

Preface

The 2005 Master Plan[1,2] is the embodiment of a set of ideas that evolved during the late 1990's and early 2000's. While this report will not review the earlier activities during the years that led to the need for a master plan, it does try to show how those ideas helped to frame the current Master Plan. In addition, the core aspects of the existing plan are summarized here and some of the underlying assumptions behind the plan are called out as part of the focus of our review.

Crafting the plan

The current Master Plan was framed by three sets of ideas: 1) a set of themes, as developed by the 14 member 1999 -2000 Fairfield Hills Advisory Ad Hoc committee and approved in the 2001 Town Meeting authorizing the purchase of the campus, 2) public contributions gathered during a set of activities by the Fairfield Hills Master Plan Ad Hoc Committee, a group charged with preparing the plan, and 3) a set of objectives that was used to guide the synthesis and presentation of the ideas above.

Thematic direction

The themes, as documented in the Master Plan on page ES1 are:

The Town Meeting vote authorized a variety of activities to be undertaken by the Town including preparation of a Master Plan for the 186-acre area. The material distributed at the Town Meeting established five themes for this Master Plan.

These themes were:

- *The Campus should contain a substantial open space component inclusive of both active playing fields and passive open space.*
- *One or more of the existing structures should be renovated and adapted for use as Town offices and possibly educational uses.*
- *Selected structures within the entry plaza portion of the Campus should be renovated for economic development activity, such as small professional offices.*
- *A core area of the Campus could be reserved for revenue generating economic development activities compatible with other uses and the surrounding area.*
- *All components should be provided within the context of a master plan that preserves the campus environment, with the Town maintaining overall control of the Campus. [1]*

Understanding community needs and wants

"As shown in Figure 3 [see Appendix A], the committee has held 26 meetings, invited 45 community groups to present needs for the Campus, held two community workshops of two sessions each, hosted a tour of the Campus and produced a video tour of the Campus for broadcast on local access TV. The entire process was covered extensively by the Newtown Bee including the publishing of a two-page insert describing alternative plans for discussion at community workshops." [1]

The Master Plan includes an appendix, called Exhibit C, that summarizes all of the needs and wants that were uncovered during the meetings of the Fairfield Hills Ad Hoc Committee, as well as the groups expressing them. This information has been included, in Toto, as Appendix B of this report.

Three guiding objectives

Though not explicitly noted in the plan or the work related to crafting the plan, in looking back the plan was, in effect, guided by three objectives. The main objective, held by the members of the Ad Hoc committee, was for preserving the maximum amount of flexibility for long-term decisions while addressing immediate needs of the community, stated as follows in the Master Plan:

“The central philosophy of the Committee has been one of flexibility. The Master Plan proposed by the Committee addresses immediate needs as expressed by the community while retaining future opportunities which come with purchase of the Campus from the State. Decisions as to these opportunities will be made over several decades by Newtown residents.” [1]

Again, the Master Plan focuses on the near term in a way that maximizes future flexibility. To this end, the committee reviewed the needs and wants that were raised during their meetings and public participation sessions, and identified the core near term needs of the town. They banked over 72% of the land, noting the *“specific use of these areas will be decided over several decades.”* To support the long-term, a process for reviewing the Master Plan every five years was instantiated¹.

A second objective held by the committee was that the feel of the campus should be retained. The committee, with the support of Planning and Zoning, supported maintaining the overall esthetics by creating a design district to maintain the architectural identity of the campus and by selecting a group of buildings for renovation and repurposing that showcased key architectural elements of the campus.

The third objective was to shield the Newtown taxpayers as much as possible from financial burdens resulting from the redevelopment of the property². By including some commercial development, the goal was that the total costs would be less overall.

Master Plan overview

Based on the three guiding objectives above, the current Master Plan was created that ensured the future flexibility of the use of the property by land banking the majority of the land and providing a review mechanism every five years. It also focused on a few, very near-term community needs and on trying to encourage enough commercial development to offset the costs associated with providing for those community needs, while preserving the architectural integrity of the property. The plan also calls for the demolition of all unused buildings, should the implementation of the plan not materialize within five years.

