



TOWN OF NEWTOWN
Fairfield Hills Authority
SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES

**The Fairfield Hills Authority held a Special Meeting on March 7, 2022
in Meeting Room 3 at the Municipal Center, 3 Primrose Street, Newtown CT 06470**
These minutes are subject to the approval of the FHA at their next meeting.

Present: Ross Carley, Jim Landy, Brook Clark, Michael Holmes

Absent: Terry Sagedy, Renata Adler, Melissa Beylouni, Andrew Philbin

Public Attendance: Curt Symes

Also Present: Christal Preszler – Deputy Director of Economic and Community Development, Kim Chiappetta (clerk)

The meeting was called to order at 7:05 p.m.

Chairman Ross Carley began by thanking Authority members for their dedication to the Fairfield Hills Authority and to the wonderful campus that they are trying to preserve and make use of. He continued to explain that one purpose of the meeting was to enlighten members on proceedings that have been somewhat in the dark until now.

Public Participation:

Ross introduced Curt Symes who was in attendance to discuss the campus from the senior town resident's point of view. Mr. Symes began by telling the Authority that the senior population is growing dramatically. The Town of Newtown is currently close to 30,000 residents with 8,000 - 9,000 seniors. Newtown is becoming a three-generation community with children in schools, parent and grandparents who often assist with the childcare. Mr. Symes informed members that he has been involved in the AARP Livable Community Initiative that was kicked-off when Pat Llodra was the First Selectman in the 2016 timeframe. This interest has been recently rekindled with the purpose to ensure Newtown continues to be the best we can make it for all residents. The current plan contains 100 lines for tactical and strategic planning that are good for seniors as well as other residents of Newtown. Curt continued to explain that the seniors he has spoken with have asked about senior housing in all of Newtown and more specifically in Fairfield Hills. Ross asked Curt to confirm that Nunnawauk will not be expanding. Curt explained that there is much more developable property at Nunnawauk which developers have presented ideas for adding units. When he was the Chair for the Commission on Aging, Nunnawauk was a hot button topic. He continued to explain that the funding for Nunnawauk comes from the Federal Department of Agriculture, so Nunnawauk is contending for funding with other agricultural funded projects. Christal noted that Nunnawauk currently has a 5 year wait list. Curt agreed and added that in the past 10 years the wait list has fluctuated but is always around 5 years. Senior affordable housing along with transportation are both needs of many seniors in Newtown. Ross asked Curt how mixed-use housing on the Fairfield Hills campus would alleviate this issue. Curt explained that many newer senior developments do not include an affordable component and are often at much higher price points. Walnut Tree Village was highly affordable in the 1990's but now the values have increased significantly. Curt said that for seniors with middle incomes and houses purchased in the 1970's they are not able to keep up with inflation. Many of Newtown's

seniors want to keep their independence so they are not looking to move in with their children. Curt expressed his belief that there will be a mushrooming demand for senior affordable housing in Newtown over the next 10 years. The debate over mixed use development on the campus is similar to what was experienced when considerations were being made for funding and the justification for the Senior Center and Community Center. Ross asked if seniors are in support of the mixed-use project on the Fairfield Hills campus. Curt responded most definitely. When looking at Newtown in its entirety, most of the good useable, larger property is outrageously priced or zoned for commercial use. Newtown is running out of land so seniors are looking at Fairfield Hills. Ross noted and Curt agreed that having the Community Center and Senior Center on the campus make it more appealing for senior housing. In addition, Curt noted that most people do not want to see these historic buildings go away. The group then discussed the State requirement for each town to create an Affordable Housing Plan that will document each town's 5-year plan for increasing their affordable housing stock. Chairman Ross thanked Curt for his support. He then emphasized that the project will soon be arriving at a point where a decision must be made to move forward or not proceed with the project.

Acceptance of Minutes:

There was no acceptance of the minutes due to a lack of a quorum.

Chairman's Report:

Gathering Spaces:

Ross informed the Authority that Brook Clark has been involved in the gathering space project and asked Christal to speak to the project. Christal began by explaining that Fairfield Hills was fortunate to be approached by the Jeniam Foundation as well as the Newtown Board of Realtors who each donated \$5,000 to be used for the campus. She continued to explain that the memorial bench program can be costly and she and Kim have been trying to figure out how to make donations more accessible to everyone. They have been considering other donation options such as plantings which is the inspiration for this project. Christal reached out to Authority member Brook Clark, who is a registered landscape architect, for assistance. Brook explained that she worked to stay within the \$10,000 budget to create an inviting space in the location of an existing bench. The plan proposes two overhead lilac trees and more native plantings like the red twig dogwood. The planned location for this gathering space is just off the existing sidewalk that is parallel to the building at the Tax department entrance of the Municipal Center. The proposed plan also includes playful stone benches that will be fun for kids and will follow the livable communities' recommendations for a gathering space where various ages can gather and enjoy the space together. The project area is an estimated 12 x 12 feet. Ross expressed his appreciation for bringing this new element to the campus. Christal added that slower growing plants were selected to help reduce the frequency of maintenance and therefore costs. Curt noted that the Senior Center and the Friends of Newtown Seniors may be able to come together to help fund similar future projects on the campus. Ross thanked Brook for her input on the project and Christal for her work.

