

Fairfield Hills Master Plan Review Committee SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES

**The Fairfield Hills Master Plan Review Committee held a Meeting on July 11, 2019
In the Parks & Rec meeting room, 3 Main Street, Newtown CT 06470**

These minutes are subject to approval at the next meeting.

Present: Deborra Zukowski, Gary MacRae, Robert Rau, Doug Smith (left 9:20 p.m.), Chandravir Ahuja, Rob Sherwood, Bryan Roth, Jeffery Jorgensen, Bob Bowen, Neil Chaudhary (arrived 7:26 p.m.)

Absent: Public Attendance: None

Also Present: Dan Rosenthal – First Selectman, Ross Carley – FHA Chair, Wes Thompson – EDC Chair, Christal Prezler – Deputy Director of Economic & Community Development, John Bocuzzi – 57 Queen St., Kinga Walsh – 21 Horseshoe Ridge Rd., Ned Simpson – 42 Watkins Dr.,

The meeting was called to order at 7:04 p.m.

Public Participation

John Bocuzzi – 57 Queen Street:

Mr. Bocuzzi explained to everyone that he attended the meeting to support discussions around housing on Fairfield Hills. He expressed that it is very wise for town to consider housing from the stand-point of the economics of remediating the environment issues in the campus buildings. Preservation of these buildings is a great idea and a sought after use by developers now is housing. The State is currently offering great incentives for the developers and it will increase the Town's tax base without increasing the need for services.

Kinga Walsh – 21 Horseshoe Ridge:

Mrs. Walsh explained to the group that she was in attendance as the Community Center Committee Chair, as well as a resident of Newtown. First she spoke for the Community Center. She referred to a letter that she had mailed asking that the Committee consider the goals of the Community Center when making recommendations regarding the campus. She requested that the recommendations do not duplicate efforts on the campus and that the impact on parking is considered.

Kurt Symes – 36 Lake Road:

Mr. Symes told the group that he has been a resident, property owner and small business owner in Newtown for many years. He is currently very involved in all senior related efforts and activities. He noted how Newtown's demographics have changed and that he has spoken to the Board of Selectman, Legislative Council and many other groups regarding the needs and wants of seniors. Housing has been identified as a critical need. Per Mr. Symes conversations with the First Selectman, Ross Carley – Chairman of the Fairfield Hills Authority and Christal Prezler – Deputy Director of Economic and Community Development, he has learned that there are things in play now such as tax advantages that make this an opportune time to move forward on housing at Fairfield Hills. He recognized there are valid questions that need to be vetted, but feels this is the opportune time for the Committee to move forward with discussions on housing. Mr. Symes continued to note the continued decay of the buildings and the need to ensure their safety and security. Housing could be a key solution.

Deb asked for a show of hands of how many supported stand-alone apartment buildings (no commercial component) in existing footprints. She then asked how many supported housing over commercial. There were

2/3 to ¾ of the members of the public were in support of stand-alone apartments and 100% in support of mixed use.

Ned Simpson – 42 Watkins Drive:

Mr. Simpson asked that the Committee include housing in the Fairfield Hills Master Plan. He told Committee members that he and his wife walk the campus many time per week and enjoy the beautiful nature, but he does understand that this is an asset that costs the town allot of money. As a member of the Board of Finance he has seen the costs associated with the campus and how they have been pushed out into the future. He continued to tell the group that as he took the survey he felt it would be a source of consternation for the community, as well as a source of information for the Committee. He noted the survey did not convey to people the trade-offs and gave examples one of which was choosing between air-conditioning a school and preserving Fairfield Hills as it is today. In 2001 the vision was small retail, restaurants and professional offices, but since that time much of that has occurred in town but not on the campus. Mr. Simpson highlighted the commercial properties that are now available around Newtown. He asked what would be different in the master plan that would draw developers to the campus instead of other parts of town. The town has not been able to sell the idea of small retail, restaurants or professional offices on campus, but now has the opportunity to add housing in a way that the developer wants to do it. Mr. Simpson noted that the FHMPRC has put allot of time and effort into the review process which gives them allot of credibility. He asked that the group use that credibility to educate the residents of the trade-offs and the challenges. He also asked that Committee strongly consider housing without a commercial component to allow more flexibility for developers.

