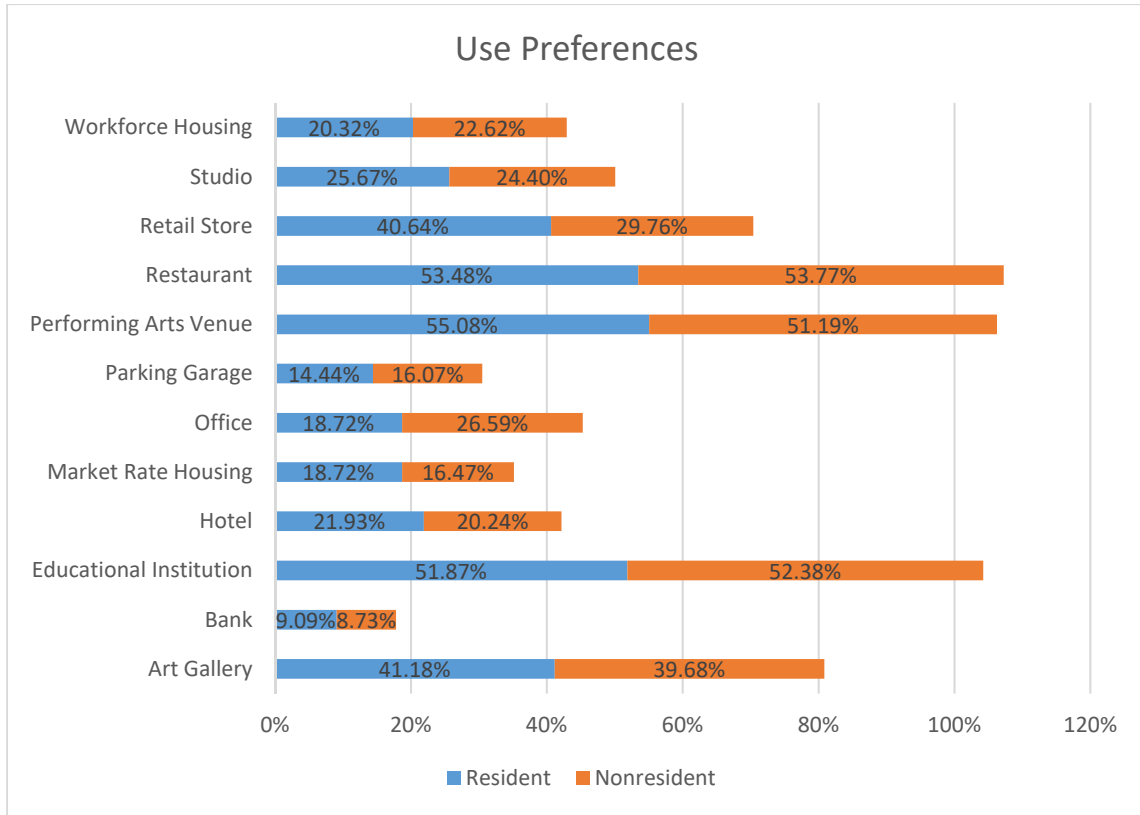
Most residents and nonresidents viewed the façade/front building/castle as the most important historic element to preserve. In addition, just under half of each group felt the stonewall surrounding the prison as significant. The cellblocks were viewed as the least important, and based on insight from the open-ended question (see sec iii) suggests that not every cell should necessarily be preserved.

Residents vs. Nonresidents (cont.)



Of the participants who selected demolition, both residents and nonresidents cited the potential cost to preserve the prison, and their preference for a different structure on the site as the primary reasons. Nearly 40% of residents believed that cultural trauma caused by the prison’s history was also a reason for the structure to be demolished, compared to 28% of nonresidents. This statistic highlights the potential difference in which residents and nonresidents view the historic structure.

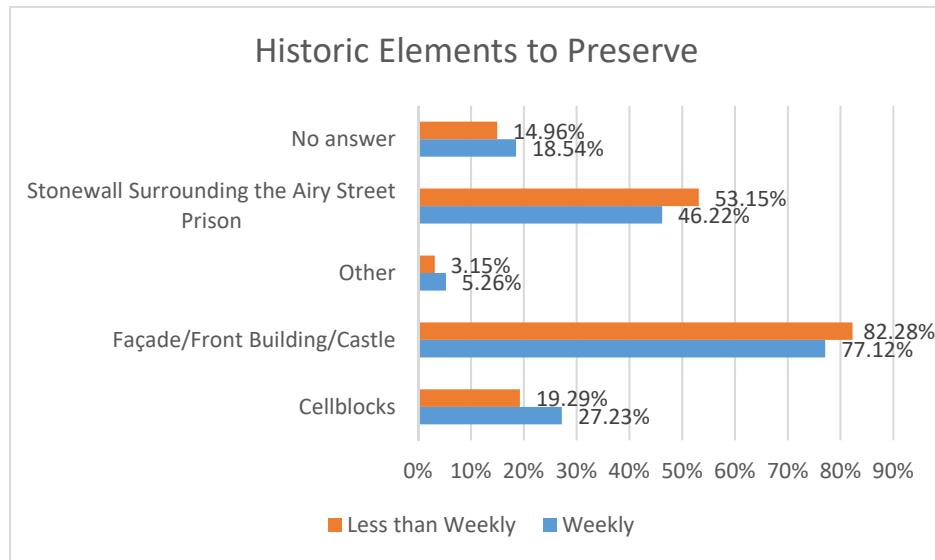
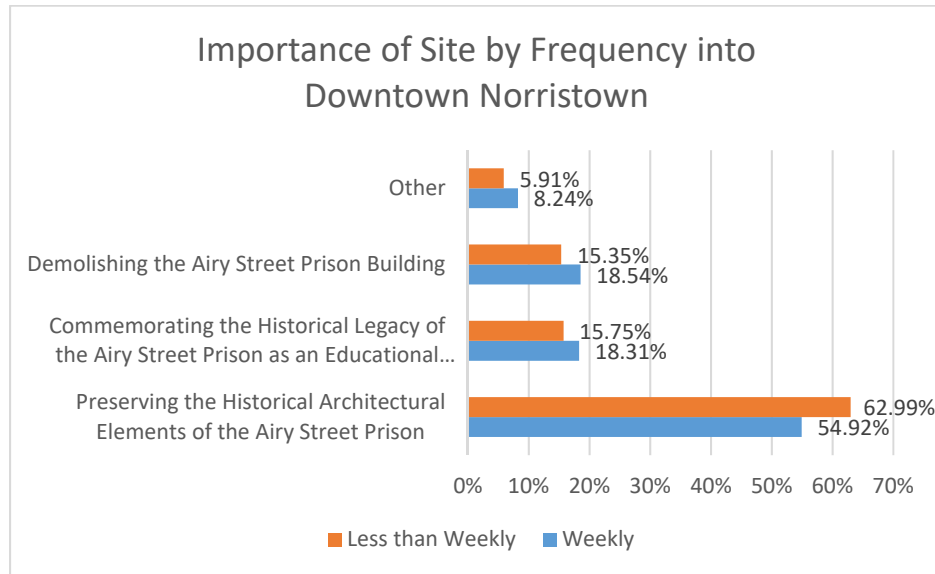
Residents vs. Nonresidents (cont.)



Many of the use preferences had similar levels of favorability among residents and nonresidents. Over half of both groups selected ‘Restaurant’, ‘Performing Arts Venue’, and ‘Educational Institution’ as potential options. Based on the open-ended comments, an educational institution could mean a museum exhibit for visitors to learn about the prison’s past. Both groups viewed banks and parking garages as their least favorite use.

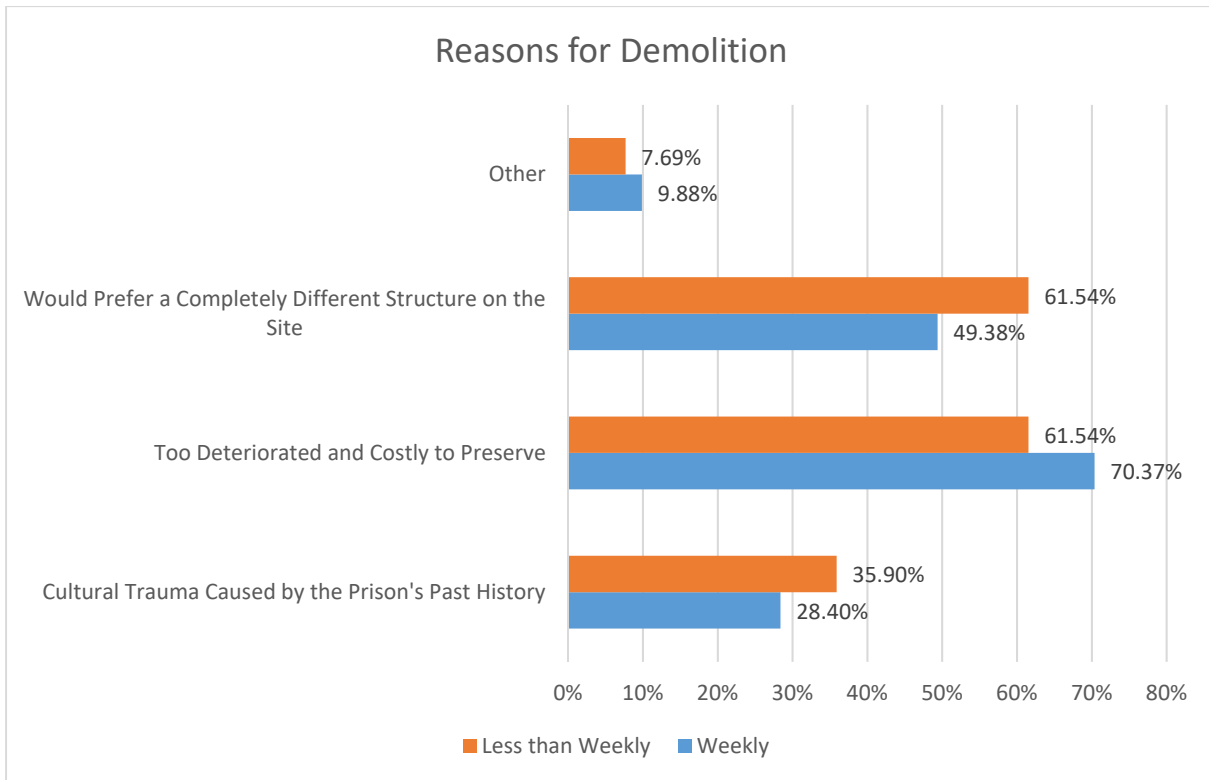
In terms of differences, more residents favored retail than nonresidents (40% and 29%, respectively), possibly reflecting Norristown inhabitants’ views on their present shopping options. Nonresidents favored an office as a potential use more so than residents (26% to 18%, respectively).

