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Prison warden gives land back to state *AG's office announces land sale is 'unwound'*

By Daniel Dunkle | Sep 22, 2011



Photo by: Daniel Dunkle Prison Warden Patricia Barnhart

Thomaston — The property on Ship Street Circle that was sold by the state to Prison Warden Patricia Barnhart was turned back over to the state in an agreement signed Sept. 21, according to Attorney General's office spokeswoman Brenda Kielty.

"Yesterday, the Barnhart property was reconveyed to the state by the warden," Kielty said in a phone interview Sept. 22. "It's completed. We consider it unwound."

In June, Barnhart and Sheehan Gallagher paid \$175,000 to the state to buy a Ship Street Circle parcel in Thomaston that includes three houses and more than five acres of property extending down to the St. George River, according to Maine Bureau of General Services Acting Director Betty M. Lamoreau.

The property is adjacent to the former Maine State Prison land and was used for years by the prison system to provide housing for prison employees.

Barnhart has been living in one of the houses since she was hired as the prison warden. Despite the fact that the prison system was using the houses, the State Legislature had authorized selling them along with a number of other state-owned properties to raise \$1.5 million to close a budget gap.

After learning that the properties were going to be put up for sale, Barnhart asked if she could buy the home she was living in, and the deal was negotiated with the Maine Bureau of General Services to allow her to buy the entire property.

As part of the deal, Barnhart had agreed to lease one of the houses back to the state so the prison could continue using it to provide temporary housing for staff. The Department of Corrections

could not pay more than \$1 per year for four years to lease the house and could not pay for the property taxes on the property, officials testified.

In a July 8 letter to Barnhart, Attorney General William Schneider argued that because Barnhart was employed as prison warden at the time of the sale, the sale violates state law and is void.

"We suggest that the parties and their counsel meet as soon as possible to discuss the process for unwinding this matter," Schneider wrote in the letter.

So far no details have been released about the terms of the agreement to unwind the sale.

On Aug. 16, Barnhart told the Legislature's Government Oversight Committee she wanted to get out of the deal without taking a financial loss, but she was not trying to make a profit on the property.

<http://knox.villagesoup.com/news/story/prison-warden-gives-land-back-to-state/448601?cid=1016521>