



TOWN OF NEWTOWN
Fairfield Hills Master Plan Review Committee
MINUTES

**The Fairfield Hills Master Plan Review Committee held a Meeting on October 23, 2018
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, Neil Chaudhary, Gary MacRae (7:03 p.m.), Doug Smith, Bryan Roth, Robert Rau, Rob Sherwood

Absent: Jeffery Jorgensen, Chandravir Ahuja, Bob Bowen

Public Attendance: none

Also Present: John Reed, Don Mitchel, Ross Carley, Kim Chiappetta – clerk.

The meeting was called to order at 7:01 p.m.

Public Participation:

None

Approval of Minutes

Doug Smith motioned to approve the minutes from October 10, 2018. Neil Chaudhary seconded the motion. Rob Sherwood abstained. Motion passed with all in favor.

Communications

Deb Zukowski informed Committee members that she spoke with the Board of Education and will discuss the outcome during calendar conversations later in the meeting.

Tom Connors was unable to attend this evenings meeting, but did provide responses to questions via email which was distributed to the group. (See attached.)

New Business

FFH Master Plan Implementation Discussion:

Deb welcomed Dr. John Reed (*former Fairfield Hills Authority chair*), Don Mitchel (*current Planning & Zoning Chair*), and Ross Carley (*current Fairfield Hills Authority chair*) to the meeting.

Deb asked to begin with the process and issues around the incoming brewery. Ross Carley answered that each lease negotiated is unique to itself in that it may involve taking down a building, renovating an existing building, or a piece of property.

Mark Tambascio approached the Fairfield Hills Authority regarding leasing Stratford Hall. As good landlords of the building the FHA wants to ensure the building exterior is sound. Money has been spent to remove the asbestos roof and replace the flat roofs. Work is also planned to encase the lead paint. The process begins with the business owner approaching the Fairfield Hills Authority with a proposal. The business concept had already been reviewed by George Benson, Director of Land Use and Christal Preszler, Deputy Director of Economic and Community Development. Lease negotiations include details of identifying who is responsible for what. Bank typically looks for a 60 year lease in order to approve loan. In this case, the bank accepted a 20 year lease with an option of an additional 10 years. Past business proposals have run into issue with banks not approving loans unless the property would eventually be owned by the business taking the loan. The lease has gone through several months of negotiation between the team, including the First Selectman, the Town Attorney and the business owner's attorney. Small pieces are still being considered at this time. Some constraints were to not allow the building exterior to be changed where it is apparent and an elevator to the basement installed at the back of the building.

Bryan Roth asked if this conversation could be a blueprint for future lease negotiations. Ross replied that this is the first real contract with an outside party and that the FHA and Town are trying to put together a mold that can be leveraged for other proposals. A concern that Ross had was if for some reason the business defaulted, what role would the bank play as first mortgage holder of the property. It was worked out that the bank would take possession, but would have to obtain approval from the Town for any business who would use the building. Deb asked how long the process has been from the letter of intent until the lease signature. Ross answered that it has been about 3 months of negotiations. Don Mitchell added that it is not as simple as what is heard because it also involves the Legislative Council and Board of Selectmen.

Neil noted the concept of not allowing changes to the front exterior of the building, and asked if this is documented and how does this relate to the Community Center and other buildings that were taken down. Ross explained that there were disagreements in the design of the Community Center and there were some concessions such as adding cupolas. Ross asked the Committee for more input as to how the FHA should handle enforcing the design. Neil then asked what happens with Stratford Hall after 30 years. Ross replied that after the lease term, the building returns to the Town to be leased again. Gary MacRae said his understanding was that there is significant investment by the business owner. If there was a business failure, (which he does not believe will occur), Gary wanted to confirm that there would be no compensation for the renovation that took place. Ross replied that this is correct. He then asked if the contract will be public information and Dr. Reed asked if there was a lease payment. Ross explained that the contract will be public information and that he believed for the first year the it is a low payment per month which will increase over the term of the lease.