Salient features of the current master plan

Based on input from town leaders and the public, the committee identified the following as immediate or potential near-term needs, calling them out specifically in the Master Plan:

- Protecting the Aquifer
 - The amount of impermeable surfaces is restricted even in the campus area outside of the aquifer protection zone, to ensure that the aquifer is adequately “recharged.” Therefore, emphasis is placed on getting the most out of every non-permeable surface. For example, parking lots are shared where possible.
- Town Hall & Educational Offices
 - Shelton (building or footprint), sponsored by the town

¹ Our 2010-2011 Master Plan Review Committee was convened under the 5 year review process.

² The objective of reducing the impact of campus development on taxpayers was identified through informal conversation with multiple members of the Fairfield Hills Authority and the Ad Hoc Master Plan Committee.

- High School Academy
 - Kent (building or footprint), sponsored by the town. However, should the school determine that it no longer needed an academy, Kent would join the others listed for commercial development.
- Community Use, envisioned to *“to meet community needs including the Senior Center, cultural programs, recreation programs and special community events or assemblies of people such as the Friends of the Library Book Sale.”* [1]
 - Plymouth Hall, sponsored by a non-profit
 - Bridgeport, sponsored by a private interest. Note that Bridgeport was also listed as a potential building for private development (see next bullet)
 - Administrator’s House, sponsored by a non-profit or the town as a museum
- Commercialization for reducing the overall financial burden
 - Stratford, Newtown, Woodbury, Canaan, the duplexes, and potentially Bridgeport
 - Three “infill” buildings of 50,000 sq. ft. each
- The use of the single family houses for affordable housing.
- Adding seven fields to the three existing ones on the property and the two abutting ones, noting - *“The fields can be constructed in a sequence and within a schedule to meet the priorities of the Parks and Recreation Commission and users as well as coordination with other demolition and construction activities proposed in the Master Plan.”* [1]
- Road changes / Parking / Utilities needed to support the above.

The bulk of the Master Plan discussion focuses on the aspects of the plan that are considered immediate, i.e., the municipal center and the push for commercialization to minimize the overall financial impact on the taxpayer. It includes plans for the Shelton-based version of a “town hall,” and a commercialization strategy centered around leases (nominally with 30-year term and upfront payments of the full lease amount). The plan also includes a great deal of financial detail, potential phasing, and a section on impacts resulting from the implementation of the Master Plan.

Learning the realities of the property

The process and associated discussion to buy the property took many years, during which the property was neglected. When the purchase was finally completed, the conditions of the buildings had deteriorated significantly. In addition, the State’s estimates for clean-up costs vastly underrepresented the amount of money that would be needed to remediate the property. These two realities have caused much turmoil in the plans and execution of those plans for the property.

Shifts during the ensuing years

As the plan was being implemented, several unforeseen conditions became apparent. The following list calls out all changes to the Master Plan:

- It was learned that the property under Shelton had significant water issues that would make repurposing or reconstructing the building infeasible. Faced with this dilemma, the town leaders and plan implementers decided that Bridgeport Hall was the next most appropriate building for municipal use.
- The use of the single family houses for affordable housing was removed as requested by the selectmen based on feedback from community surveys.
- A high school addition was constructed, obviating the near-term need for an academy.
- A private interest requested permission to build a recreational facility at the campus.

- The Commission on Aging and other leaders of the senior population requested that the Senior Center use be removed from the community center noted in the Master Plan.
- With the latter two and the addition of the Newtown Youth Academy, the reuse of Plymouth was deemed impractical – given its level of deterioration, and so it is now slated for demolition.
- A Band Shell was added to the West Meadow to support the arts.