Weekly vs. Non-weekly



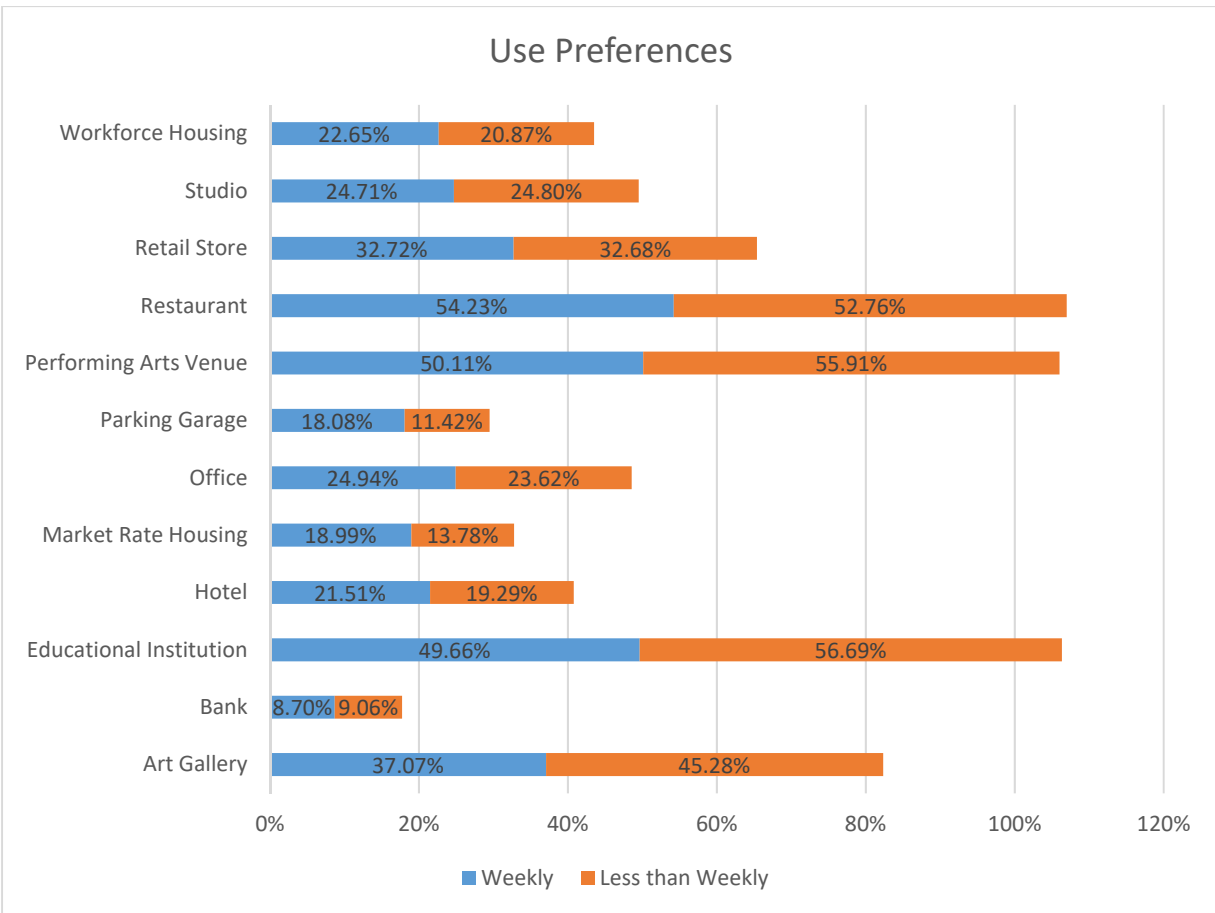
The responses were also cross-referenced by weekly vs non-weekly (or less than weekly) visitors to Downtown Norristown. In this case, weekly visitors likely were travelling downtown for work or to use County facilities, though not exclusively. There were no substantial differences among weekly and non-weekly visitors regarding the fate of the prison and which elements were most important to preserve. The majority of both groups wanted to preserve the prison and thought the façade/front building/castle was the most significant element to retain. As was the case with residents and nonresidents, both groups viewed the cellblocks as the least important historic element.

Weekly vs. Non-weekly (cont.)



Both weekly and non-weekly groups viewed the cost of preservation and their preference for a different structure on the site as the top reasons for demolishing the prison. A higher percentage of non-weekly travelers voted for a new structure on the site than did weekly travelers (61% and 49%, respectively). More non-weekly travelers (~36%) also believed cultural trauma caused by the prison's history justified demolishing the building.

Weekly vs. Non-weekly (cont.)



Weekly and non-weekly travelers selected similar use preferences, with patterns mirroring the residents and nonresidents analysis. The majority of both groups favored ‘Restaurant’ and ‘Performing Arts Venue’ as preferred uses. About 56% of non-weekly and just under half of weekly travelers favored an ‘Educational Institution.’ As was the case with residents and nonresidents, ‘Bank’ and ‘Parking Garage’ were the least favored preferences among each group.

In terms of differences, a higher percentage of non-weekly travelers (45%) selected ‘Art Gallery’ compared to weekly travelers (37%). Non-weekly travelers also favored an ‘Educational Institution’ more than weekly travelers did. Otherwise, there were no substantial differences in each groups’ use preference.

Race

When it comes to the future of the site, what is most important to you?				
	Commemorating the Historical Legacy of the Airy Street Prison as an Educational Opportunity	Demolishing the Airy Street Prison Building	Preserving the Historical Architectural Elements of the Airy Street Prison	Other
White or Caucasian (<i>n</i> = 552)	17.6%	14.3%	61.1%	7.1%
Black or African-American (<i>n</i> = 49)	14.3%	36.7%	34.6%	14.3%
Asian, Asian-American, Pacific Islander, Native Hawaiian, White or Caucasian (<i>n</i> = 10)	20.0%	30.0%	50.0%	0.0%
Native American or American Indian (<i>n</i> = 2)	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Hispanic or Latino (of any race) (<i>n</i> = 23)	17.4%	21.7%	60.9%	0.0%
Some other race (<i>n</i> = 44)	22.7%	13.6%	54.5%	9.0%
Multiracial (<i>n</i> = 11)	0.0%	63.6%	27.2%	9.0%

Some of the more divergent views regarding the fate of the prison were found in race. While over 60% of white respondents favored preserving the prison, only 34% of Black respondents did. Moreover, 36% of Black respondents wished to see the prison demolished, along with 30% of Asian participants, all Native American participants, 21% of Hispanic participants and 63% of multiracial participants. In comparison, only 14% of white respondents and 13% of those identifying as another race supported demolition.

