

October 24, 2018

FFH Master Plan Review Committee Research Agenda

Development: History, Current Status, Obstacles, and Successes

Uses: Current and Requested

DATE	TOPIC	INVITEES
Sept 25	Land Use, Zoning	George Benson: Director of Planning
Oct 10	Infrastructure	Fred Hurley: Public Works Louis Carbone: Water and Sewer Auth.
Oct 23	Implementation of Plan Describe process from FHA POV, e.g., Brewery.	Ross Carley: Current Fairfield Hills Auth. Chair Thomas Connors: Prior FHA Chair (via email) John Reed: Prior FHA Chair Don Mitchell: Planning & Zoning Chair
Nov 7	Seniors and Disabled	Marilyn R. Place: Senior Center Anna Wiedemann: Comm. On Aging Chair Pat Llodra*: Friends of Newtown Seniors Representative Judith Slason*: Exec. Director of Nunnawalk Meadows
Nov 20	FFH Adaptive Reuse Zoning Describe process, e.g., using light industry example.	Don Mitchell*: Planning & Zoning Chair Lilla Dean*: Prior P & Z Chair Robert Geckle*: 2005 FFH Master Plan Comm. Chair George Benson: Director of Planning
Dec 5	Cultural, Recreational Programming	Amy Mangold: Parks & Rec Edward Marks: Parks & Rec Comm. Chair Laura Lerman: Cultural Arts Comm. Chair Matthew Ariniello: Community Center
Dec 18	Current Tenants – What works, what could be improved	Dan Rosenthal*: First Selectman Jennifer Crane*: Center for Support & Wellness Dorrie Carolan*: Parent Connection Ian Yorty*: Newtown Youth Academy Mark Tambascio: Brewery
Jan 9 **	Social Services Conservation Agriculture	Ann LoBosco: Social Services Donna Culbert: Health District Holly Kocet: Conservation Comm. Chair Gail Friedman (??): Victory Garden Committee (?): Farmers Market
Jan 22**	Commercial Housing	Christal Preszler: Economic and Community Dev Wes Thompson: Economic Development Comm. Chair Chris Hottois: Local developer Phil Clark: Local developer
Feb 13**	Public hearing	

* Confirmed

** Tentative date

Those meetings that have already occurred reflect actual attendees.

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The Board of Education has been contacted via email to see if they have a need and would like to be added to our schedule. Nov 20 reply from Michelle Ku: *"The Superintendent has been exploring the possibility of hosting a regional behavioral special education program. Surrounding districts have expressed an interest in sending students to our district for such a program. It is in the very early stages of planning right now, but eventually, the district would need a centrally located and separate space to host the program."*

Town Finance has been contacted via email.

The Town Assessor has been contacted re: helping us understand assessments and tax-based revenues. She is open to joining a sub-committee effort on estimates for revenue-generating opportunities.

Note that the above meetings are intended to provide information/context to the committee membership both to help guide the subsequent public engagement efforts expected in the spring of 2019 and to ensure that past and current experiences and learnings are a part of the final deliberation process.

Thomas Connors comments via email , 10/23/2018 .

- 1) When were you a member/chair of the Fairfield Hills Authority?

2011-2016

- 2) What is the value that you feel the Fairfield Hills Authority brings to the governance of the property?

The FHA's current role is gatekeeper to the property. They are typically the first group to hear of proposals for development, issues on the grounds, events, etc.. The role of the FHA has diminished significantly since its inception. In reality, they have no real authority over the property any longer because any vote they make can be overridden by the other pieces of local government. They are simply in an advisory role at the moment and provide an outlet to make decisions that are germane to the property but do not rise to the level of additional involvement from other branches or boards.

- 3) What do you feel were the major accomplishments during your time on the Authority?

Ambulance Association, Parent Connection, Beautification of the property, Farmers Market, Fruit Orchard, Community Center, Streetscape Grant, Arts Festival, Coordination of use by public utilities during natural disasters as a staging area, New baseball field. Coordination of grounds maintenance with town departments.

- 4) What were the largest disappointments?

The inability to get any major commercial development on to the campus. A proposal for a mental health facility was rejected. A proposal for a mixed use project was rejected. Several projects that were brought forward including the Everwonder museum, Ice Rink, Bakery did not have the necessary private funding to move the project forward.

- 5) What are your thoughts/concerns about property security?

I think the property was relatively secure. It has enough activity throughout the day and evening that any kind of vandalism or breaking into the buildings was not excessive. I also think the buildings are already pretty gutted of anything valuable. The biggest concern would be structural integrity and whether that poses a risk to people on campus but most activities are safely away from the buildings and having been in all of them, they are built to stand. The exterior shells of the buildings are in relatively good shape. The interiors are the problem.

- 6) Do you feel there are impediments that have diminished the development of the property that can be addressed in an updated Master Plan/zoning reg?

The biggest impediment was the condition of the interior of the buildings. I was with dozens of developers over the years and almost universally, they loved the exteriors but the

interiors were too capital intensive to make development realistic. The location is superb from a demographic and geographic standpoint but having to virtually demolish a building was just too much to ask. None of that can be addressed by the Master Plan.

- 7) Any other comments that you feel will help us recommend updates that are constructive and implementable are very welcome.

My general thoughts about the Master Plan and how it impacted the FHA and stewardship of the property is that the master plan was simply a guideline. It wasn't a covenant. The Master Plan provided a broad scope of allowable uses. When presented with a proposal for development, the FHA had an objective role to simply see if the proposal fit an allowable use. What was more of a challenge was the subjective element of whether a proposal was not only an allowable use but also a desirable addition to campus. This subjectivity is where individual opinion and hopes for the campus would either converge or diverge. For example, retail is an allowable use but a pawn shop would likely not be something we'd want to see. The Master Plan played a fairly small role in the process. The allowable uses were so broad that it was relatively meaningless from a practical standpoint. An allowable use might not be an attractive use and any development on the campus would still require a vote from the FHA to "recommend" to the Board of Selectman, Legislative Council and Board of Finance to take up the issue.

It was always my desire to make the campus a zero sum line item on the town budget. I believe it should have a line item that demonstrates real costs to maintain the property and then work toward generating revenue on campus from fees and other opportunities to pay for that line item. It is a wonderful place that has organically developed into a fantastic area for passive and active recreation but it takes a considerable amount of money to maintain it, mitigate security risks, demolish buildings etc.. My feeling was that a town investment into making it a regional outdoor event destination for concerts, festivals, etc would be an excellent way to accomplish that. I'm not sure the Master Plan addresses that or not but if it needed to be defined, that would be one suggestion.

I also think limited housing in a mixed use development is something that should happen but that seems to be a third rail for local residents. My sense is that if the Master Plan clearly defined what was allowable (size of dwelling, limited number of apartments, requirements for affordable housing, etc..) you would see developers start to come forward again.

I guess my overall feeling is that the more specific you can make it the more relevant it will be as it relates to the FHA.