Christal Prezler – Deputy Director of Economic & Community Development:

Ms. Prezler explained that as Deputy Director of Economic & Community Development she is responsible for many activities on the Fairfield Hills campus. She noted that in the prior show of hands vote, she voted for both stand-alone apartments and mixed use, but expressed that her opinion does not matter. It is the market that dictates what is going to happened. Christal asked that the Committee remain open minded and define housing broadly to ensure opportunities are not lost. She told members that in working with Fairfield Hills she has often heard from people that they like the character of the campus and that she does too, but she has witnessed pieces of buildings falling off and it is not realistic to think that the campus can remain as is. There are a handful of people or groups that have the qualifications and financial wherewithal to properly remediate and reuse these buildings. Thinking that these groups will be around in the future and that the buildings will still be viable is not realistic. Ms. Prezler encouraged the group to approve housing and/or mixed-use, and thanked the Committee for their work.

Steve Rosenblatt – 50 Watkins Drive:

Mr. Rosenblatt began by saying that as a senior he would love having an apartment on the Fairfield Hills campus and that his granddaughter, who recently graduated college, would love an apart on campus also. He is not interested in commercial businesses on the ground floor as it would add traffic. Mr. Rosenblatt continued to tell the Committee that he did not see parking as an issue. The need to bring people into Newtown to live and stay is very important and supersedes residents' concerns with home values as renovating these decaying buildings would improve the campus and therefore the area. There is reason beyond money to have apartments on the Fairfield Hills campus.

Approval of Minutes

Chand Ahuja motioned to approve the minutes from June 12, 2019. Mr. Chaudhary seconded the motion. All were in favor and the minutes were approved.

Communications

Chair Deb Zukowski read aloud a letter from First Selectman, Dan Rosenthal, regarding interests and proposals for reuse of existing buildings which includes a housing component. (See attachment “Fairfield Hills Campus – Proposal from Town”.)

Old Business

Prepare recommendations: Housing

Chair Deb Zukowski began by explaining that the job of the Committee at this time is to make recommendations and she asked that the discussion begin with housing.

Chand Ahuja expressed that he felt the group would be trying to decide something before having a clear vision. The existing users must be kept in mind with anything that is proposed.

Gary MacRae noted that housing was a big issue that was not going away and asked if he could make a proposal.

Gary MacRae motioned to propose that housing limited to the footprint of existing buildings be added as an approved use to the Fairfield Hills Master Plan. Bob Rau seconded.

(After much discussion a vote was taken.)

2 in favor	Gary MacRae, Bob Rau
7 opposed	Deborra Zukowski, Doug Smith, Chandravir Ahuja, Rob Sherwood, Bryan Roth, Jeffery Jorgensen, Bob Bowen, Neil Chaudhary
1 abstention	Rob Sherwood

Jeff Jorgensen told the group he felt that there are more qualified people who should be making the detailed decisions. The Committee should not be putting too many restrictions in place. Planning & Zoning has a better viewpoint for detailed decisions and recommendations.

First Selectman, Dan Rosenthal told the group he heard Jeff’s point and realized that the Committee as a group may want to forward more flexibility in the process. He expressed his appreciation of the people who responded to the survey, but his letter was trying to explain that he felt the survey results left unresolved what would be done with the buildings. He further clarified that he is not proposing all buildings are turned over for housing. Mr. Rosenthal continued to explain the cost to tear down buildings and that his intent is to convert one or some of the buildings into housing, so they are no longer liabilities and a huge cost to the taxpayers.

Deb asked that the group discuss what housing would bring to the property and what it would cost the property. In public participation she heard that reusing the existing buildings for housing would be one way of keeping the character of the campus. Converting existing buildings into housing would also address safety issues. Housing

would also address cost avoidance as there would be no demolition costs. She also heard diversified housing where both seniors and college graduates can live. There are concerns that parking may be an issue as tenant parking will need to be considered. Another concern is that commercialization on campus may become more focused on tenants of the apartments than providing destinations for the community.

Chand told the group that he would prefer restrictions because he wants to ensure something is done with the existing buildings. There needs to be something in the language to ensure there are limitations. The group has a fiduciary responsibility to provide guidance on the full vision. Jeff clarified that his proposal was for someone else who is more qualified determine the restrictions.

Neil Chaudhary asked what housing would do to the Community Center in terms of having a high number of people living on campus. Kinga added, as a member of the public and not as her position on the community center committee, that an increase in membership would help the Community Center's sustainability. Neil continued to tell the group that he was unable to find examples where a people would be living on town owned land. The public/private partnerships tend to be situations where the public supports privately owned land not necessarily the other way around. They have also heard allot regarding parking on campus. Deb reminded everyone that only 20% of the property could be impervious surface. Bob Rau brought to everyone's attention that the State has requirements for number of parking spaces per apartment that may lead to a garage. Neil continued the discussion noting the sewer capacity is now adequate but is old and as people are added may break down which would lead to a town expense. Christal told the group that she and Kim Chiappetta have responsibility for the campus and the Kim has been working on an Economic Development Administration grant for a partial upgrade of the sewers. Finally, Neil noted that these were his basic concerns and on top of that the excellent representation in the survey and that the general public opinion was still no housing.