Open-Ended Responses

Q4. What are your reasons for visiting Downtown Norristown? (*N* = 101)

Bike trail!
Commute
Commute Tues-Sat. from Transportation Center
Commuting through
Cycling
Drive
Drive thru weekly
driving through
Driving through
driving through
Driving through
I always pass by the Airy Street Prison area on my way to other locations in Montgomery County.
I drive through Norristown everyday to get to work,
I live one block over the border with West Norriton so I travel through about half the time I leave my apartment.
In route elsewhere
My route to work is through downtown
pass through during commute to work
Passing through
Passing through
SEPTA
Septa
Septa and cycling on the SRT
SEPTA issues when needed as CAC advisor
Trail
Train
Transportation
Travel
Traveling through norristown
traveling to other areas
travelling through
Use of the trail and Septa
Walking/Exercise, To go to SEPTA Station
West Norriton

Q5. When it comes to the future of this site, what is most important to you? (N = 51)

What the site could bring to the community
Utilizing the space for something useful
Using the space well
Using the property in a way that best serves the present population. Including decent AFFORDABLE HOUSING.
Using the building to help those who are struggling in our community
use of site for other uses to attract others to the area
Turning it into something beneficial for the residents
turn it into a flea market
Transforming the parcel into a space that provides a functional purpose, but also acknowledges the history of the prison if the building remains standing
To me it is of utmost priority that we honor this building by using it to help humanity. I feel it's a disgrace to continue to look the other way when we have so many homeless within our community.
There's enough construction and destruction and disruption in Norristown
The land use of the replacement development.
Serving the HOMELESS in Norristown
Save the facade and turn the site into an indoor farming/vertical farming facility.
Regardless of what is done with the site, my biggest concerns are any impact on parking, traffic, crime, and housing prices, in the area
Providing much needed housing and rehabilitation for the recovering addict/alcoholic women in the county
Productive use of the property and ensuring the building does not continue to look as dilapidated as it does.
Preserving the space and creating community use space for residents and nonprofits
Preserve the building and re-purpose it.
Preserve some of the old facade and turn it into some shops.
parking facilities
not taking away parking for County employees
Not sure
Me
Maximizing the use of a convenient and large site
mass incarceration
Making it useful
Making downtown Norristown nicer for residents and businesses
Keeping the existing parking lot next to the prison. Demolish the Airy Street Prison Building
Keep the facade but redevelop for other residential and business needs with a focus on preserving the character of the neighborhood at the streetscape level. This means not only Airy, but Marshal and Dekalb and integrating into St. Johns property, i.e. the prison wall must come down.y.
Keep it preserved and use it for occasions example Halloween do ghost tours

Q5 continued
It's a combination of preserving the historical architectural elements of the prison AND repurposing it for future productive use.
Indoor youth sports facility
Incorporating elements of the existing structure as a gateway to something new
Incorporate the facade and surrounding wall into affordable housing. And by the way, whatever happened to the mid-rise building over the parking lot next door? Or, put up the mid-rise and use the prison facade as part of an added parking garage.
I'm not sure that accessibility and the condition of existing structure make the project worthy of pursuing with tax payer funds
I want it to be used in a way that generates revenue for Norristown. Something that brings in tax money would likely make the most sense. If they can incorporate some of the architectural elements that would be a nice compromise, but I think we need to be practical
Housing
Homeless shelters
homeless shelter
homeless shelter
Finding a fiscally responsible way to use the location. The building is beautiful, but if it's not possible to find a way to preserve aspects of it in a way that makes budgetary sense, I would rather see the site be used for community development.
Employment, Revenue and Inclusion
cost
Commemorating & preserving as well as modern fusion
Both one and two, historical legacy and preserving the architectural elements
Being stewards of taxpayer funds, anything but demolition and redevelopment is subsidizing special interests of preservation which the Airy Prison is to far deteriorated to be worth saving without being a tax funded money pit.
Available parking in Downtown Norristown
A homeless shelter for all the homeless
A combination of "preserving the historical architectural elements" and adapting the site for new uses.
A career center for youth. A place where volunteer experts from both trade and professional fields teach/train Norristown youth for free. Computer lab with a aid to assist youth with resume and cover letter construction.

Q6. What historic elements should be maintained? (N = 32)

A clean safe harbor facility to sleep and bathe for the Homeless who live and wander in the area
A collection of bricks, with a informative summary of what the building used to be.
Absolutely Must Preserve Facade, Front Building, Castle no matter what the use. If possible every effort should be made to save cellblock area and stonewall.
all
all of it
Also the green space between the sidewalk and the facade.
Anything inside as I have never been that should be
arched roof and skylights, brick and stone masonry
Cell blocks are important but do we need ALL of them
conserve as much of the original exterior as possible for reuse and esthetics
Entire structure/facade
Historical Areas and Methods areas, Solitary, Kitchens, Guard Towers, Underground Tunnel to Courthouse
HISTORY, BUILDING BUILT BY HAND
I don't care about preserving any of the building.
I think it should be preserved as it has been part of the history of montgomery county and our judicial system. It should be a historical site and opened to the public for a museum and education purposes.
Keep portion of cell blocks for mixed use- explore similar use national examples
None
Not familiar with enough to know or care
Nothing, demolish completely and install an historic bronze educational placquard.
Offer regular and paranormal tours To bring in revenue
Parking
parking lot or build a garage
Preserve enough of the entire building to be a museum/haunted attraction to attract visitors
site walls on airy street plus portion of cells and surrounding wall
Something that allows for the commemoration of those who suffered injustices there
The space and history of the use of the building
The whole building
Unsure
Use as public park, greenspace for community gatherings. Less concrete in the area
Using the building for the youth of the community. I was born and raised in Norristown and used to go to the YMCA and YWCA both were Historical building that helped me develop and learn skills growing up but Both Building were Torn down. Need to keep this building and use it for a place youth can go and learn things.
We all know they don't build em like they used to. Take the space & make it something beautiful
we can preserve the history without the decaying building

Q7. What are the reasons for demolition? (N = 11)

Am not convinced that keeping frontispiece of building would contribute to anything.
Area could use more parking. County employees have to park at markley and penn when they could park across from the court house
Community park
Do not want tax dollars going towards this project. I will be shocked if the structural assessment doesn't show how dangerous this structure looks to be
ineffectual for purpose
It's an eye sore. Get rid of it and make the land usable.
Norristown has bigger issues which need a higher budget priority than the preservation of this building.
The city of Norristown needs a lift. In my opinion, a castle facade isn't going to do that for us. Especially when we all know what that castle used to be.
The model of preservation, as used in Philly with Eastern State Penitentiary, provides a modestly interesting Halloween exhibit and some people used to come for the tours, but that small benefit is massively offset by the harm to the community from the blighted building which is a dark hole in the community [no residential activity, no restaurants, no people - just a dark blighted building that people avoid in the day and really avoid at night]. The people of Norristown will thrive more with attractive, liveable, community development than with a dark blighted prison building.
There is nothing to preserve when speaking of incarceration there is nothing to celebrate
Would rather see a green space as originally discussed. My priority is listening to actual residents of the area and not those who have a dream of a "castle"

Q9. What specific use(s) would you like to see? (N = 209)

Informational office providing updates as well as promoting cultural events in the County Seat of Montgomery County.
Theatre
I would like to see a few small restaurants/outdoor space for Montgomery County employees and residents to utilize.
Employee cardiovascular fitness center
Youth sports facility for locals of Norristown and surrounding areas (batting cages, pitching mounds, pickleball courts for adults/seniors, etc.)
Anything that the public can use would be great!
Benefit the community through space for the arts while preserving the architectural wonders and as an opportunity to educate about the history of the building and justice reform. Use Eastern State as a model/partner
Incorporate the front of the prison and work around into a public spacing/parking with grass and tree area
small parks, community gardens
County offices
move other government offices closer to courthouse
Montco Offices that can use the tunnel to the Courthouse
None. Demolishing it.
it should be left alone
what about looking at eastern state penitentiary and how they preserved that jail? make it a historical destination for tourists and then in the fall, also have a haunted prison to generate additional revenue from locals and tourists alike. OR what about a food hall? an event venue - when not in use for performing arts, allow space to be rented for events like weddings and business events.
Museum/archives--as in a new home for the Historical Society of Montgomery County. A mixed-use project would be best, and workforce housing is critically needed. What about a food hall?
Museum or attraction space
Museum or attraction like Eastern State Penitentiary with restaurants, escape rooms, indoor miniature golf...
MUSEUM OF AIRY ST PRISON HISTORY (SIMILAR TO EASTERN STATE)
Museum for the county and towns within the county. Highlight famous people, famous court cases...
Museum display
Museum about the history of montgomery county. I know the county has a historical society that does a great job, but a county musuem would be phenomenal. Many other counties have a designated museum, whether run independently by a historical society or run by the county.
MUSEUM or TOURIST ATTRACTION
Museum
Museum
Museum

Q9 continued
museum
Museum
Museum
Museum
Museum
Museum
leave as a historical site for tourism
Keep the facade. Use a portion for the history/welcome center for Norristown. Redevelop the rest. Something to attract visitors.
Jerry Spinelli wrote the book, The Warden's Daughter, about the county prison. As an important piece of the historical preservation it would provide a point of interest to young people and have educational value as well.
History museum
Historical Visitors' Center to be staffed by the Historical Society of Montgomery County.
Historical Visitor Center area staffed by the Historical Society of Montgomery County
Historical site similar to Eastern State
Historical landmark
Historic site/museum interpreted and open to public
To be used as a historic opportunity for people to learn about the brutality that was and continues to exist in American prisons. A living museum aspect of this historic building could be run in a way similar to the London Dungeon, where visitors see recreations of the horrors inflicted by the justice system.
something similar to the National Gallery of Art Sculpture Garden in Washington DC
Slavery Museum
Public tours with history knowledge. Charge a small fee.
Incorporate historical aspects of the prison (displays, etc)
Fix it up and use it as a walk through and give tours for a decent price.
Educational museum
As a museum & historic site with educational mission focusing on both the history of criminal justice and future of reforms.
Venue location for The Historical Society of Montgomery County PA
montco hist. society is a good fit. the large 1890s structure is a BIG easily usable space
Event venue with tours of prison (Like Eastern State Penn) or Homeless housing/emergency shelter (Like CHOC) (Collaboration with Hospitality Center and MontCo OHCD/HHS?)
Please do not allow any restaurant or retail store in the prison. Should be used for historical education of Norristown's history, as well as an open space for the public to congregate
Museum of Morristown including prison
Walk through tour destination, like the old prison in Jim Thorpe.
Use it like Eastern State Pen
positive & negative differences between Airy St. Prison as a suburban prison as compared to Eastern State on which it is modeled.
Use as a Historic Site that people will want to visit and tour. Similar to the Old Jail Museum in Jim Thorpe, PA.
Tours through the old prison

