

**Education Subcommittee
Of The
Fairfield Hills Master Plan Review Committee**

Objective

The objective of the Education Subcommittee was to identify the future needs and requirements for space at Fairfield Hills included in the current Master Plan and to gain public input. In consideration of this objective, members of this subcommittee attended several meetings of the Facilities Subcommittee, of the Board of Education, as well as meetings of the full Board of Education. Utilizing the information obtained from the Board of Education, including its Facilities Subcommittee and in combination with information from our Review Committee's Demographics Subcommittee the following report is submitted.

Background

The Board of Selectman established a Fairfield Hills Master Plan Review Committee (FFHMPCR) with the purpose of reviewing the Master Plan, which “*should be consistent with the Plan of Conservation and Development*” and of gaining public consensus regarding the needs and uses planned for Fairfield Hills. The FFHMPCR, in turn established several subcommittees, this Education Subcommittee being one of them.

The Plan of Conservation and Development, updated in 2004, (page 57) stated:

“To meet the need for additional high school space the Board of Education has expressed a preference for building a new High School Academy on the Fairfield Hills campus, with an enrollment capacity of 500 students.”

The Fairfield Hills Master Plan – Executive Summary, 2005, stated:

“The Master Plan for Fairfield Hills contains the following attribute(s) intended to benefit the Newtown community.”

“Opportunity for a high school academy on the Kent House site and an alternative high school program at a location to be determined by the size of enrollment.”

The Fairfield Hills Master Plan – 2005, (page 17)

[The Kent site for the academy] “has several advantages including proximity to the proposed playing fields; a location on the campus closest to the existing high school; the site can be developed without impacting other components of the plan; shared parking with the playing fields would be possible; and a new access road from Wasserman Way to the east of the existing structure is a possibility to directly serve the site. However, it is important for the Board of Education to make the policy decisions as to the purpose, size and design of such an academy. This decision should be presented to the Newtown community in the level of detail and subject to community dialogue which has been the case with the planning effort for the entire campus.”

Enrollment Projections (based on the Demographics Subcommittee working document)

While the Chung report indicated a near-term school population decline, information gathered from Planimetrics, “Newtown Buildout Analysis & Population Projections” and other sources indicates that build out would require additional educational space. While it is difficult to determine what Newtown’s population will be in numbers and demographics during build out, it is important to plan, educationally and fiscally, for sufficient land at Fairfield Hills for the upper build out as noted in the *Table A below*:

Table A - Projected 2030 to 2050 Build Outs Under Various Zoning regulations

Categories	Assuming 2008 Zoning	Assuming Zoning For Affordability
Number of dwellings	12,104	13,314
Build-out Population	33,770	37,150
% Increase from 2008 Estimates	22%	34%
Estimated Seniors	6,010	6,690
Senior as a % of Population	18%	18%
Non-Senior Population	27,760	30,460
Total School Age	5,550 - 6,940	6,090 – 7,620
Elementary	1,890 - 2,360	2,070 – 2,590
Intermediate	940 - 1,180	1,040 – 1,300
Middle	940 - 1,180	1,040 – 1,300
High	1,780 - 2,220	1,950 – 2,440

Board of Education (BOE) Facilities Subcommittee Recommendations

The Facilities Subcommittee of the Board of Education has indicated that elementary schools should be located in neighborhoods and upper level schools should be centrally located. Fairfield Hills land (at least 60 acres) should be preserved for upper level schools. At the Board of Education meeting, December 7, 2010 D. Leidlein, Chairman of the Facilities Subcommittee reported reserving land at Fairfield Hills for future school needs (2030 – 2050). The purpose, size and design of the facility should be determined by future Boards of Education.

At the same December 7th meeting D. Nanavity reported that the current high school, having experienced two additions, is currently maxed out, meaning that there is not enough land (47.5 acres) to support any further additions. The state’s move to increase graduation requirements could use classroom space in a manner not anticipated previously when the addition was first proposed. Additional classroom space may be required to accommodate the 25 graduation credits proposed by the state.

The BOE facilities subcommittee is in support of reserving 60 acres of land at Fairfield Hills. The demographic information provided below in *Table B* is in support of this recommendation.

Table B – Current and Projected Student Populations

2010	October 1, 2010	Build-out: 2008	Build-out: Affordable
Elementary (K-4)	1,840	1,892 – 2,360	2,070 – 2,590
Intermediate (5&6)	896	940 – 1,180	1,040 – 1,300
Middle (7&8)	897	942 – 1,180	1,040 – 1,300
High School (9-12)	1,729	1,780 – 2,220	1,950 – 2,440
Total	5,362	5,554 – 6,940	6,090 – 7,620

Discussion

Currently, there is some discussion about reducing the need for in-classroom space via online education and other methods of delivering instruction. We cannot tell if these are viable. According to the superintendent, experience with alternate education methods such as unguided or minimally guided online learning has not been successful to date. Planning with the assumption that large-scale versions of it will be successful in 30 years is not prudent. Likewise, should the build out population trend to the higher ranges or the effective capacity be reduced because of added graduation requirements then the current high school will not be suitable. The discussion of any additional school buildings should be reserved for future Boards of Education.

The BOE Facilities Subcommittee recommends a conservative approach in reserving 60 acres for an additional high school. If we make this assumption and the student population follows the lower estimates, then the land will become available for other uses based on the needs of the community at that time. If, on the other hand, we do not bank the land for a high school and the upper estimates are reached and alternate education methods are not realized, then the town will have difficulty finding the appropriate acreage, even for a second high school, since the bulk of the town will have been built out.

Points to Consider

- Reserving 60 acres of reasonably contiguous land supports building a new high school, should the higher end of the demographics range occur. This allocation would ensure that the land would be available, and not acquired via another, less desirable and costly method, e.g. eminent domain.
- Alternatively, should the high school enrollment remain at or below current student levels, then, 30 acres of the banked land could be used for a middle school, should that enrollment become inadequate for current middle schools. The remaining acreage could be used as deemed appropriate at that time.
- Reserving 60 acres limits other uses for a significant portion of the campus
- If build out occurs, and a future Board of Education determines that a second high school is preferred, then a central location could be considered less desirable.
- Reserving the land for a high school is a conservative approach, one that minimizes the potential of future disagreement.
- The campus environment of Fairfield Hills is most appropriate for educational purposes.