Rob Sherwood explained to the group that parking would be an issue on the campus even if one of the buildings was converted into office space. The issue could be mitigated by the developer. Rob expressed concerns with limiting a developer to an existing footprint. Deb clarified that the current Master Plan says "largely coincident", and the group can soften that language. New buildings, NYA and Community Center, have a vastly different feel.

Bob Rau said that there is no question in his mind that there needs to be some type of housing component regarding of whether it was mixed use or stand-alone housing or both.

Doug Smith said that the housing question goes between keeping the character of the campus versus having the possibility of housing. He explained that he was very sensitive to the concerns raised by Neil but does not think the Committee should be the end of the road for housing. If the group decided that due to the concerns with housing the recommendation be to disallow housing, then next logical step would mean the buildings would have to be demolished at taxpayer cost. Doug said that he was leaning toward allowing housing with broad but meaningful restricts on type and scope of housing with an eye toward how would affect the campus at large.

Bob Bowen noted concerns about people not wanting new housing, but in contrast the aging population and people leaving and the need to keep both here. He express that the campus is laid out and housing will be vital to the future of Newtown and the campus.

Bryan Roth expressed the importance of putting restrictions around the amount of housing.

Deb added another point of new buildings leading to more money coming into the town. Past history suggests that such money not be as much as anticipated. Dan said there is interest that would mirror the NYA process where the town would maintain control of the property, but the developer would own the building. Town brings no money into any development (e.g., local tax incentives), so the town would receive real and personal property and vehicle taxes.

Jeff added we do know what we pay if we do nothing. If things continue as they are, we know someone could get hurt or worse. It is likely that requests for money for razing the would be rejected at referendum.

Gary is hearing a solution that would keep the building character the same, Cochran has a problem with parking so Shelton and Kent may be the right place to think about housing. Let this go out to the town to get real feedback and real information like what would the cost of razing the buildings mean to each homeowner. He is also very concerned about safety risks regarding the current state of the buildings.

Chand referred back to the discussion from the last meeting where there was a consensus about the property: to allow mixed-use housing because of the cost element, but only in support of the vision. We want to save money and we want to ensure that it balances interests in town. Housing is a means and not an end, to realizing the potential the property provides. We need to iron out restrictions on housing.

The group continued to discuss concerns including staying in line with the vision of the property, the natural beauty of the property, the need to secure the buildings and the costs to the town. After much conversation a motion was made.

Deb handed the meeting over to Neil and motioned that the Committee make a recommendation that the Fairfield Hills Master Plan be modified to allow commercial proposals that include a housing component provided that the proposal is for no more than 2 buildings and that the commercial component adheres the vision for the property. Bryan Roth seconded. Vote passed with all in favor.

(See attachment "2018 FFHMPR Committee Recommendations-Draft-071019" for the following sections.)

Prepare recommendations: Vision

Deb read the existing Vision to members. The group discussed whether or not housing had to be added to the vision. The group agreed that housing did not specifically need to be added.

Neil Chaudhary moved to keep the vision as is. Gary MacRae seconded. All in favor.

Prepare recommendations: Supported Uses

Deb read the permitted uses documented in the Fairfield Hills Adaptive Reuse Zone (FHAR). Concerns regarding conflicting development were raised, but members felt it was not the place of the town to address these concerns. After some discussion, the group agreed to not recommend any supported uses be removed.

Prepare recommendations: Cohesive Themes

Deb read the three cohesive themes of the campus from the 2013 Amended Master Plan. The Committee agreed to not recommend any changes.

Prepare recommendations: Buildings

Deb began by reviewing the tables from the 2013 Amended Master Plan. The tables are out of date and should be adjusted to reflect current potential uses for the buildings.

Deb brought to the Committee’s attention the text below the table that requires an alternative location if a building identified in the Recreational Fields table is used for something other than recreational fields.

In a discussion regarding Cochran, Chand recommended not restricting the building to recreation. Members discussed the close proximity of Cochran to the homes across the street on Mile Hill South. After some discussion the group came to the conclusion that using Cochran for an assisted living facility would address concerns with traffic and parking.

Deb asked for a motion to add assisted living to the Master Plan.