Q9 continued
Whatever the use, it should respect the sensitive and complex history of the site
Partially Preserved Historical Site/Partial Redevelopment.
I would like to see a mixed use facility with an educational element like a museum on the history of the county and Norristown. It could also be used to generate additional tourism through hall rental or holiday events
Mixed use that reflects greater culture of Norristown and Montco. Should be mixed use complex and affordable housing should be absolutely included (specifically address senior populations most specifically that will embrace this) - could even be condo type. with those Seniors making investment along with retail and arts to underwrite some of cost and welcome youth and others (arts will address education also)
Would love to see this site turned into a market place for local artists and vendors...year round shops inside the prison and a seasonal (or year round!) farmer's market in the parking lot space. This would attract visitors as well as provide a source of fresh local produce and products for residents in walking distance.
Would like to see at a minimum the facade preserved but the wall along the side street looks solid and highly desirable to be included in final disposition. . Don't know enough about viable spaces behind the facade to suggest uses. But the one footprint could accomodate several uses including the eternal carpark.
mixed use. firestation may take up too much of the site.
mixed use residential/commercial, public outdoor space, focus on neighborhood walkability
Mixed use including some open space
mixed use facility that is accessible by public, provides retail and homes
Mixed use development: residential including subsidized housing, retail, food/beverage, possibly hotel
mixed use- a place to live, work, eat, and play
Mixed Use - Small village with market, apartments, hotel
Mixed Use
Marketplace, worship center, historical center
A mixed use building would be nice... a cafe, some subsidized apartments and some short term rentals maybe?
Preserve the castle part. Build a 5 story townhouse/condo for professionals. They will revitalize the area, not low priced housing.
Turn it back into a jail, for small offenses and/or a holding facility for greater offenses who will be transferred to Eagleville or Graterford correctional facilities.
income-assisted housing or an all-inclusive homeless shelter
homeless shelter, affordable housing for low-income households, something to benefit communities most affected by the American justice system
Would love to incorporate the architecture into a new - lower cost- housing. Maybe transition housing or group housing for homeless or those with limited income.
Low-income housing or residential shelter
I'm wondering if a part of it can be converted to homeless shelters and other parts could be for housing county services that deal with homelessness - shelter, food, clothing, medical, mental health....
I'd like to see it turned into a Homeless Shelter

Q9 continued
Housing for the homeless
Housing for the homeless
Housing for homeless and poor
Housing fir the HOMELESS
Homelessness
Homeless Shelter
Homeless shelter
Homeless Shelter
Homeless shelter
homeless shelter
Homeless housing
Homeless housing
Homeless housing
facility for homeless
A space to accommodate the homeless
A homeless shelter
What I'd really like to see is it be turned into temporary or transitional housing for our unhomed population.
Outreach Center/Shelter for our homeless population
Underprivileged resources
Resources for mental health/substance use & homelessness.
Low income housing or emergency shelter for the county shelter that was closed down.
Emergency shelter
Green Space. none of the above
Green space
Beer garden or outdoor space, a "third place"
Market, business incubator space
Potential Reading Terminal Type Venue / Broad Street Market (Harrisburg)
Something like what Doylestown, Quakertown, Ambler,Phoenixville etc has done with renovating abandoned historical properties for "market type" development. Think Reading Terminal Market.
Multi use like Reading Terminal or Ponce markets
Market—similar to reading terminal, Ardmore farmers market, have retailers rent booths and have food, art,, drinks and seating.
Food/retail court similar to Reading Terminal Market or art/restaurant/studio/retail space similar to Cherry Street Pier
food court like Reading Terminal Market (can be visited every day, unlike a concert hall); can include small stages for musicians (see nashvillefarmersmarket.org). Also some educational displays about the history of the prison and mistreatment of minorities (was not always people of color). Bok Building in Phila has a large variety of uses (buildingbok.com/about). Also things that the nearby community can use--rooms for teaching English, computers available to the public (lcnlit.org/). Seems to me there is plenty of housing nearby.
a town center with shops and restaurants
Farmers market

Q9 continued
flea market
A mini mall of local vendors
I would like the front of the building to be used as a year round farmer's market (2 floors). A farmer's market would serve people that live and work in the community not to mention, local farmers. The back of the building could be reconstructed as apartments and garage space. There is a need for reasonable housing in the area.
Event venue.
Conference center; event space
Schooling for students within the district to receive more supports
Maybe Montgomery County Community College
spanish-language education courses
Trade school for 18+ with cafeteria and offices
During rehab phase use site for trade skills training in all fields -- utilities, masonry, etc. plus offer public programs in home repair and preservation.
adult education classes, Spanish and English classes, GED programs etc.
Free or very cheap co-work shared space.
A space for a community garden
Community Center for under privileged children and/or adults (Safe spaces to go). Community Gardens with educational programs. Fitness Center/Pool with programs to maintain a healthy lifestyle.
We are the county seat - partner with the Norristown Area School District for after school opportunities for children. Also, add a multicultural space and possible soccer field. Consider a pool.
I think it should be developed as a educational/recreational facility where children and families have a place to gather and be enriched. A book store, a childcare center, a beautiful garden, a pond, etc is needed to provide a sanctuary for the community.
Community Center for the residents, possibly housing and services for the homeless, possibly a medical center
I would love to see a community center with nature park/community garden, able to be utilized for events, some kind of connection to the justice center, dropoff/pickup location for group/community trips
Make it a YWCA and YMCA for youth of Norristown
Community Center
Community use
community space
Community type building; serving many uses to bring new people to town of course for our Norristown Citizens.
Community space and interpretive elements about the history of the building and its site for education
DAYCARE AND GYM
Childcare services for county employees
We need more business!!!
A business that will provide the MOST TAX REVENUE to Norristown. However, include adequate parking spaces in order to encourage visitors.

Q9 continued
Whatever will allow for a large amount of private (and public?) investment to be pumped into the site.
For when downtown Main Street ever gets redeveloped
brewery?
Brewery or concert venue
A boutique hotel or some sort of retail marketplace that would bring visitors from outside the borough and from the King of Prussia mall.
There are 3 uses I can think of that I have seen other buildings like this get transformed into. 1) A community market space (torpedo factory Alexandria VA) - could become a focal point of Norristown and a place people go to for shows, arts, retail etc 2) A museum dedicated to the history of Norristown itself 3) Most needed in this county and Norristown low income housing/homeless shelter - however I am not sure with the past use of the building that it would be the best use of this particular space
MULTIPURPOSE SPACE ALLOWING FOR THE PRESERVATION OF THE HISTORICAL AND EDUCATIONAL ASPECTS, WHILE ALSO ALLOWING FOR A COMMERCIAL SIDE (COMMUNITY ART STUDIO AND CAFE) TO BRING IN THE MONEY NEEDED FOR UPKEEP.
"Studio" should be defined, but if you mean something akin to a maker space, then yes. If Retail Store would include fresh foods (farm market, etc.), then yes, or make that a separate category, especially if it can include lunchtime offerings, similar to the Reading Terminal Market.
I'd like to see resident artist studios for working artists including space for student art classes on the upper levels with the best light available. On the lower level(s), I'd like to see shops that host wares from artists, maybe as rotating exhibits as well. If the courtyard remains open, it would be interesting to see food trucks that are more permanent with seating all around. I think the parking would be necessary, with the potential to have a multi-level parking area. If a food truck food court were not a possibility, then I think the courtyard should remain open for open air markets with rotating vendors. Of course, the courtyard could become enclosed with a glass ceiling to allow as much natural light in as possible and give it an outdoor vibe. I feel like it could have a creative environment and lead to a widespread feeling that exists in Conshohocken and Phoenixville. But parking is key to the success.
No additional parking is needed. Please do not require parking minimums for any development - this will lead to less useful and tax generating space, less environmentally friendly, and less people-centric. I would even recommend developing some of the existing parking next to the prison to more usable, non-parking space.
Indoor/vertical farming.
Not just workforce housing: You have a lot of folks in that county who are experiencing considerable housing insecurity. Low income housing is much needed.
Low to moderate income housing
Education and affordable housing
Attainable or affordable housing
Affordable housing. Montgomery County has no affordable mid range priced housing. It is either luxury or cockroach. Very few nice apartments that are truly affordable for working people that don't make a lot of money; ie county jobs!

