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JUSTICE

Task force to defend Warkworth prison

COUNTY WARDEN and Brighton Mayor Christine Herrington has formed a task force to protect the Warkworth Correctional Facility from being closed. "The Mayor and Warden felt we needed to take the bull by the horns," said Northumberland-Quinte West Member of Parliament Rick Norlock.

A recommendation to the federal government to close the Warkworth prison came to light in July and caused serious concern for local municipalities about the loss of jobs, tax revenue and the impact on the local economy. A Correctional Service

Canada Review Panel report on strengthening public safety included a consultants' report in the appendix on building a super jail near Kingston and closing six older facilities to save money. One of the prisons the consultants recommended closing was the Warkworth Institution.

"I'll do everything I can to lobby on behalf of my constituents to make sure we keep hold of what we have and build on it," said Mr. Norlock. "I offered my services to the Warden and to the various councils," said Mr. Norlock. "We'd be working shoulder to shoulder." The task force will identify the social and economic benefits of the Warkworth prison to local residents, workers and businesses. It will carry out a peer review

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The Warkworth Institution was included in a consultant's report that stated some jails should be closed and amalgamated into a super jail in Kingston. A task force has been set up to defend keeping the prison in east Northumberland.

MP determined to save prison

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of the Correctional Services report's conclusion to close local facilities and build one consolidated regional facility in Millhaven. The group will build a case for keeping the Warkworth Correctional Facility open and even expanding it.

"From my perspective, we'd be working to ensure the long-term viability of Warkworth Institute," said Mr. Norlock.

The Warkworth prison, opened in 1967, lies just inside the Brighton border and is a major financial contributor to the municipality. The federal prison does not technically pay property taxes, but the government gives that amount in a grant to the municipality. The Warkworth Institution gives Brighton \$602,000

each year, which is almost 16 per cent of the municipality's budget. The jail also gives Northumberland County a grant of \$168,500. The possible closing of Warkworth Institution would also put 350 people - many of whom live in Northumberland - out of work. The loss of well-paying jobs would hurt the county, which has already been rocked by several plant closings and industrial job losses. Many local businesses could also be hurt if laid-off residents aren't spending.

Warkworth prison puts over \$32 million into the Northumberland economy through wages and goods and services.

Mr. Norlock has been quick to stress the proposed closure of Warkworth Institution is only a consultant recommendation. There were close to 190 recommendations from the panel report released in April 2007. So far, the only major recommendation implemented by the government

is stiffer regulations for granting parole, according to the MP.

"There's been no decision on the part of cabinet," said Mr. Norlock. "There is no funding (for a new regional jail) because the last budget went into 2009. So for the next two years, it's not even a consideration."

The MP has already appeared before Brighton and Trent Hills council to talk about the threat to Warkworth prison. He will be

coming before County Council on Wednesday, Sept. 3.

Public events will be held over the next few months to make sure local citizens are kept up to date on the task force's work and have a chance to offer their input on the future of the Warkworth Institution.

"I'll do everything I can to lobby on behalf of my constituents to make sure we keep hold of what we have and build on it," said Mr. Norlock.

Hospital hikes parking fees

by Paul Dalby
THE INDEPENDENT

IT'S GOING TO COST you more to visit a sick friend or relative in Northumberland Hills Hospital, Cobourg.

The \$4 flat rate parking fee at the hospital was hiked to \$5 on Tuesday,

Sept. 2. The hospital defends the increase, the first since 2003, as necessary to balance its books.

The county's other hospital in Campbellford does not charge for parking.

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