Chand Ahuja motioned that assisted living be added as an approved use to the Master Plan. Bob Bowen seconded. All in favor.

Deb asked for a motion to out of the Field table move Cochran to the “Buildings Targeted for Private Commercial / Non-profit Use” table.

Chand motioned that Cochran be moved to the *Buildings Targeted for Private Commercial / Non-profit Use* table. Rob Sherwood seconded.

Deb asked for a vote, and the results were as follows:

7 in favor	Deb Zukowski, Gary MacRae, Robert Rau, Chand Ahuja, Rob Sherwood, Bryan Roth, Bob Bowen
1 opposed	Neil Chaudhary
1 abstained	Jeff Jorgensen

Neil motioned to recommend that buildings with no potential be razed as soon as possible. Bob Bowen seconded. All in favor.

The group had extensive discussions regarding the pros and cons of making a recommendation to have a plan that would provide guidance to developers in regards to the architecture of the buildings. The concern of some members was that the Committee did not have the level of expertise for specific recommendations. At the end of the discussion, everyone agreed that there needed to be some type of plan but the details would be drafted by a group more knowledgeable in the area.

Chair Deb Zukowski handed the meeting back over to Vice Chair Neil Chaudhary and made a motion that the Committee recommend the Town undertake a site use overlay plan to provide better guidance for potential development of existing buildings. Bob Bowen seconded. All in favor.

Prepare recommendations: Supported Uses

Deb read the supported uses as documented in the Fairfield Hills Adaptive Reuse Zone. The group agreed to not recommend removing any of the existing supported uses.

See "Prepare Recommendations: Building" for addition of assisted living as a use.

Adjournment:

Jeff Jorgensen motioned to adjourn the meeting. Bryan Roth seconded. All were in favor and the meeting was adjourned at 10:35 p.m.

*Respectfully submitted,
Kimberly Chiappetta, clerk*



TOWN OF NEWTOWN

OFFICE OF THE FIRST SELECTMAN

To: Deborra Zukowski, Chair, Fairfield Hills Master Plan Review Committee

From: Dan Rosenthal, First Selectman *DR*

CC: Chandraviir Ahuja
Bob Bowen
Neil Chaudhary
Jeffrey Jorgenson
Gary MacRae
Robert Rau
Bryan Roth
Rob Sherwood
Doug Smith

George Benson, Director of Planning
Ross Carley, Chairman Fairfield Hills Authority
Christal Preszler, Deputy Director of Ec. & Comm. Dev.
Wes Thompson, Chairman Econ. Dev. Commission

Date: July 1, 2019

Re: Proposals for Fairfield Hills

During the time that the Fairfield Hills Master Plan Review Committee has been meeting, there has been renewed interest in the Fairfield Hills Campus, including an influx of well-qualified proposals for reuse of some of the existing buildings.

Interest in renovating existing buildings has a common theme – housing. This is largely due to the fact that by including a largely residential component in the project, it makes the developer eligible for tax credits. Given the heavy cost of renovation, absent tax credits, the economics of the projects don't close.

At least three development firms with interest in the property have proven track records renovating historic buildings successfully. Private investment combined with tax credits that are available at the federal and state levels allow these reuse project to make financial sense. The president of one company serves on the board of a historic preservation organization. He was recently recognized for his work with an award for successful historic preservation projects. The proposals site plans to invest up to \$60 million to renovate some buildings that would include housing, thus preserving existing buildings on the campus.

Renovating the buildings will bring in revenue from real estate taxes, car taxes of those who live in the units, common area maintenance fees, create jobs and would diversify the housing stock in an area already developed and supported by necessary infrastructure, while offering new housing options for

young people and seniors. Most importantly, the reuse of the buildings will save the taxpayers the substantial expense of abatement and demolition of large buildings.

Based on conversations with developers, I cannot stress enough that the only viable reuse for these large buildings is to include a residential component. It is my goal to include a mixed use component in upcoming projects. Renovating some of the buildings on the campus as housing will support keeping the character of the campus intact, and turn the current liabilities into assets.

I strongly urge the Fairfield Hills Master Plan Review Committee to include housing, limited to the footprint of existing buildings, as an approved use in the Fairfield Hills Master Plan.

Fairfield Hills Master Plan Review Committee (2018-2019) Recommendations

1.0 Introduction

In 2001, Newtown voters approved the purchase of the 186 acre Fairfield Hills Campus and surrounding property. Core uses and strategies were established at that time related to open space, playing fields, economic development, educational uses, municipal use, and the need to preserve the campus environment with Town control of the property. The 2005 Fairfield Hills Master Plan Ad Hoc committee further developed these uses as part of crafting the original 2005 Master Plan.