Q9 continued
Affordable Housing, Homeless shelter, Youth activities establishment
Strip Club
We need more good, affordable food options close to the courthouse.
green space/park with basketball courts
Grocery store.
Food store for city folks
Library/History site
Performing Arts Venue has an upscale sound to it. We have two theaters. What we need is live music and a venue that can have both concerts and a showbar environment. At street level we need multi-purpose spaces for mixed-use. Parking can be immediately above the first floor as a sound barrier with housing above. Residential units should be above that and here is where I have a potentially original idea, the housing should be co-op. There can be rental units mixed with owners, but a co-op is the way to keep the slumlords out.
That be a pretty amazing music venue to walk up to or a hotel that be interesting
I would like to see it as a destination site. Perhaps a music venue, a museum, an art gallery, a fabulous restaurant, or a great food court.
Concert venue
It would be nice to have a few more options for lunch, coffee, gathering that are safe and aesthetically pleasing while visiting the courthouse
Use it as a market space for local vendors to utilize year round
Crisis unit
MontCo visitors center
Low rent marketplace for food and hard goods, Historical Society Museum, coffee shop and event space, music venue and small space rentals for meetings, parties and conventions.
Apartments; Wedding Venue
New large central fire station for Norristown fire Department
Firehouse
Fire station
Fire Station
Fire house
Relocate Library here
Anything but wasting taxpayer funds on misguided preservation of a deteriorated non efficient crumbling structure
Specifically NOT parking
Open Space
Some part of the site should be preserved as open space
Paranormal tours
Paranormal investigation
tours ghost and other
Park/playground
Park
Outdoor community space
A park/open space

Q9 continued
A park that might use some elements of the structure similar to “The Ruins” at Holiday Park in Indianapolis which has family space and water features
Parking is sparse enough for county employees. to get rid of the spaces underneath the courthouse and then get rid of the airy street parking lot would be a burden on all employees.
I am worried about parking if more county offices move to the Justice Center.
County employees shouldn't have to park so far away from work
Park
anything that preserves the architecture and gives the public access
The property should be preserved. Our history as a community should not be preserved both the positive and negative. Norristown needs to create something that will draw people down town. It is unfortunate that norristown is the only county seat in the surrounding area that is not thriving.
Something to attract tourists and locals to the area
Preserve it for renovations
Recovery based housing for women just out of a rehab facility or jail to be able to concentrate on their recovery by working a proven program and to get back on their feet by teaching them how to maintain a job, household and recovery
Should be a recreational center with a complete gym, free weights, bar bells, treadmills, bikes. And should also have a full basketball court with multiple baskets that resembles a nice high school coach
Rec gym for kids

Q10. If you have any additional comments, please share them below! (N = 220)

A few years ago I contacted the national preservation of historic sites and they informed me of other cities turned their properties into hotels and restaurants. It would become a draw for people
A prison mueseum would have to compete with Eastern State Penitentiary for business. The cost of repairing it and the cost of operating it as a mueseum would make it unlikely to ever be anything but a tax burden.
A space where people could come during breaks from court to work, eat, have coffee as well as a few good retail shops would be great. Similar to other county seats.
A well run women's recovery house is lacking in our county. There are many women looking for an opportunity to live better lives and just need a little help in achieving that. These are women that can be better employees, mothers, wives and members of society if they are just given a chance. The prison building is large enough to house women and provide learning areas for how to be independent. I realize this is outside of the budget but we would be investing in the future of the county and the children that are affected by not having a healthy mother in their lives.
All through Montco I see luxury apartment communities going up. Recently while having to obtain an apartment (due to foreclosure) I found it EXTEMELY difficult to find housing within my budget. Every month the prices went up and these were not nice properties by any means.
Anything but parking!
Assaults/robberies happen in the area frequently and more attention needs to be given to this. Tourists and visitors will not come if there continue to be assaults/robberies of pedestrians . Also parking is really limited and until pedestrian safety is addressed there needs to be large parking garage to support increased visitors to the area
Attainable housing should be looked at as a viable use.
Beautiful structure
Buildings arent made like they used to. Just look at the new justice center and then look at that castle style prison. Keeping Norristown beautiful is by keeping the old architecture alive. This building should have been maintained all along.
Can some funds be raised by community events or fundraisers?
Community center with residential apartments and performing arts, with small artisan workshop studios
Demolishing the old prison would be a very visual reminder of everything that is wrong with govt in general and more specifically montgomery county and norristown!!!!
Do not give in to a LOUD minority. They do not speak for the people you represent.
Don't demo the building.
Don't feel passionate about this building one way or the other. Agree with others on need for homeless housing.
Don't listen to special interests and not waste tax payer funds on preservation and let developers determine best use as Norristown needs more re-investment and not preservation employees and visitors of courthouse need more parking opportunities
Erasing a historical landmark does not erase the history. It is ignorant to assume it will. Human nature is that if something potentially historically offensive is removed we will forget it and that should not happen.

Q10 continued
Follow the examples of other counties that preserved their old, 19th century prisons-Jim Thorpe-educational. Doylestown-Art gallery/venue location. Owego, NY-Restaurant/bar. Eastern State-educational/museum/entertainment venue.
Get the homelessness ppl off the streets
Glad it was not torn down! The building is historic, and unique to Norristown.
God, I wish I had gotten this a few years ago. The architecture of this building is extremely unique to Norristown. It is also very close to the courthouse. The Archives should never have been moved to Eagleville. The Archives needed to be separated from the criminal files also housed in the same building on Old Arch St. The prison needed to be gutted inside and remodeled; updated, the works leaving the shell alone. The space between the building and wall could have been an indoor / outdoor eatery and walkway with gardens. And the damn criminal records should have been moved to this building. No one can answer my question as to why the archives and criminal records are housed together. One has absolutely nothing to do with the other and it stretches staff very thin, favoring the criminal records. Then one has the carriers that must drive back and forth to get the criminal records...another needless expense if one had used the prison for criminal records,etc. I also want to say what a horrible disappointment it was when IT took over The Archives. Thousands of priceless historic papers and books have disappeared never to be seen again. Digitization of all papers is so not the answer!
Grew up and went to school in Norristown area and always interested in prison property. Would love to see it reused.
Homeless shelter is needed in Norristown
Homeless shelter with all the people in Norristown
Housing will not be affordable, so that is why I do not think that is a good use.
I am a community redevelopment consultant that has done this in the past in Quakertown, Doylestown, West Chester, Media, State College, Lansdale, Ambler, Ebensburg, Colledgeville, Easton and Phoenixville. If you build it they WILL come.
I believe either a safe harbor for Homeless or a housing workplace will be bene
I believe that the Airy Street Prison should be redeveloped for the youth of Norristown in the form of a youth sports facility as well as adults/seniors wellness center for things like Pickleball and exercise. Putting in batting cages, pitching mounds, basketball nets, fitness equipment to get kids active...this would bring the kids together in a safe environment and give them an opportunity to grow socially and physically without negative distractions presently impeding them.
I believe the county has NOT spent \$\$ on this site for so long that they have a duty to abate haz-mats and structurally stabilize the parts that are to be kept, and restore the castle on Airy St.
I believe too much is being destroyed and not enough preserved.
I do not live in Norristown and I have not visited, so I did not know about this building. If this was an attraction (museum, haunted history tour) I would have definitely visited the area. I like the look of the building. If it can be saved it will be a great venue.
I feel very strongly that no tax dollars should be used to resurrect the old prison. If a private foundation or entity were to take on the project, they I think that would be worth looking at. Thank you.

Q10 continued

I grew up in Norristown and my Father Robert Heil Sr was born in Norristown. My Grandfather Earl Heil was born in Norristown.

I think it is Very important to preserve protect and reuse this important piece of Norristown history.

I grew up walking past the back yard of the jail on my way to St. Pat's. I remember picking up the pinky balls that came over the wall. It allowed me as a child to think about those behind the walls as people with human dignity, playing outdoors.

I have always wanted to know the history of the Prison. There is something about it that every time I pass it I want to know more information about it!

I have been a professional historic preservationists for over 45 years. I am also a keen proponent of urban vitality. Historic architectural fabric always helps define community and helps revitalize neighborhoods and cities. The Airy street prison is a vital part of Norristown.

I have lived in Norristown for over forty years, and I believe that this historic site could be the catalyst to enabling downtown Norristown to thrive again. Within 3 blocks of the prison two new apartment developments are already being proposed, and going through the approval process. Another developer is also proposing an apartment complex on Main St. I believe that saving the prison, and reusing the prison is of the utmost importance to Norristown becoming a thriving County seat like the other County seats in our area. Please save our prison so all those new residents in those new apartments will be able to appreciate our history, and enjoy it's incredible architecture.

I hope that there is a community of builders/funders/philanthropists, who can come together and provide a safe, nourishing, and peaceful place for the residents of Norristown at this historic site where so much space is available and should not go to waste.

I hope that you consider something like the repurposed torpedo factory in Alexandria. I think a space dedicated to arts and retail could become a draw for Norristown. I think Norristown needs a space like this to continue its revitalization.

I just work in Norristown, so I would be fine with whatever decision is made for the site as long as it benefits the residents and is what they want. Not Norristown Borough Council but the residents.

I like to preserve history in the area.

I realize that what to do with the prison has become a bit of a debate, but it seems more efficient to make have something new built on that lot. A key thing to remember is that the only people that would've signed the petition in the first place are the ones that wanted it to stay; there was not a "demolish the prison" petition because that was the plan that was already in motion.

If it does have to stay it could make a good site for a farmer's market. If not I think we need to focus more on assisting the homeless in Norristown.

I really don't care. Leave me alone

I ride my bike along the SRT often and the number of unhoused people seems to continually increase. Plans to build a shelter in the community would be welcome.

