



TOWN OF NEWTOWN
Fairfield Hills Master Plan Review Committee
MINUTES

**The Fairfield Hills Master Plan Review Committee held a Meeting on November 20, 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, Bob Bowen, Bryan Roth, Rob Sherwood, Robert Rau, Doug Smith, Jeffery Jorgensen (arrived 7:08 p.m.)

Absent: Chandravir Ahuja,

Public Attendance: none

Also Present: Don Mitchell – *Planning & Zoning Chair*, Lila Dean – *Prior Planning & Zoning Chair*, Robert Geckle – *2005 FFH Master Plan Committee Chair*, Kim Chiappetta – clerk.

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

Public Participation:

None

Approval of Minutes

Wednesday, October 23rd:

Gary MacRae motioned to approve the minutes from October 23, 2018. Neil Chaundhary seconded the motion. Motion passed with all in favor. Bob Bowen abstained.

Chair Deb Zukowski explained that there was a technical issue with the agenda not being posted and not being noticed in a timely manner, so the November 7th meeting was not held.

Tuesday, November 13th:

Minutes do not require approval as it was not an actual meeting and there was not a quorum. Two members of the Committee reviewed documentation held in the Land Use office.

Communications

Deb began by telling members she was contact by the Newtown Bee regarding the November 13th Special meeting agenda. The Bee was questioning what was meant by “Review of FFH Main Campus transfer”. Deb replied via email with clarification that members of the Committee would be reviewing documentation of State’s transfer of the Fairfield Hills campus to the Town.

In addition to the review of this documentation, Herb Rosenthal will be looking through his personal documents to see he can provide additional information.

Bob Rau pointed out that Lila Dean and Jane Brymer were primary authors of the “Plan of Conservation and Development”, and that a tremendous amount of work went into this detailed document. The Town has paid 3rd party consultants for similar work and Lila and Jane saved the town allot of money by undertaking this task.

Gary McCrae told members he attended a *Livable Community/Age Friendly Community Initiative Steering Committee* meeting. He was asked to brief the committee on what the Fairfield Hills Master Plan Review Committee was about. He explained the purpose of the Committee and that the group is currently in an information gathering mode. Anyone interested in reading the minutes from this meeting can contact Kim Chiappetta in Economic and Community Development.

New Business

FFH Adaptive Reuse Zoning: History and Processes:

Deb introduced Lila Dean who was instrumental in creating the first adaptive reuse zone, and who also took the lead in reviewing the recommendations from the 2005 Master Plan and making modification. Lila clarified that the Committee made the modification, but she did not agree with all of them.

Deb then introduced Bob Geckle who was the Chair of the 2005 Master Plan effort, and preceding that had participated in the initial committee which was formed to determine if Fairfield Hills should be purchased from the State.

Deb asked Lila and Bob of their recollections in terms of the impetus of why the Town wanted to purchase and control the property. Lila answered that the Town wanted to control of property. Initially there had been 104 applications for reuse of property as a whole. The applications were narrowed down to 3 and a town hall meeting was held, but no one was able to get behind any of the applications. Bob arranged visits to the abandoned buildings and walk-arounds in an effort to ensure people were as familiar with the whole situation as possible. Deb noted the 3 proposals that were offered and reviewed were for the development of entire campus by a single developer. Lila said that the Town could have sold the whole campus for development who would have provided a portion of the property back for open space. Two of the proposals were from entities with vast experience who had already done similar projects with abandoned State facilities. Neil noted that these proposals were for a plan to sell the land, and that as the Committee understands it, sale of the property is not possible. Lila and Bob explained that not allowing the land to be sold was not part of the transfer from the State, but was the will of the people. Deb asked for a summary of the salient features of the proposals. Lila said all proposals included some type of housing to start cash flow for the projects. At the time when the proposals were presented her understanding was that nothing could be done with the property if they could not generate cash flow with a housing component. Deb asked why were these proposals rejected. Lila said that she did not know that exact reason, but felt people were concerned with losing control of the property. Bob added that housing was a continuous matter of dispute throughout the entire process. Bob Rau reiterated that this is still an issue and that all a housing component was part of the proposals for cash flow and is still necessary.