The 2005 Plan called for a 5 year review resulting in the formation of the 2010 Fairfield Hills Master Plan Review Committee. The 2010 committee recommended adding an overall vision for the property and a set of more cohesive themes. It also recommended that the open meadows be officially designated as open space **among** along with a few other changes. A work group (comprised of two members of the 2010 committee, a member of the Conservation Commission, the chair of the Planning and Zoning Commission, and the Director of Planning) reconciled the recommendations and the 2005 master plan, producing the 2013 Fairfield Hills Master Plan.

The 5 year review process was maintained, resulting in the formation of the 2018 Fairfield Hills Master Plan Review Committee, hereinafter referred to as the "Committee." The primary purpose of the Committee was to review the 2013 Master Plan for the Fairfield Hills campus and associated property and make recommendations as the Committee deemed appropriate for revisions or modifications to that Plan. The Committee was also requested to leverage community involvement and outreach as a part of its effort to build a perspective of what an updated Master Plan should emphasize.

1.1 Our Process

The Committee solicited input and active participation from members of the public, community boards and commissions, and such Town of Newtown departments as it deemed appropriate. Specifically, we focused on:

- A) Becoming informed: From September 2018 through January 2019, members of the Committee focused on understanding the 20013 Master Plan, municipal needs, and the ongoing realities of the property. We hosted 7 meetings, with over 20 invited participants, to better understand the history, current status, and needs of the community. All meetings encouraged public input. In addition, we hosted an open forum for public discussion and suggestions on "Current and potential uses related to recreation and town services" and "Commercial, mixed use (housing over commercial), and housing."¹

¹ The quoted text is from the agenda for the January 22, 2019 agenda.

- B) Launching a town-wide survey: We leveraged the 2010 Fairfield Hills Master Plan Review Committee Survey, augmented with questions and ideas gained from our efforts in A), above. The 2019 Community Survey had 1825 valid responses, well more than the 1041 responses gathered in 2010 – a time when there was a lot of community discussion and disagreement about the development of the property.
- C) Preparing recommendations: Using our knowledge of and experience from the earlier steps, we deliberated both individually and as a committee to reach the recommendations provided below.

Summaries of our approach and findings for the first two steps are included separately as appendices A and B. The remainder of this document includes the recommendations and summaries of the discussions that occurred during the final step.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 Vision, Use, and Theme Recommendations

Vision Statement

Recommendation : Discussion
Recommendation : Discussion
etc.

Supported Uses

Recommendation : Discussion
Recommendation : Discussion
etc.

Potential Cohesive Themes

Recommendation : Discussion
Recommendation : Discussion
etc.

2.2 Process Recommendations

Recommendation : Discussion
Recommendation : Discussion
etc.

For clarity on what “Process” may mean - examples from 2010 recommendations:

- Ensure Operational Transparency
- Support Continued Public Participation

- Drive towards one town-wide plan, but repeat the Fairfield Hills Review process until the vision is more fully implemented.

2.3 Implementation Recommendations

Recommendation : Discussion

Recommendation : Discussion

etc.

For clarity on what “Implementation” may mean - examples from 2010 recommendations:

- Support the Fairfield Hills Authority’s ongoing review of the lease structure and terms.
- Do not consider selling a parcel of land at Fairfield Hills unless certain guidelines are met.
- Act as quickly as possible to prevent further deterioration and secure the renovation of those buildings that can be saved and to demolish those deemed unusable.
- Undertake/Continue a comprehensive review of existing infrastructure.
- Replace the Fairfield Hills Adaptive Reuse Zone with a finer-grained, use-based zoning map.
- Designate High Meadow as a protected area.

3.0 Suggested Priorities

4.0 Concluding Remarks

Appendix A: Informing Ourselves and the Public

Note that the ~~above~~-meetings ~~listed below~~ were intended to provide information/context to the committee membership both to help guide the subsequent public engagement efforts and to ensure that past and current experiences and learnings ~~are were~~ a part of the final deliberation process.