Accomplishments

- Newtown Youth Academy
- Municipal Center
- One full-sized baseball field. Lights were added to extend the playable hours enough to postpone the need for an additional full-sized field.
- Partial implementation of a trail system
- Some infrastructure improvements, like roadwork, electricity, broadband, telephone, gas, and storm water drainage upgrades.
- Parking
- The demolition of the dangerous tunnels and five buildings

Areas that we are revisiting for the review

As part of this five year review, we are revisiting several aspects of the Master Plan, in part because of changes in the plan and in the community at large. These aspects include:

Housing: Housing has been reintroduced for two reasons. First, the housing boom has subsided. Second, we are in the midst of discussions around the desire to increase the diversity of our housing stock to offer young couples and seniors places in town they can afford. This discussion is part of a broader, state-wide discussion about affordable housing.

Minimizing costs via a campus-focused strategy: With the discussion around expanding the use of the property to include even more town services, including social services and safety, we've had folks questioning whether one small piece of Newtown should be used to carry so much of the load for town services. Instead, others are looking into taking a broader, town-wide approach including leveraging ongoing discussion surrounding the overall plan of conservation and development for the town.

Town retention of land ownership: Our attempts to increase the commercial base at the campus have not panned out. While some folks attribute the lack of success to political instability, others suggest that the problem lies with the use of leasing vs. outright sale. That is, long-term leases for commercial development are often used in urban centers, though are much less commonly used for towns the size of Newtown. Yet others are suggesting that the notion of leasing was appropriate, but the requirement for upfront payments of the full lease was the problem. Perhaps a more traditional approach would be more effective. One final, and very large component, is the recession that hit in December 2007. As the economy recovers, we should ensure that we are poised to realize our goals for the campus.

Sources:

[1] The 2005 Master Plan, <http://www.fairfieldhills.org/PDF/MasterPlan2005.pdf>

[2] The 2007 Master Plan Amendment, http://www.newtown-ct.gov/Public_Documents/NewtownCT_FFHills/ModToPlan.pdf

Appendix A

**Figure ES 3
Fairfield Hills Master Plan – Community Participation**

	2002												2003		Total
	Mar.	Apr.	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.			
Ad Hoc Committee Meeting	**	**	**	*	**	** *	** **	** **	**	*	**	*	(26)		
Community Workshops			6/19 6/20 **						11/16 *				(3)		
Legislative Council									11/19 *				(1)		
Open House Tours								10/5 *					(1)		

Appendix B

This appendix includes the full text for representing the needs, as articulated by both public and private groups during the committee meetings, as provided in Exhibit C of the 2005 Master plan.

Section V Summary of Space Needs Requests

During March, April and May, the Ad Hoc Fairfield Hills Master Plan Committee held 6 meetings to provide an opportunity for organizations in Town to express their needs and thoughts as to space needs on the Fairfield Hills Campus. The series of meetings was organized on a topical basis with invitations sent to organizations based upon their topic of interest. The topics were municipal needs, recreation needs, open space needs, service group needs, recreation/arts needs, education needs and economic development needs.

As a result of this process, some specific space needs as well as requests for the re-use of certain buildings emerged. In other instances, there were requests or recommendations related to specific programs with no quantified space needs. It is anticipated that as the planning process proceeds, the relationship between programmatic needs and space allocations will become more specific. In addition, an analysis of capital funding resources as well as operational funding will be completed.

The following presents a summary of requests received to date.

Municipal Offices

- Edmond Town Hall Study (KBA) - 19,500 sq. ft. Town Offices.
- Police Department - 18,850 sq. ft. stay at Town Hall South.
- Hook and Ladder Fire - 11,250 sq. ft. stay at site.