Mixed Use Project update:

Ross reminded members of the meetings with the Economic Development department, Land Use department, representatives of the EDC and himself representing the FHA, to discuss the mixed-use project involving the Shelton House and Kent House buildings. The group has spent about 1 year considering all aspects of the project and how to best move forward. He explained that the selected developer, Winn Companies, is a well-established development company near Boston, Mass. who has been very flexible and willing to work with the Town. Winn has been in this business for 50 years and has a great reputation. They own and maintain all of their buildings. Winn is planning to invest \$70 million in grants, tax credits, and other funding for renovation of Shelton House and Kent House. Ross expressed his astonishment with the work done by this company to preserve the historic exterior of their buildings. He explained to members that the process had been going quite smoothly until more recently. In order for the developer to obtain the tax credits necessary to help fund the project, the State of CT Historic Preservation Office is requiring that the entire campus be designated as historic

property. Having this historic designation for all buildings on the campus will limit the Town on its ability to demo unusable buildings for a specified period of time. The Town could petition the State to remove a building in cases where a building has suffered extreme deterioration. Ross expressed his confidence that if there was housing on the campus it would stimulate interests in many of the other vacant buildings. The Town is looking at a potential \$70 million dollar investment in the campus. He further explained that the buildings would be sold to the developer and would be taxable. The Town would continue to own the land and receive a lease fee. There would also be Common Area Maintenance (CAM) charges estimated at \$100,000 per year that would be added to the Fairfield Hills budget for campus improvements. If the Town decides to not proceed with the project, the First Selectman will bring forward a request for an estimated \$25 million to demo the seven larger campus buildings. The demo costs would be bonded and repaid at the taxpayers' expense. Ross expressed that in his opinion this would greatly change the look and feel of the campus. The group continued to discuss the impact the demolition would have to the campus. Christal returned the conversation to the financials. If the project moves forward there is the investment in the campus and the things that go along with it such as taxes, CAM charges, market rate units and affordable units. The town has owned the campus for a long time and the priority is what can be done with the buildings. The secondary is what to do with the remaining buildings. The secondary concern should not drive the project. If the project does not happen, the result will be expense ridden. Ross opened to questions and welcomed all opinions. Curt said if there is an income stream, money can be used to improve the remaining buildings. Christal noted that safety is a big concern for the vacant buildings. This would give a significant influx of funds every year that the FHA could determine how to use on the campus and remaining vacant buildings. Brook said with the historic designation she would think that it would not be that difficult to demo less attractive buildings such as Cochran Hall. Christal explained that the State Office of Historic Preservation considers the history and not the architecture. Brook continued that in the First Selectman's presentation he explained there is a lifespan for the campus buildings and this appears to be the only chance to save some of them. The group discussed the quality of work in the buildings including marble fireplaces and wood molding. James Landy asked if all buildings were demolished, what would come into the campus. Ross explained that a certain percentage of the campus is zoned for commercial development. Christal added that if there is a blank canvas the town could lose control of what the campus would look like. It may be possible for newly developed buildings to not reflect the historic architectural style that was the campus. Curt told the group about Lowell Mass. preserving its historic mills and installing museums in them that told the history of the town. This might be a great opportunity for Newtown to have a small museum of the town's history. Ross asked that anyone in support of the mixed-use project to please reach out to the First Selectman. He does not want this project to get quietly swept away. Brook asked what happens next. Christal replied that there continues to be conversations. The Town is learning a lot as this is a first experience of this type. The next step may be to bring forward financials to the Board of Selectman and Legislative Council. Ross again expressed his concern that the financials may not be brought forward and the project may quietly go away.

Sewer Main Replacement project:

Ross asked Kim for an update on the Fairfield Hills Sewer Main replacement project. Kim informed the group that they finally have a construction start date of March 21st which does not necessarily mean that there will be active digging, but the EDA grant construction sign will be installed. Christal noted that project materials had already been delivered for storage behind Shelton Hall. Kim explained that she is somewhat coordinating with the construction company to ensure there is minimal impact to campus events. Construction areas will be covered and secured outside of construction work hours for the safety of visitors to the campus. Ross asked if all funding has been finalized. Kim replied that funding has been secured for quite a while. The project is being funded by an EDA grant award of about \$914,000 that is a 50/50 match with town funds.

Member Updates:

None.

Staff Update:

None.

Adjournment:

With no further business, Brook Clark motioned to adjourn, Mike Holmes seconded and the meeting was adjourned at 7:56 p.m.

Respectfully submitted, Kimberly Chiappetta, Clerk.

A recording of the meeting is available by contacting Kimberly.Chiappetta@newtown-ct.gov.