Development: History, Current Status, Obstacles, and Successes Uses: Current and Requested

DATE	TOPIC	INVITEES
Sep 25, 2018	Land Use, Zoning	George Benson: Director of Planning
Oct 10, 2018	Infrastructure	Fred Hurley: Public Works Louis Carbone: Water and Sewer Auth.
Oct 23, 2018	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, 2018	Seniors and Disabled CANCELED²	Anna Wiedemann: Comm. On Aging Chair Pat Llodra: Friends of Newtown Seniors Representative Judith Slason: Exec. Director of Nunnawalk Meadows
Nov 20, 2018	FFH Adaptive Reuse Zoning	Lilla Dean: Prior P & Z Chair Robert Geckle: 2005 FFH Master Plan Comm. Chair
Dec 5, 2018	Cultural, Recreational Uses	Amy Mangold: Parks & Rec Director Carl Samuelson: Asst Director/Parks Edward Marks: Parks & Rec Comm. Chair Laura Lerman: Cultural Arts Comm. Chair
Dec 18, 2018	Current Tenants – What works, what could be improved? All tenants were invited.	Malcolm McLachlan: Newtown Ambulance President Mark Tambascio/Dave: Brewery Dave Kingsley: Brewery Dan Rosenthal: First Selectman
Jan 9, 2019	Commercial Housing	Chris Hottois: Local developer Bryan Atherton: Commercial Real Estate Christal Preszler: Economic and Community Dev George Benson: Director of Planning
Jan 22, 2019	Public Conversation – What is missing? Current thoughts about commercial uses.	
External Meeting	Newtown Schools	

² The meeting could not be held because of technical issues. Given the late notice of the problem the invited participants showed up. The meeting time was used for the a conversations among the invited guests. A few committee members stayed to learn, though the number did not constitute a quorum.

Key Learnings

One of the most concerning things we learned was the deterioration of the buildings and the related issues of security and overall safety. During the time we were meeting, we found videos online of youth exploring buildings and saw news reports of people entering the buildings to steal copper and other items. As the buildings continue to deteriorate, those who enter the buildings, whether with criminal intent or on a “lark” are at risk of being seriously hurt.

We also learned of issues central to re-purposing existing buildings, including overall costs and financing. According to several participants, mixed-use development is necessary for re-purposing the larger buildings because access to financing often requires such diversity in the development. In addition, developers reduce risk by providing both commercial and housing.

In terms of uses, we heard from seniors that their use of the property is currently limited due to accessibility and lack of amenities. Many seniors do not play standard organized sports, nor do they access the walking trails because of lack of resting spaces and bathrooms. The soon-to-open senior center may address some of their programming concerns.

Finally, two new features (in addition to the senior center) will soon be opening. The new Community Center, slated to open in late July, intends to be an indoor space for people to gather, participate in cultural programming, and have access to other types of recreational activities not currently available on the campus. It will also include a cafe for people to have access to some nourishment. Also, the anticipated brew pub will extend the options for food and drink on the campus. One concern shared with us is that the impact on parking because of the new features is not well known yet.

TO COMMITTEE MEMBERS: PLEASE SEND ME ANY OTHER THINGS YOU FEEL SHOULD BE ADDED HERE.

Appendix B: 2019 Community Survey

Getting the word out

We viewed the survey as a key part of our community outreach and so developed a multi-phased strategy to keep the community aware throughout the survey period.

Week 1:

- Article in the Newtown Bee
- Near immediate posts on over half a dozen Newtown-oriented Facebook groups
- Town email blast, via the First Selectman's office
- Announcement on the Town website, again via the First Selectman's office
- Physical copies of the survey, with posters and URL cards provided to the senior center, library, and municipal center
- Announcement at the Edmond Town Hall Theater shows

Week 2:

- Newtown Bee letters from First Selectman Dan Rosenthal and an engaged community member
- Posters throughout the Municipal Center along with "homemade" posters on the Edmond Town Hall bulletin boards

Week 3:

- Posters at several local businesses, an official poster at ETH targeting movie-goers, and on the poster stand near the Newtown General Store
- A large sandwich sign at the intersection of Queen Street and Church Hill Road

Week 4:

- Refresh of the Facebook groups posted to earlier.
- Another town blast
- A letter for May 10 issue of the Newtown Bee
- Email chains to friends and local colleagues
- Visibility at the Newtown Volunteer Fair (jointly sponsored by Friends of Newtown Seniors, The Newtown Chamber, and the C.H. Booth Library)

In addition, announcements were made by our Senior Liaison to various senior groups throughout the time period.

Summary of Survey Results

Fairfield Hills Community Survey Results

This document provides a summary of the input collected by the 2019 Community Survey. It does not represent thoughts or positions of the committee. Over the next few meetings, the committee will be deliberating recommendations for updates, if any, to the current Fairfield Hills Master Plan. These recommendations will be provided to the Planning and Zoning Commission for review and possible action.