Recreation

- Babe Ruth Baseball - Need 2 fields now
Need 5 added by 2010,
987 youths enrolled 2001/1300 by 2010
- Lacrosse - 2 more fields; program grown from 45 to 230 kids.
- Pop Warner Football - No field need but would like lacrosse to move to
Fairfield Hills.
- Basketball - 4 courts in Bridgeport.
- Soccer - Did not attend.
- Skateboard - Want park at 7,500 sq. ft. / \$40,000-\$50,000.
- Parks and Recreation - Responsible for all fields. Presented need for 40
acres with 600-800 parking spaces and 7 fields.
Also, want indoor space as well as storage for
equipment.

Open Space

- Open Space Committee - Should be substantial amount of passive open
Space with trails, nature walks, etc. Open Space
Committee has prepared a map for Fairfield
Hills to Upper Paugussett State Forest
Greenway. Shows Fairfield Hills with 100 acres
open space.
- Newtown Bridle Lanes - Currently use trail to H2O tanks and around
back of campus near Nunnawauk Meadows
for trail rides. Would like to retain for this
purpose.
- Governor's Horse Guard - Will be at Fairfield Hills for long term.

Golf Course Newtown Forest Association	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Currently use trails same as Newtown Bridle. - Interest in this use but no organized support. - Supports open space.
<i>Service Groups</i>	
Daytar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provides services for people with disabilities. Not looking for particular space but supports cultural and athletic uses that clients could participate in.
VNA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use Edmond Town Hall once a month for a meeting and have a thrift shop. Current space is 900 square feet, could use more.
Rotary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No particular space needs but need balance in plan to generate some tax revenue.
Youth Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Currently occupies second floor of building previously owned by Congregational Church now bank owned. Outgrown space. Requested 20,000 square feet but could share recreation space.
Womans Club	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Supports bike/walking trail, community garden. Restore beauty of Fairfield Hills with flower beds, etc.
Lions Club	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Supports Town needs, athletic fields and walking trails. Should have some economic development but also consider land banking for future.
Historical Society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Need space to display materials. Create Newtown Heritage Center. Possibly antique shows in Bridgeport Hall.
Friends of Library	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Annual Labor Day Weekend Book Sale is big fundraiser. Need 7/15-9/10 to set up and clean up. Need storage area year round. Bridgeport Hall is current and preferred location.
St. Johns Food Pantry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Located in St. Johns Church basement in 300 square feet. Do 2,000 – 3,000 meals a month.
Senior Center	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Currently have 800 sq. ft. in multi-purpose building in Sandy Hook. Share space with Children’s Adventure Center (daycare). Need at least 2,500 sq. ft. Have no adult daycare nor activities for men (woodworking, pool, etc.).
Salvation Army Food Kitchen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In Town hall South as part of Social Service Office in 400 sq. ft. area. Need larger area as well as storage.
K-9 Advocates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Newtown Pound is located at Town Transfer Station. Not good environment and hours not good (closed on Sunday). Should be moved to Fairfield Hills. Not sure on size requirements.

Recreation/Arts/Education

Center For Classical Ballet

- Wants Plymouth Hall for performing and visual arts. General cultural center. Could be revenue producer.

Siochain Theatre Company

- Need theatre for 50-100 people. Suggest subsidy for artisans for 1 year for crafts, etc. Two YMCA's are interested in developing facility (Plymouth Hall is possible site)...once established could be self-funding.

Children's Adventure Center

- Supports Senior Center/VNA move to Campus and they stay where they are with full use of center. Could use small space at Campus for outdoor activities.

Newtown Public Schools/Bd. Of Ed.

- Fully support shared town office concept; need 9,500 sq. ft. of space; need space of 28,000 sq. ft. for alt. Ed. Program...up to 200 students, can get 30 to 35% reimbursement; would like parking for events as well as school buses (2 acres); space for adult ed day classes; long term set aside 70 acres for another school.

Town Players/Little Theatre

- Town Players do not want to move but suggest space for combined arts council...music, SCAN, artisans, etc.

Joe Borst

- Suggest medical care facility (Cochran House)

Economic Development

Economic Development Commission

- Limited sites in Newtown zoned for commercial/industrial use and available for development. Fairfield Hills Campus is important tax base resource.