Lila explained that housing was in the initial uses and that the Fairfield Hills Authority petitioned them to remove it. The Master Plan was a precursor to the Fairfield Hills adaptive reuse. Bob added that a firm was hired to document the first Master Plan. There was a well-organized, strong vocal contingent who wanted Fairfield Hills to be a large park for all to enjoy nature. Lila added that there was an interest in keeping the fields mowed for certain types of birds. Bob continued that the other side wanted development. The Town cannot afford a large park, but housing was not a desirable component. Rob Sherwood asked if the 3 main proposals were given in the 2003 – 2004 timeframe. Bob said yes. Additionally, Rob noted that at the time the Town was anti-development. Now seeing the development taking place, the Town appears to be more proactive and sentiment has changed.

Deb returned the conversation to the Fairfield Hills adaptive reuse zone and explained that this is a critical piece of documentation that drives the development of the property. She noted that permitted uses had changed dramatically and thought this was as a result of the 2005 Master Plan review recommendations. It will be beneficial to understand when the changes occurred and why. Deb read a list of permitted uses and compared to revised list of permitted uses.

Lila and Bob told Committee members that Town members were invited to participate in an exercise where a map of the campus was cut into various sections and a basket of uses was provided. Participants matched uses to each section of the campus. This exercise made people think about what they wanted. The effort had a huge impact. Bob added that the activity was well attended. There was no vote, but everyone's input was considered. The group discussed proposals for the property that were received between 2006 – 2007. These fell apart due to the economy and change in administration. Two of the deals that were lost on campus established in other locations in Town.

The group then discussed the total acreage on campus and that at this time there is 22 acres designated for commercial development. Lila highlighted that the group wanted to promote commercial development with the goal of making the campus revenue neutral. Lila said that there were many public hearings held and that they were well attended. Deb said that since the 2006 timeframe, things have been added that have come with new interesting proposals. Lila said these proposals fit under the guidelines, and that nothing was drastically different.

Deb read that no site development plan application will be approved if the commission finds it is not consistent with the approved Master Plan for the Fairfield Hills Campus. She then asked how Planning & Zoning determines if a plan is not consistent with Master Plan. Bob said it is based upon permitted uses and design guidelines in the plan. Deb said that there is a vision which says the campus is a destination for the public of Newtown and a corporate headquarters would close out people. She asked what the thought process would have been if Planning & Zoning received a proposal for a corporate headquarters. Lila said some corporate headquarters have restaurants and art open to public, so a design would be chosen that would fit the design standards. Bob gave an example of a proposal received for a psychiatric facility that would have required a section of the campus be gated off which was not favorably looked upon. Neil gave examples of hospitals and breweries not being documented as supported uses in the Master Plan and that the Master Plan states the uses need to be consistent with the Master Plan. Lila expressed that in her opinion the brewery still complies with the uses in that food must be served so it can be considered some type of restaurant. Bob said that there are three legs to the stool of the Fairfield Hills campus: municipal, recreation and economic uses. Bob expressed that the Master Plan is a powerful component as to what happens on campus as opposed to spot zoning that has no master plan. The Master Plan acts as guide book of what everyone feels is appropriate use of property.

The group then discussed the restriction that there shall be no more than 10% building coverage and no more than 20% of impermeable surfaces. Deb asked why those numbers are there, and could they be changed. Lila said that people on the Town staff and commissions reviewed other states and towns to ensure the campus has sufficient water recharge.

Bob Bowen asked if the Master Plan is a high-level strategic plan for the Town, and if these percentages should be consider during the Master Plan review, or be done by Planning & Zoning. Deb said that there is a need to understand these numbers are to be determine what development is possible. The group then discussed pipe capacity and storm water management. Bob explained that there were multiple consultants specializing in various areas so the initial plan was done with a variety of expertise.