The survey data, as well as information from our research phase (gathered during our meetings from Sept. 25 though Jan. 22), will be used to inform the committee's discussion and decision.

Thank you to all who took the time to fill out the survey.

Introduction

The Fairfield Hills Master Plan Review Committee prepared a community survey to gather input directly from Newtown residents about their preferences for the Fairfield Hills campus. The survey was live from Monday, April 15th through Wednesday, May 15 of 2019.

There were a total of 2,201 responses to the survey. Some respondents were technically ineligible to participate, and their answers were removed from analyses because they were either too young (24 respondents under the age of 18) or they did not reside in Newtown. Analyses were conducted using the remaining 1,825 respondents, noting that not all respondents answered all questions.

This document summarizes the overall responses. (All of the respondent data is available [here](#).) It is intended to provide a higher-level interpretation of the survey results for use by the public and to supplement the raw survey data and research information used as part of the Fairfield Hills Master Plan Review Committee deliberations.

Views on Current Status

When asked about currently available activities and amenities, over 50% of the respondents thought that the following items were available at about the right level.

	About Right
Parking (Q8)	73%
Sports Fields (Q2)	69%
Walking/Biking Trails (Q7)	63%
Agriculture (Q6)	55%
Arts (Q1)	52%

However, over 50% of respondents identified the following four items as insufficient, i.e., too little of each was available on the property.

	Too Little
Bathrooms (Q9)	68%
Food (Q4)	63%
Resting Areas (Q10)	63%
Outdoor Entertainment (Q3)	60%

There was uniform agreement that all of the items listed on the survey were either at a good level or needed to be expanded. At most, only 24% of the respondents indicated that an item (pickle ball courts) was overly represented on the property.³ Other than pickle ball, one item had 12% of respondents who answered too much. The remaining items were 0 to 3%.

Views on Future Services and Features

More than 50% of respondents supported the following.

	Total Approve
Band Shell (Q14)	83%
Small Food Service (Q45)	79%
Town Green/Pedestrian Plaza (Q18)	77%
Small Retail Shops (Q17)	72%
Restaurants (Q46)	70%
Pub/Tavern (Q47)	68%
Local Retail Businesses (Q41)	66%

³ Note that there was a highly contested appropriations request on the Town Budget referendum for additional pickle ball courts during the time the survey was available.

Performing Arts and Community Center (Q13)	65%
Artisan/Craft Market (Q23)	63%
Events Space (Q22)	61%
Water Fountains ⁴ (Q32)	61%
Playground/Water Park (Q21)	59%
Theater for Performing Arts (Q52)	57%
Art Gallery / Museum (Q53)	56%
Main Street (Q15)	56%

Fewer than 50% of the respondents supported the following.

	Total Approve
Basketball Courts (Q31)	45%
Tennis Courts (Q30)	41%
Education Facilities (Q29)	38%
Business Co-op, Innovation Ctr (Q50)	36%
Small Corporate Offices (Q49)	34%
Small Movie Theater (Q19)	29%
Wedding/Event Hall (Q27)	28%
Horse Trails (Q20)	27%
Small Professional Offices (Q16)	24%
National Retailers (Q42)	24%
Boutique Hotel (Q26)	21%
Multiplex Theater (Q43)	20%
Health Services Ctr (Q25)	19%
Large Corporate Offices (Q48)	19%
Banks, Real Estate Offices (Q44)	16%
Light Industrial (Q51)	14%
Multi-level Parking (Q24)	9%

Unfortunately, the survey did not include a question for an ice-skating rink since there were plans at the time the survey as designed to build one on the property.

⁴ The term “Water Fountain” was ambiguous - some thought “Drinking Fountain” while others thought “Water Feature.”

Views on Housing

Housing on the campus has a history of eliciting strong opinions, and proposed developments that include a housing component have been met with public push-back. Therefore, looking at only the favorable response may be insufficient. Not only is the pro/anti response important, but also the vehemence of that response. The table below shows all favorable and unfavorable responses.

	Very Fav	Fav	Unfav	Very Unfav	Total Fav	Total UnFav
Mixed Use (Q59)	8%	16%	16%	47%	24%	63%
Condos (Q54)	5%	13%	19%	53%	18%	72%
Stand-Alone [S-A] Apartments (Q55)	5%	12%	19%	54%	17%	71%
Rental Housing (Q28)	6%	10%	22%	52%	16%	74%
Age-Restricted S-A Apartments (Q56)	5%	11%	21%	52%	16%	73%
Age/Income Restricted, S-A Apartments (Q57)	4%	8%	22%	56%	12%	78%
Income Restricted S-A Apartments/Condos (Q58)	4%	8%	19%	58%	12%	77%

In all cases, total favorable is less than 25%. Very unfavorable is consistently near or above 50%. If there is a public hearing (and assuming those most vehement show up), it is possible that for every 1 who strongly supports housing, there will be at least 10 who strongly oppose it for standalone housing. It will likely be closer to 1 in support for every 7 against, for mixed use development (apartments over commercial).