Dr. Reed said that when this first started everyone was wildly optimistic about the money that would come in. He gave kudos to the current Authority members for staying persistent over the years and finally landing a first for profit business, and hoped it is the first of many. Ross noted that the low monthly rent was due to the huge investment being made by the business owner. Deb asked if information has been provided regarding the cost of retrofitting the building. Ross said that the building is very solid, and the business will be stripping and painting inside. Dr. Reed said that he began in 2003 and left in 2011 and that he was chair for a couple of years. He asked Ross if there was a ballpark figure as to how much has been invested in the building. Ross estimated that there has been about \$75,000 spent to date. Dr. Reed continued that the next logical building would be Newtown Hall. The hospital had initially expressed interest between 2000 – 2003, but had backed out. The intriguing question is where will the Town get the money to remediate the building, which is necessary to make it more attractive to a potential business. He expressed concerns with liabilities, and noted Plymouth Hall falling apart. The Town is not able to tell when the buildings will come down. Hopefully recommendations for master plan will be a strong statement that if development is to be discussed, the Town must come to grips with what can be assured to people. Dr. Reed then recalled past proposals and how they did not come through due to various reasons including negative reactions from the Authority. Bob Rau asked what more specifically was the

negative feedback regarding the proposal for mixed use. Dr. Reed replied that in these situations one must consider individual taste, and that it is necessary to validate everyone's even when you don't agree. He found he became more flexible in trying to get a business onto the campus. Cochran, which is the most expensive to take down, had a reasonably detailed proposal for apartments which was rejected. There was only an impact to school district was 12 – 13 kids. This proposal would have been an economic incentive.

Ross added that the Authority has been thinking through a way to develop the area around the former Woodbury Hall so that the view is not disturbed. Dr. Reed asked about prior discussions for an amphitheater. Ross said that in the former area of the doctors' houses is being considered as a potential location for an outdoor theater.

Bob R. said that the buildings are too expensive to rehabilitate or knock down, and asked if it is the responsibility of the FHMPRC to deal with this. Deb suggested that one option could be to consider the developer acting as the Town's bank in regards to remediation and demolition, in which the Town would forgive lease payments as a form of payment to the developer. Ross said that the Authority has tried to market the property in various way. The Town at some point will have to take some of the buildings down, and repurpose the property for a business to lease the property and build. The group then discussed past proposals for apartments and mixed use. Dr. Reed remembered a proposal for apartments focused on Cochran, and that there were 3 – 4 board members who rejected this concept. He reminded the group that part of the reason the Town purchased the property is because citizens did not want development on the property. Deb said she remembered with the Claris proposal that there were conditions on what could be done with nearby land, and that there was a need to have signage visible from the road.

The group discussed various areas of the campus. Ross explained that unlike other properties there are no hard boundaries between buildings. Property lines are liquid and can adjust if necessary, as was done to accommodate the brewery patio around the back of the building. He continued to inform the Committee of the Authority's efforts to ensure the campus aesthetics are considered and gave the example of requiring the brewery's food trucks to be located around the back of the building. Don(Don??) added that Zoning is now beginning to tweak the sign regulations for Fairfield Hills. Neil expressed confusion on how everything pieces together in regards to Planning and Zoning and the Fairfield Hills Authority. Ross explained that if there is controversy between what is wanted by the FHA and what is planned by the developer, the default is to Planning and Zoning. The FHA enforces the Master Plan, and does not take any liberties. Dr. Reed said the parameters that the master plan set forth had a big impact on the Authority. In negotiating leases the Board of Finance and the Board of Selectman cannot be as secretive in initial negotiations, so the Authority was correct structure to negotiate leases. The reality is that the First Selectman has the authority to change the lease. Doug(Don??) added that the FHA has the responsibility but no real authority. Neil asked if the FHA rejects a proposal, could the developer go directly to Planning and Zoning. Ross answered yes. Don interjected that there is still the lease that must go through the FHA, and that Zoning ensures the business complies with zoning regulations. Deb said that in the Adaptive Reuse Zone it states that it must comply with the Master Plan. Deb asked what are the facets of the Master Plan that would be consider if something conforms or does not conform. Don said from a legalistic view point the FHA's decision is not appealable and therefore not binding; whereas the P & Z decision is appealable and therefore binding. Deb asked if this means that P & Z does not have to follow the Master Plan. Don replied that P & Z has to find that the proposal is consistent with the Master Plan.

Dr. Reed explained that from what he recalled when the Town purchased Fairfield Hills the resolution had 3 – 5 broad purposes for the purchase. This would be powerful legal information. One topic that was talked about by many at the time was land banking, but it does not get talked about much because Conservation has largest area in which building is not permitted, and Kent was never suitable for a school. The recommendation in changes to the Master Plan will be to the vision. Variables such as the Community Center, the Municipal Center (Town departments), Ambulance, trails and fields have already shaped the development of the campus. He continued

to speak to mixed use in Europe and its social activity, and wide variety of housing needs that is necessary for a town to be dynamic and healthy. Bryan noted that the conversations seem to returning to apartments. The group then discussed apartments in Town.