I think costs of demolition vs. preservation/improvements are top consideration.

Q10 continued

I think it's important to preserve parts of the building, not necessarily on-site there, make sure that it is easily accessible to the public to learn our local history especially as it pertains to policing, criminal justice, and institutionalized racism

I think our county should renovate it and make it into a haunted attraction. Teaches history while in a fun setting for kids, families, and young adults. Let's make norristown unique again, not just another parking garage for the courthouse.

Preserve norristown's history which is all but gone while bringing in revenue and a unique attraction in the area. When not in Halloween season, can conduct tours. Use it a training ground for correctional officers and sheriffs. They did this exact thing at the West Virginia state penitentiary in Moundsville WV. Tours, haunted attraction, and training ground for their annual mock prison riot training/conference. Bring is outsiders in the area which will bring revenue.

If not this, just please keep it in some way, it's very unique and you have an opportunity to have something in norristown that is fun, attracts outsiders, and puts it back on the map. Norristown is only known for going to the courthouse. There is nothing attracting.

I think there is a unique opportunity to preserve the prison as an educational site. Similar to how we maintain site that we used in the Underground Railroad.

Educational Value: The prison can serve as a powerful educational tool, teaching visitors about the history of racial inequities in the justice system. By understanding the past, society can work to prevent similar injustices in the future.

Memorialization: Preserving the prison allows for the commemoration of those who suffered injustices there. It can become a place of reflection and remembrance, honoring the lives impacted by racial discrimination.

Tourism and Economic Benefits: Historic sites often attract tourists, which can benefit the local economy. A preserved prison can be part of a larger heritage tourism initiative, drawing visitors interested in history and social justice.

Community Engagement: The site can become a focal point for community engagement and dialogue about race, justice, and equity. It can host events, discussions, and exhibits that promote understanding and reconciliation.

I think this is a wonderful and inspiring piece of architectural design history that adds thought provoking educational value and interest to Norristown.

Q10 continued

I think uses that can be consumed by the courthouse workforce/visitors like restaurants -- which Norristown desperately needs -- or office space will be successful. I don't know what the local residents want or need, not even sure how stable they are. There seems to be a lot of transients. While I'd like to see beauty like the arts or something, I don't think that will generate the revenue to sustain itself. And as I answered earlier, PLEASE do not take away more parking for the employees and visitors. That lot is full every day. Cherry Street and Main Street garages are packed with VERY narrow spaces, hard to navigate. Safe, weatherproof parking was already taken away from the CH employees and I just feel the need to advocate for us. As a court stenographer, I come in early, work late -- sometimes REALLY late if I'm doing daily copy or waiting with a jury -- and Norristown is scary at night. Pretending it's not is not caring for the employees who are here after dark, especially since we were not considered during the Justice Center remodel. I think keeping it a business use is best. Thank you.

I think you should make it a YMCA and YWCA for youth of Norristown, a place they can go to learn new skills and education assistance.

I understand that the county cannot commit funding for the prison reuse, but it can lend its support should a developer want to seek funding from other sources, such as the commonwealth and the federal government. Also, assuming the building is on the National Register, it would be eligible for Historic Tax Credits (a la Divine Lorraine Hotel and many other examples).

I visited Norristown last fall specifically to see the ex-prison. Contrary to the opinions thrown around, it looked quite solid to me. And i was delighted to see the elements of a historic district including the law offices around the corner on the courthouse street, the courthouse itself, the Episcopal diocese office. And also noteworthy are the WPA frescos directly across from Airy St Prison ! i never see them mentioned in commentary, Alltogether that whole neighborhood plus the church a bit down from the ex-prison form a cohesive district. I think many towns and small cities in Pennsylvania would be quite envious ! Wishing that a workable solution will result. d l

I work at Dekalb & Airy, across from the prison. The neighborhood has a bad reputation, as you are well aware. That will have to be overcome to attract visitors from outside the immediate area. Parking will be helpful for them as well as for the 4 churches that currently use the county lot at Dekalb & Airy. Thank you for soliciting public opinion!

I work in the criminal justice field and visits to old prisons are a great way for people to learn about our history and how it informs today's practices. I hope the prison is saved, at least the front castle portion and hopefully the cells. If it is demolished, it should not be turned into a parking lot.

I would like to see an educational/museum type place that show cases the history of Montgomery county including Norristown. Since it's in the middle of downtown it would be very easily accessible to all kinds of people.

I would like to see it used in a productive way that benefits the community by either bringing in revenue and attracting people to visit that area for cultural or community purposes, or else in a way that contributes to helping the public. If it could be turned into a beautiful space to help house or temporarily house the displaced homeless, I would be ok with that too.

I would like to see the facade preserved and build a new venue behind it for music/concert/event presentations, with adjacent parking. A restaurant/bar would be nice to have too if there is room

I would love to see this turned into modern amenities while still preserving the history and architecture. Reading Terminal Market meets Eastern State Penitentiary

I would prefer the market to determine the best use for the property.

Q10 continued
I've seen old City Hall's transformed into City Hotels across PA and think it would be a welcome historic addition to our county seat.
I'd like to see the the facade and outer elements preserved but a tenant going in there, even if it was a parking lot.
I'd love to see a future project that brings additional value and revenue to our downtown. I'd also like to see that the local community and long time residents can also benefit from its presence
I'd love to see the space used to provide a gathering/community space for the public.
I'd love to see this architectural gem become a destination with all or part of the space used as a museum. I do historical work in both Montgomery and Chester Counties, and the fact that we don't have the same level of public-facing space as Chesco seems like an urgent disparity, given Montco's history and resources.
If people want to retain the structure, sell to a private developer and they can do whatever they want with it. Do not waste tax payers dollars preserving this building.
i'm really glad the jail has been saved from demolition. with its size, there are a number of things that could be done to preserve the building and contents
Is it possible to make it a shopping and restaurant area for families? You have a parking lot. The last thing Norristown needs is an office building and a cell phone store. Since the County owns it why not charge \$1 rent for merchants and restaurants for 5 years? It doesn't generate revenue now. You could pull in taxes etc. Use the front as a main entrance with a mini police station there. Most people don't go into Norristown because of worry about getting mugged. You could have a secure safe area that could grow out the surrounding area.
it is a magnificent landmark
It seems shortsighted to make a retail space that wont profit or survive due to most of the businesses being closing after 5 PM at night.
It should also have facade or architectural lighting to showcase the structure at night.
It should be affordable housing with capped rent
It would be a perfect location for a museum
It would be a shame to demolish such a part of Norristown's landscape. The building is rare and historic.
It would be an unfortunate loss for Montgomery County if the building was torn down.
It would be great for this beautiful building to be preserved and accessible to the public so that all of us who live in and frequent Norristown can come by, enjoy the area, and support local business!
It would be nice to have a destination of some sort that anchors arts hill to be a bookend to the schuylkill trail building at Lafayette street. A movie theatre would be a good use for the adjacent site. It could use the 1890s building for one screen at least.
It would definitely be nice to fix up the area, my suggestion is the space be used for the children, maybe a splash pad park or a park that people can come to & play & be safe within the community. Be a gathering space for events etc.
It's a piece of history, should fix it up, add some shops, information about its history, and maybe a restaurant that could be an old prison theme
It's time for Norristown to rise from the ashes and prosper like our surrounding communities. Stop being the eye sore and dumping grounds for rentals and low income housing!!!
Its a beautiful building on the outside and the stone wall adds a lot of character to the area. I would hate to see a city ruin a unique feature for something as pedestrian as a parking garage or office building.

Q10 continued
It's a pretty building I hate seeing buildings like that dissappear. Reconfigure the inside but please keep the outside
It's a travesty you are thinking about demolishing the building completely. Please repurpose it. I know in other areas they are repurposing old banks into restaurants and wedding venues and that has proven to be very successful
It's about preserving Norristown's iconic skyline. The prison's aesthetic resembles and connects to other old buildings in the county. Yet makes Norristown stand out due to the unique architecture.
It's been decrepit for decades, let it go and use the space for something better.
It's easy to tear down historical buildings for convenience or profit, but architecture like this, and the things that occurred in that building, both have lessons for future generations that a parking lot won't get. There is a new courthouse going up, and there is an effort to revive Norristown. But what makes Norristown is its culture, people, and history. Start tearing that away, and you'll just have another urban area that looks the same as all the rest - boring and unattractive. Historical buildings like this are an opportunity to teach the future while holding onto what makes a city feel special and different from others. Do parking lots, housing, or another retail shop do that?
It's historical and should never be torn down !!
It's history for a reason. Do something good with it. Educate instead of trying to erase. Communities need to learn so history is not repeated. DO GOOD!
Just happy to see that they are keeping it standing.. Norristown has alot of history and that building being one of them..
Just more affordable housing, market rate in the area is definitely not very affordable, still.
Keeping the jail architecture, but opening it up to the public, could create some great diversity to the downtown Norristown area - esp. with the impending new Justice Center and its space for some music, etc. Encouraging a brewery or restaurant there could bring folks through as well (as well as provide more eating options for county employees during the week).
Knock it down
Let's do something that elevates the culture of Norristown and not just make developers and landlords money
Let's do something to make downtown Norristown more welcoming
Making the building safe and beneficial to the community, while preserving the historical building should be the goal... Keep the community in mind instead of what you can get out of it in taxes, etc. Too often money trump's community benefit and I am scared that will happen here.
Many fighting to preserve the prison think they "know better" and look down on the opinions of current residents. Too many in the effort to preserve do not see the tax burden this would cause to Norristown Borough Residents. a Museum is ridiculous.
Mixed use that would draw a variety of people
Montgomery County needs to stop purchasing property. This isn't a game of Monopoly. Leave well enough alone and let the historical society take care of the building.