Recommendations on how the Fairfield Hills Master Plan Review Committee can be most effective:

Deb asked Lila and Bob if they could provide recommendations on how the Fairfield Hills Master Plan Review Committee can be most effective. Bob said the elephant in room is the large buildings on campus that have no

reuse potential. The Committee should make recommendations regarding buildings. Until this matter is addressed a large portion of the campus cannot be used. Gary added that this is consistent with what he has heard in other meetings. The group then discussed the need to demolish buildings that cannot be reused. Lila added that the property has an abandoned look making it difficult to attract development. Bob noted that allot of progress has been made, but there is still more to go. The group also discussed shared parking and how it must be considered when determining development.

Lilla said that the Master Plan must look at a broader picture, and that the group should not get bogged down in details. Bob said the group should look at the 3 pillars (municipal, recreational, economic) and determine what is right for the community. The community may feel different now than in 2005.

Discussion shifted back to economics. Bob said that it was never envisioned that the campus would be economically profitable. The intent was to secure a balance for campus maintenance. Brian Roth said it may be beneficial to present to the town and ask how they envision the campus: cash flow positive or cash flow neutral. Doug noted that of the buildings left there must be a spectrum of that are not viable and must come down, and those which can be reused with a certain amount of investment. Bob said that in his opinion only Newtown Hall could possibly be reused.

Jeff expressed his concern that the group may be wasting time in that planning is done by Planning & Zoning. He asked if the review being performed by the Committee is useful. Deb asked Lilla if she agreed with Jeff. Lilla said that there is truly a need to review the Master Plan, and that it may not be necessary every 5 years. Bob agreed with Lila and added that the document provides a framework for decisions. He noted that it is the common feel to the campus that is important. Doug agreed that documents like this are necessary to provide a cohesiveness that is important to Planning & Zoning. Jeff expressed that the Master Plan is a wonderful vision, however the tactical part is done by other parts of government.

Deb thanked the guests for their participation.

Senior and Disabled Uses Discussion:

Deb requested a motion to postpone the Senior and Disabled Uses discussion to another meeting.

Neil motioned to postpone discussion of the Senior and Disabled Use. Jeff Jorgensen seconded the motion. Motion passed with all in favor.

Potential BoE use:

Deb re-read an email from October 23rd minutes. The superintendent has been exploring a possibility of hosting a regional behavior special education program. (See attachments to October 23rd minutes for details.) Deb will invite the Board of Ed to attend a FHMPRC meeting to discuss the requirements and the potential for the campus.

Old Business

Calendar for 2019:

Deb recapped that the group agreed to meet on the 2nd Wednesday and 4th Tuesday of every month. Meetings are currently scheduled through April. If a scheduled meeting falls on a holiday that meeting will be cancelled and a special meeting will be scheduled. Deb asked Kim to distribute a meeting calendar in the next meeting so members have all dates.

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

Neil reminded members of discussions regarding FHMPRC having Twitter or Facebook pages, and the need to determine how to avoid an accidental meetings, and avoid behavioral issues. Potential solutions are: 1) Don't allow people to comment – purely for information dissemination. 2) Monitor for offensive or inaccurate comments – just delete comments. 3) Give certain Committee members authority to comment. 4) Create response for each type of comment – which Neil did not recommended. He noted that the first 3 options seemed reasonable and recommended the 1st. Deb expressed that she did not agree with the 1st option in that social media is collaborative and not allowing the public to comment may create ill will and backfire. Social media can be considered a venue for getting interesting ideas.

Neil expressed he was mostly concerned with inaccuracies on the page. Deb said she would like everyone to take time to think about these options.

Deb asked for motion to postpone.

Neil motioned to postpone the discussion. Doug seconded. Motion passed with all in favor.

Deb asked members to review the Fairfield Hills Master Plan Review Committee page on the Town website.

Deb noted that the key meeting is the commercial housing meeting, and that she does not anticipate a large public attendance but has had the Senior Center reserved to accommodate more people. Deb read the list of people who have been invited to the meeting and asked if members had any additional recommendations.

Public Participation

No public participation.

Discussion of Future Agenda Items

No discussion.

With no further business, Brian Roth made a motion to adjourn. Bob Bowen seconded and the meeting was adjourned at 8:46 p.m.

*Respectfully submitted,
Kimberly Chiappetta, Clerk.*