Committee members expressed concerns with the Master Plan not being a serious document. They then discussed what has been done on the campus to date. Ross provide the example of the Parent Connection which was made into a showpiece through a grant and the Town. Deb asked if this example show the Town can come up with funds when necessary. Ross clarified that money came from movie that was filmed on the campus many years ago. The group discussed the costs paid under the Fairfield Hills budget. Dr. Reed added that one year during his time with the Authority the FHA had an annual budget of \$180,000 and the money was used to hire a management company who managed 24 hour security and property maintenance. Much of the maintenance has now been distributed between Parks & Rec and Public Works. The FHA is responsible for tree trimming, plantings, lighting and some snow removal. Conversion shifted to security concerns on the campus and how they can be addressed. Dr. Reed noted the State owned power plant located by Reed School which is heavily deteriorating. He added that buildings on the campus are owned by the Town and not just by the Authority.

Deb asked how does the FHMPRC make a difference. What would be a good use of the Committee's time? Dr. Reed said to be bold and articulate a vision. Currently the use is mostly recreational base, and the Town must recognize that the vision is owned by the Town. He added that the Town must take care of its current commitments before moving on to others. It was suggested to provide citizens facts regarding the campus and bring the community together for a vote to demolish the buildings. The group then discussed the costs of remediation and demolition.

Neil asked if Fairfield Hills has an architectural review board as does the South Main Street design district. Ross said he would welcome an architectural review board to help determine if proposals meet the Master Plan requirements. Don explained to members that the Architectural Review Board is an advisory board who is fairly new and consists of 5 members.

Neil asked if there is anywhere else in the State where residents live on town owned property. Ross gave an example of UConn where there are stores with rental units above them. He believes these rental units are open to the general public. Bob Rau said the campus will not progress until it is determined how to get the funds for demolition.

Old Business

Public Communication Channels (Social Media, Town Web Page, etc.):

Neil has not had the opportunity to work on social media due to his travels, but does have some thoughts.

Deb said that there have been no further updates to the Town website, as the Town Clerks office is busy with absentee ballots at this time. The Town Clerk, Debbie Aurelia Halstead, said updates will be on the website by the end of the week.

Schedule/Calendar:

Deb reminded members that the suggested meeting dates for 2019 were acceptable for all Committee members who responded. The FHMPRC meetings will be held the 2nd Wednesday, and 4th Tuesday of every month.

Deb asked for a motion set the 2019 meeting calendar through to April as discussed. Neil entertained. Gary seconded the motion. Motion passed with all in favor.

Public Participation

None

Discussion of Future Agenda Items

The following are the dates of meetings and topics of discussion for the meetings scheduled through the end of the year:

Wednesday, November 7th - Seniors and Disabled:

Former First Selectman, Pat Llodra will be attending. Deb has called Ana Wiedemann and is pending her response.

Tuesday, November 20th - FH Adaptive Reuse Zoning:

In attendance will be Lilla Dean (prior P & Z Chair), Bob Geckle (2005 FH Master Plan Committee Chair), George Benson (Director of Planning). Rob Sibley is unable to attend.

Wednesday, December 5th - Cultural, Recreational Programming:

In attendance will be Amy Mangold (Director of Parks & Rec), and Laura Lerman (Cultural Arts Committee Chair).

Tuesday, December 18th - Current Tenants:

Meeting will be to discuss what works, what could be improved.

In attendance will be First Selectman, Dan Rosenthal, Jennifer Crane (Director of the Center for Support & Wellness), Dorrie Carolan (Founder and Executive Director Parent Connection), Ian Yorty (Executive Director Newtown Youth Association), Mark Tambascio.

Tentative meetings are scheduled as follows:

Wednesday, January 9th - Social Services, Conservation and Agriculture:

Invited include: An LoBosco (Social Services), Donna Culbert (Director of Health), Holly Kocet (Conservation Commission Chair).

Tuesday, January 22nd - Commercial Housing:

Christal Preszler (Deputy Director Economic & Community Development), Wes Thompson (Economic Development Commission Chair), Chris Hottois (Flint Ridge Development), Phil Clark (Claris Constructions)

Shortly after, the FHMPRC will be holding a public hearing.

Neil asked if Deb can send out the link to POCD to all members.

Discussion of Future Agenda Items

Discussion of the Board of Education conversations was moved to the next meeting.

With no further business, Doug made a motion to adjourn. Bryan seconded and the meeting was adjourned at 8:55 p.m.

*Respectfully submitted,
Kimberly Chiappetta, Clerk.*