Views on Status of Buildings and Related Financing

The survey included a section to gauge the community's view on development, as a whole, and opinions on how to finance the development.

The table below shows views related to overall development.

	Total Fav	Total UnFav
Reserve for Future Needs (Q33)	65%	13%
	Total Agree	Ttl Disagree
Sense of Urgency to Develop (Q11)	62%	22%
No More Development (Q38)	25%	59%

In terms of paying for improving the buildings/property, views are shown in the following table.

	Total Agree	Total Disagree
Renovate, Developer Pays (Q35)	46%	32%
Let Buildings Sit for 5-10 yrs(Q37)	44%	42%
Renovate, Town Pays (Q34)	36%	42%
Demolish Buildings, Town Pays (Q36)	26%	54%

The survey also asked about control for the land and subsequent development. Community views are shown below.

	Total Agree	Total Disagree
Town Maintains Control (Q39)	72%	11%
Land Parcel Sold to Developer(Q40)	34%	50%

Demographics

A survey reflects the opinions of those who respond along with what their experiences were related to the topic of the survey. At times, though, the response to a survey may not represent the overall demographics of a community. The Committee used several communication channels to try to ensure it reached a representative sample of the community and then analyzed the results to ensure that the responses adequately represented the community as a whole.

The demographic analysis examined responses for any gender differences because, compared to the census 2018 population estimates for Newtown, female respondents were over-represented. There were indeed some differences between male and female respondents but in no case did the differences shift what was considered generally favorable for one gender to be generally unfavorable for the other (and vice versa).

The distribution of the age of survey respondents was similar to the census 2018 population estimates but skewed slightly toward the younger side. For example, census data estimates that 20% of Newtown's population was 65 or older but there were 17% of the respondents who indicated their age was 65 or older. We also examined responses by age group to better understand how opinions may vary by age to better gauge needs across the different groups. Click [here](#) to view the results. While age differences are of some interest, the main reason to focus on this was to recognize that our oldest respondents were slightly underrepresented and as such the committee members could review opinions separately by age category to allow for any adjustment.

Write-In Comments

In addition to answering questions asked on the survey, about 40% of respondents provided additional write-in comments. These write-in comments provide qualitative data that complements the quantitative data provided by the survey. The comments provide ideas and recommendations that town leaders can refer to when considering any changes to the property but do not, necessarily, give insight into overall community support for the ideas.

The write-in comments included remarks about overall themes for the property, concerns, recommendations for additional features, more general comments specific to the property, and a few other comments. Any write-in comment that included more than one type of remark was split so that each remark was separate, yielding a total of about 800 comments. To see a full listing of the comments as originally submitted, click [here](#).

Just under 50% of the respondents called out higher-level themes, including the community destination outlined in the current master plan and others liked a more dedicated sports/youth destination, a shopping (with or without housing) destination, or a central park / open space focus. Of those calling out overall themes, just under 60% appeared to support the current master plan, over 20% requested a more intensive shopping destination, and just over 15% wanted a focus on a more park-like environment. (Comments about themes generally included broader remarks, often including multiple features and some concerns justifying the theme, and were generally not split apart. Therefore, the number of comments about themes is synonymous to the number of respondents.)

About 20% of the comments were about overall concerns, including tax burdens (just over 10% of the respondents) and, to a lesser degree, concerns about conflict with vacant space elsewhere in town, the loss of town/site history, traffic/congestion, the lack of an overall development/management plan, loss of Newtown's small town feel, public access to the property, and pollution/aquifer concerns.

About 10% of the respondents offered other features and recommendations for the property. Just over half of these called out the desire for a hockey rink. Other features included:

- An educational campus for Newtown Public Schools
- Colleges and institutes
- Dedicated bike paths
- ATV tracks and other youth-oriented sporting features
- Access to community-wide transportation
- A gazebo
- Special-needs housing
- A public golf course
- A food hall
- Pet amenities like a doggy drinking fountain, and
- A community garden for growing one's one fruits and vegetables, for those residents whose yards were not ammenable to gardening.

The remaining comments emphasize or elaborate on answers given earlier in the survey or provide more general comments that were difficult to categorize.