Q10 continued
Montgomery County was negligent in allowing this parcel to deteriorate since 1987. Now they just want it to "go away" by tearing it down. That simply continues their irresponsible handling of this property. Make it a valuable asset of the County and something positive that will ADD to the County seat!! It would be a disgrace to demolish it. Montgomery County could have used ARPA funding in the name of revitalization to make this project a success.
Museum
Music venue would be cool!
N/A
N/A
Need to save some part of Old Norristown. The entire block should be saved & used for something cultural
New mixed-use development of the parking lot portion of the combined parcel can be pursued without wholesale demolition of the historic prison, which is a unique structure that contributes to the distinct identity of Norristown. This block of Airy Street is home to many large institutional civic and religious buildings, of which the prison is an integral part. It helps to establish a sense of place.
No public housing
No tax dollars should be spent on this project.
none
None
norristown deserves nice buildings too!
Norristown has a growing Hispanic population with great local food. I would encourage the township to embrace this culture and find a way to include it in this redevelopment project.
Norristown has a storied past and sadly few buildings that tell that story. The prison is especially important for that reason
Norristown has lost so many historic landmarks! We used to have so many theaters--one, as I understand it, is now a McDonald's and an Exxon. And there was a really cool municipal building next to the prison that is now a parking lot. The newspaper building is now a vacant lot. The old photos of Norristown are really something to see. While I know we can't just cling on to the past, I would love to see us evolve by not just razing buildings but by preserving the ones worth saving. I think the prison building has architectural value and could lend itself to an event and multi-use space that is unique, on many levels, in the area.
Norristown has so few architectural wonders. we can't take away the largest
Norristown has so much opportunity to improve! Please don't leave elements of blight from prior decades intact. The historical value is not worth the cost.
Norristown is a beautiful place and has beautiful people. I believe the way to keep Norristown beautiful is to invest in its people. The very people that have made Norristown what it is today. Invest in the children. The future of Norristown is now.
Norristown needs a grocery store. Efforts should be made to prioritize encouraging the development of a grocery store. In my opinion, access to healthy food in a community that needs it supersedes historic preservation if the choice is one or the other.

Q10 continued
Norristown needs a reason to visit, a cool venue like an Arts / events center would be great. Elm wood park Zoo has done a great job. With transit right there it's ideal to encourage a cultural center for the county.
Norristown needs to preserve what historical buildings it has left!
One of the few authentic buildings left in Norristown, it needs to be saved or repurposed.
Open it to the public to tour the prison and host/hold active paranormal investigations.
Our historic infrastructure is something that is irreplaceable. Once it's gone it's gone forever. Doylestown has truly made the most of the historic infrastructure that they have. Norristown has the potential to be just as great but we need to protect and preserve what is still here that would make people want to come and spend quality time in Norristown. Montgomery County needs a County Seat that stands out just like Bucks and Chester Counties do. We are a great county!! We need a spectacular County Seat!! We are not there yet but we could be if we do it right and not tear everything down. Any place can have new. What's old is what makes us stand out from the rest. Doylestown made a fantastic art museum out of their historic prison. We can have something just as spectacular!! Yes, nothing comes cheap but in could be money spent to make a whole lot more money for the borough and the county!!
Parking is the last thing planners/developers think about. With the volume of individuals working, doing business, shopping, etc. in Norristown there isn't enough parking spaces available.
Pennsylvania played a huge role in the evolution of criminal justice and incarceration as both punishment and reform. With the noble goals of the Quakers and foreboding architecture intended to strike a fear of incarceration into the hearts of would-be criminals, historic prisons like this one are, today, equal parts curiosity and educational tool. My interest in preserving the structure is twofold, both with an appreciation for the magnificent architecture and for the chance to peek 'behind the curtain' of a hundred years of prison life that few of us have ever experienced firsthand. I am a longstanding patron of Eastern State Penitentiary in Philadelphia for those same two reasons. I implore you to reach out to the staff that manages the E.S.P. historic site for their advice on how to make preservation a reality. When they started out, they were faced with the same sort of water-damaged, weed infested, crumbling ruin as the Airy Street prison is today. They prioritized the oldest original structures first, and it took decades, but talk to them about what a success it is today! Thank you for your efforts!
People are sleeping literal steps away from a property that could be used as workforce housing. This disused eyesore is a stain on the borough and should be razed to the ground. It is rare in parts of the county to find such property (that isn't already open space), so close to public transit and major roads, where workforce housing would be such a logical fit. Tear it down!
Philadelphia already has an old prison and I think it inhibits that community's development
Places mentioned by others, such as Jim Thorpe and Philadelphia, already have tourism bases that would allow a project like what's proposed to come to fruition and even thrive. Norristown simply doesn't. Tax dollars and development grants are better spent on proposals that move Norristown forward, and not pining for the past.
Please consider factoring in something like a green roof/renewable energy.
Please consider low income assistance here!
Please create a center for kids and adults to join in our community. There is no community feel within Norristown. Movie nights, bands, classes with community involvement.

Q10 continued
Please do not demolish the building!! So much of Norristown and the surrounding area's architecture is being lost to new construction. The building should be preserved as is, and open to the public to explore and experience
Please do not destroy this building! So much history stands there.
Please do not use for housing. Keep and restore the beauty of this historical site. Castle H
Please don't save the prison. That's a waste of money and opportunity. I can see how the idea was used to gain support, but it's a bad idea. You'd be better off putting a fraction of that into a small gallery within the justice center focused on the history of incarceration.
Please find a way to keep the castle!
Please not a homeless place
Please preserve the building, we tear down too many historic buildings.
please preserve this piece of history for the county
Please save this local historic treasure
please save this treasure
Please tear down the site and build something that will lift up Norristown.
Please use the space for businesses that will bring Norristown the MOST TAX REVENUE.
possibly a location for a shelter?
Preserve all the open space that's left
Preserving both the physical plant and the memory surrounding its use is important socially. There are deviants among us, there always has and always will be. Sequestering penal institutions out of sight is bad policy. The citizenry has no reminder of consequences of bad behavior whether a result of misfortune, personality defects or running with the wrong crowd.
A gentle reminder to citizens of the need to apply punishment or offer compassion or the possibility of rehabilitation keeps citizens engaged.
Preserving this building as an educational opportunity will help the populace to learn from the mistakes of the past and present and strive toward making the justice system more fair and humane. If this historic prison were to cease to exist then this powerful potential of a learning experience is lost. Also with an option for visitors to make donations, this could help the economy of Norristown.
Rather than renovating the current library, get fed & state funds to renovate this building. A library here with parking would be awesome. Having a museum/historic preservation site adjoining the library is one-stop education. Having an arts center within the historical site is also a win/win.
recreational center for families/kids, have different sections for various things like flea markets, local businesses, farmers markets.
Redeveloping this site based on its historical significance rather than demolishing it allows for a new positive expansion of downtown Norristown in a section not recently improved as those areas surrounding the courthouse
Redevelopment in Norristown should prioritize improving quality of life for residents & attracting new bus; rather than costly preservation of structures with no historical value.
Save the prison!
Saving us taxpayers money with demolition and bringing in money through the Arts for cities within the county.

Q10 continued
Since I have had no admittance to the building, I really can't give a complete plan for usage. Perhaps the county could hold an open house there which would give citizens a chance to see all aspects of the property.
Since we do not have a homeless shelter, I think this may be an opportunity
Something that can contribute to programs for the kids (future leaders) would be amazing to see more often in Downtown Norristown than to keep holding on to a physical location that can be easily read in a book (or online now)
St Augustine prison in Florida is just like our prison but is preserved and is a tourist attraction with retail. I'd love to see that in Norristown
Stop pandering to the minority who are crying about this place. No one cared about the prison for decades, and now it needs to be revitalized. I can't roll my eyes hard enough. Let the crybabies cry, level the area, and develop it into something useful.
Strongly encourage a surveillanced park
Such a beautiful building with great history that should be preserved!
take advantage of Pennsylvania's rich history of Legacy Tourism. Examples exists in southwest PA and the tourism has stabilized economically fragile towns and communities.
Thank you
Thank you for preserving this building
Thank you for sharing
Thank you!
Thanks for all of your hard work!
That building is to far gone to be saved it needs to be demolished it is unsafe to the public, there are trees growing from the ground up thru the roof the building is so bad if a fire happened there fire personnel would not go in to search for any potential victims and to fight the from the inside because of the age of the building and condition it is in, the building would be involved in to much fire that there would be to many structural collapses prior happening as fire department personnel is arriving that would determine that it would be a exterior fire fight and in the case of fighting a fire like that with structural collapses causing it more difficult to get water on the fire heavy equipment would be needed to more building debris moving collapse area of the prison walls and roof material to have full extinguishment of the fire.
The Airy Street Prison is a beautiful piece of history that should have it's beauty preserved and used as functionally as possible to further enhance Norristown.
The Airy Street Prison would be a perfect shelter to help get the homeless off the streets.
The building has been vacant for 4 decades. Why now when the municipality of Norristown wanted the site demolished for hazardous reasons?
The building is beautiful and should be preserved to help re-vitalize Norristown. A Reading Terminal Market type food and other retail on the first floor and event space on the other floors would be a benefit to the community.
The current structure should be demolished in the most environmentally friendly way. Such division in the community over its use. Need a positive space or structure after demolition that will bring people together.
The front castle area is a true asset to Norristown. If the rest needs to be demolished, so be it. An old rectory building in Philadelphia was rehabbed into townhouses and go for hundreds of thousands. Bring in money makers. Norristown cannot be the charity capital of the county.
The historic significance of this building should mandate that it be preserved as a museum and local tourist destination

Q10 continued
The prison and the Art Deco post office and St. Johns are key parts of a unique historic & cultural landscape district that could be interpreted for future generations. Preserving this landmark building and repurposing the site for Norristown's future is a great opportunity. Even while this is happening the county should as its steward undertake to stabilize the building and remove the invasive vegetation that threatens the stonework.
The prison is a historic landmark that should be available to enjoy (including the inside) by all Montco residents (not residential in nature).
The prison is a reflection of our county's history. The proximity to the courthouse is a reminder of the weight of the burden we as a society must consider and weigh when determining our peers fate in the courts. Few people are aware of the history of punishment and reform, but especially at a local level. If we had tours, plaques, etc., that explained the history of the prison, the hanging, etc., a lot could be learned about how reform has taken place, increase awareness as to who has been incarcerated in Montco., over the span of time, the evolution of care (or not), etc.
The prison is an eye sore, and we need to make Norristown beautiful, and the only way to do that is to create new buildings, stores, office spaces to bring professionals to our town.
The prison is an historical site in Norristown and should NOT be demolished. There's every reason to believe that the Airy Street Prison could become the next Eastern State Penitentiary with educational programs and seasonal events.
The prison is one of the most unique buildings in the city and county and should be saved for future generations.
The prison is UGLY, in poor condition, and represents a past we'd be better flushing down the drain. There are already too many brutal government-owned buildings, so use the space to bring residential use into the core. Minimize parking...there are excellent transit options!
The prison would be ideal for an Indoor public space to bring more business and community to Norristown whether it be a market, art and music space, or a general space for learning and community events.
The project is perfect for the use of the historic preservation tax credits. There are state and federal tax credits available.
The rear might have a different use, but the front must have sufficient space for a museum
The social significance of the previous use should be communicated among the preserved architecture. It would be unfortunate to ignore either. Artist/craft space with galleries could be a good use along with cafe(s) and public green space. Introducing some residential space would add to a neighborhood that is heavy with govt and other offices. Walkability with locally useful destinations is a good goal
There are many talented people who can help to find a viable reuse for this property while preserving the architectural elements that make it unique. It is reassuring that the county is working to find a reuse along with preserving an important part of the county's history.
There are no hotels in downtown Norristown. There is now an opportunity to provide such within walking distance of the County seat municipal complex. A healthy downtown starts with hotels. I find it hard to believe there are not hundreds of people from out of town conducting business in and through the municipal complex on a regular basis. Having a place to stay within walking distance would be a great start. Partnering with a large hotel operator would help spread the cost and risk.
There is a legacy for Norristown which should be preserved.
There is a lot of History in Norristown. I would be nice to preserve some of the prisons history to entice visitors to come to Norristown.

Q10 continued
There's too much land disappearing in our county/state with construction of houses and roads. This is a part of Montco history and should not fall victim of greed. It doesn't need to be a parking lot when there's a lot on Main St. Or another office with a forever lease sign. It should be a museum.
This building provides a great opportunity to do an adaptive reuse project that provides mixed use/community space that can also educate about architecture and the history of Norristown
This historical site must be preserved!!!!
This is a hugely significant building, and should be saved.
this is the right thing to do, ask in a survey and having a RFEI
This site is not fully functional and may present some public health risks. however, the façade is stunning and should be kept. I think that the lot should be partly preserved and possibly redeveloped. Whether it is partially a historic site/architectural site and something new, or wholly redeveloped, either choice would be better than its present condition.
Thanks to the Planning Commission for posing these questions to all of us who live and work in Norristown.
This would be an amazing site to use for music & arts. Don't let this chance pass us by.
Too costly. You will just spend a fortune and raise our taxes like you did last year, while people are suffering from Biden and Harris 9% inflation rate.
Tourist Attraction, bring business but keep history
Trade school for adults wanting to learn a trade to get into a new profession or improve their skill.
Turn it into something similar to Eastern State and have informational tours and a haunted house. You can use the money earned to help fix things up in town.
Use phase I as facade for completely modern structures behind. Refer to Liacorus Walk at Temple where the rowhome facades were preserved.
Used convert into Crisis Center overnight housing stay, rehab center etc great investment for the community & location.
We need more good, affordable food options close to the courthouse. Ones that allow us to go there and pick up food in our allotted break/lunch times.
We need to incorporate prison reform into the project. The old way of punitive punishment is gone and a more humane way is here. What does that look like? Instead of shutting people away like animals, what can we do to treat people who have broken laws with compassion?
Maybe use it as a dual bh + misdemeanor facility. Or maybe a nursing home/hospice for those who are incarcerated. Maybe a youth center for those whose parent/s are incarcerated. Maybe a job training / votech school using local businesses to volunteer / train in return for guaranteed high quality candidates.
I like the ideas of shopping and housing, but honestly just taking the old jail down and not addressing what it stood for would be a mistake. Let's use this to do some good in Norristown and it's future.
We should not lose sight of our past as we build for the future...
What a incredible building. It deserves to be preserved for the community use.

Q10 continued

While historical places are nice, this is not necessarily a historical place. It is just old. Yes, the architecture is nice, but the building is just old (not historical.) It is not cost effective to preserve it when we are paying many of our County employees peanuts and below poverty level salaries.

While I do not live or work in Norristown now. I did both for many years. I lived in Norristown from Oct. 1985 to Dec 2022. I also was working in Norristown from Aug. 1985 to July 1993.

While I understand the want to persevere old building. I haven't been convinced that there is a need to preserve this building.

While I understand wanting to preserve the "history" of the building, you have to understand that the "history" isn't always a pleasant one. Just because the architect built both the prison and the courthouse, does not mean that the history of the prison is a good one. Who preserves the legacy of a prison when prison, at its core, is supposed to be about taking something bad and transforming it into something good, reforming it. The legacy of the prison, not being a great one, perhaps now is the time to reform that legacy. Instead of memorializing what some see as a dark symbol from a murky part in history, transform this into something that provides hope, joy, or entertainment. You could turn this space into a museum/performing arts venue. You could turn this space into a homeless shelter, seeing as how now that has become a Norristown priority. You could turn the building over to Norristown borough and allow them to use it as some type of social services building. Preserving the history of the building isn't necessary. Making the building a functional space which serves the community, that should be the priority.

While I would like to see the site restored, I would be adverse to funding the project through taxpayer means. I seriously doubt that there would be sufficient private entity interest in the project given the current economic situation in the borough. It seems to be a complicated issue with no easy answers, but it would be a shame to lose this historic site.

While the building is beautiful, it also represents a history of incarceration in our community. While it could present an opportunity for educational purposes, that role is already being filled by Eastern State Penitentiary in Philadelphia, which is not far away. Finding a balance of how to preserve the unique architecture while avoiding the glorification of the prison system may be challenging. The space should be used to enhance the community and be accessible to ALL community members.

While the history is very important, I do think the European model of preservation could be useful: if you do not wish to invest in creating an entire museum around the site, then use thoughtfully integrated signs and collaborations with local history societies, while allowing the bulk of the space to redevelop into something the community needs right now.

With all the problems facing Norristown and the county, I am frustrated money is being spent even on this survey. If some entity wants to preserve it or develop it, then let them raise 100% private funds to do so. Otherwise, you cannot preserve everything. Demolish it, and either sell the property or develop it into something new.

Workforce housing would be an excellent element. Airy Street needs to be peopled, and housing would make that happen. I anticipate that any repurposing of the site will require an infusion of public funds--RACP, LSA, etc. Existing RACP itemizations should be made available for the right project--and there's millions already set aside in the commonwealth's capital budget. State elected officials will follow the lead of municipal and county officials in throwing their support behind funding for the right mix of uses. For any use, please ensure adequate open space with native plantings, the most innovative storm water management features, and maybe even green roofs.

Q10 continued

Workforce housing would give back to the community. The walls are beautiful but cold and hostile--too reminiscent of its prior use. Retaining some of the architecture allows the history to be experienced in a thoughtful and potentially restorative way through education, as opposed to denial by erasure. Workforce housing with community green space for working class families and individuals can begin to bring the warmth of shelter, respite, and love to that space.

Would love to see an outdoor food and music area

Would love to see this place help our homeless in MC with shelter, resources like basic medical, counseling, job assist, housing/medical options.

Would love to see this turn into something to give people a reason to travel to Norristown. Similar to what eastern state penitentiary was able to do for Fairmount Ave.