

Fairfield Hills Master Plan Review Committee MINUTES

The Fairfield Hills Master Plan Review Committee held a Meeting on June 12, 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, Neil Chaudhary, Gary MacRae, Robert Rau, Doug Smith, Chandravir Ahuja

Absent: Rob Sherwood, Bryan Roth, Jeffery Jorgensen, Bob Bowen

Public Attendance: None

Also Present: Ross Carley – FHA Chair, Christine O’Neill - Clerk

The meeting was called to order at 7:06 p.m.

Public Participation

No public participation.

Approval of Minutes

Mr. Smith motioned to approve the minutes from May 28, 2019. Mr. Chaudhary seconded the motion. All were in favor and the minutes were approved.

Communications

Ms Zukowski read a communication from Kinga Walsh, Chair of the Community Center Committee (attached here). Miss Walsh expressed that some of the items from the Fairfield Hills Survey would be addressed by the Community Center, such as bathrooms, outdoor entertainment, and resting places.

Ms Zukowski shared that The News-Times did an article after an interview with First Selectman Daniel Rosenthal, who was at the last meeting, regarding the placement of apartments in Cochran, Shelton, and Kent on Fairfield Hills Campus.

New Business

Prepare Recommendations: Buildings

Mr. MacRae recalled comments from a previous meeting made by Dr. Reed that an accident could happen in one of the buildings, which would then make demolishing them an urgent matter. He also remembered Mr. Rosenthal saying multiple developers were interested in Kent, Shelton, and Cochran (one interested in Kent and Shelton, one interested in Cochran), adding that if the developers walk away from this project they are unlikely to return. Mr. MacRae expressed his wish that the buildings had been demolished before the Town moved into the campus. He feared that making the buildings apartments would take away from the peaceful aesthetic for those who enjoy walking the campus.

Mr. Smith did not want to hold off on demolishing buildings that are unlikely to be developed. He echoed Mr. MacRae's comments that eventually a kid could get hurt inside one of these old buildings. He clarified that Kent, Shelton, and Cochran might still be able to have some use, but as for the other buildings that are no longer salvageable, he would like to see them gone. Referring to the survey, he said an ideal situation would be a sort of town square with small shops and no housing; however, having listened to Mr. Rosenthal he felt that was extremely unlikely. He would not like to see "just another housing development with some other useful things around it," and pointed to the strong anti-housing sentiment in the survey, but ultimately understood that having some housing might be the only way to save/use the buildings.

Mr. Ahuja sensed a growing urgency in the community to have the Town do something to resolve the unused buildings. He agreed that if a building is not salvageable, it should be demolished as soon as possible, as demo costs would only increase with time. He further commented that the availability of State funding may also add to the urgency. Mr. Ahuja stated that two other elements from the survey that stood out to him were 1) residents did not want to pay more taxes, and 2) residents wished to preserve the historical aspects of the campus. The challenge of the FHMPRC is to reconcile all these desires. He promoted a holistic approach rather than just approving individual projects such as the brewery without having a long-term vision.

Mr. Rau wondered how much weight could be put on the results of the survey, without considering other things like budget and interest from developers. He felt it was likely that regardless of the survey results, housing will end up on the campus.

Mr. Chaudhary shared that he was not partial to the idea of people living on Town land, but was not completely closed off to the notion. He again echoed the sentiment that the useless buildings need to come down before someone gets injured, pointing out that the argument of there being no return on investment for a building demo was not an excuse not to do the responsible thing. Mr. Chaudhary discussed with Mr. Carley how the issue of cost, including having to pay prevailing union wages for a demolition, complicates matters. He stated that the zoning the campus should also be taken into consideration, offering the example of large festivals interfering with parking for potential residents if the apartments are developed near the active area of the campus rather than more out-of-the-way buildings.

Ms Zukowski shared that there is no consensus (over 50%) on what should be done with the buildings from the surveys. The only survey item on this topic with over 50% is "demolish the buildings and the Town pays," which had 54% disagreeing. She also noted that Mr. Rosenthal said developers do not seem open to mixed use (residential and commercial combined in a single building). She explained that a decision needs to be made about the role of Fairfield Hills in Newtown. If it should be about paying bills, housing would need to be a part of it, because she felt the push for housing is very largely driven by finances. She wondered how the campus could accommodate parking for apartments. She said that the Town started bonding for Fairfield Hills in 2000, and the bonding term is 20 years. Over 5 million dollars would be retired in 2024, and the bonding for the Municipal Center ends in 2027. She asked Mr. Carley for the most recent figure to demolish the buildings that needed to come down, and he said about \$15 million. She said that would amount to an increase in \$110 in taxes per annum for an average residence. (Financial summary attached here)

Mr. Smith returned to the idea of zoning within the campus to isolate the housing so that it does not interfere with the town square concept that could be developed nearer to the Municipal Center.

Prepare Recommendations: Vision

Ms Zukowski recapped the vision from the last FHMPRC (2013 Master Plan), saying that housing was not at all part of it. The last Committee saw the campus as a community-oriented gathering space with enough commercial use to render Fairfield Hills revenue-neutral. Mr. Ahuja suggested modifying the statement, which the current Committee generally agreed with, to permitting housing provided it does not disrupt the flow or use of the campus. Mr. Rau wondered if the developers were attracted to the buildings because of the environment on campus, or just because they were looking to make money on the buildings. Mr. Chaudhary felt that having housing developers take over the buildings would not generate revenue, but would rather prevent costs. Mr. Smith asked for clarification about the last Committee's stance on housing, and Ms Zukowski mentioned that the Planning and Zoning Commission changed the wording from saying that the FHMP prohibited it to the Zoning Regulations limit it.

Mr. Chaudhary strongly felt it was time to discuss housing and decide ultimately if it would or would not be allowable (Mr. Smith clarified this wouldn't mean housing *should* be on campus, just whether it would be allowed). Ms Zukowski decided they should come back to the Vision later.

Prepare Recommendations: Housing

Mr. Chaudhary ran through a few different options of types of housing to vote on, such as whether to allow mixed use, condos etc. Ms Zukowski thought they should clarify that the purpose of the housing should be to help implement the Vision Statement by enabling funds for developers to extend the commercial space on the campus. Mr. Carley recommended using the wording "housing confined to existing structures."

Mr. Chaudhary shared that he would support mixed use, but was having a hard time stomaching apartments. He felt that Shelton, Kent, and Cochran all being turned into apartments would virtually encompass the whole campus. He did not support the idea of putting apartment buildings just anywhere on campus, as that could turn the existing uses of Fairfield Hills away. He understands the need to balance the trails and recreational uses with making some money, but is not sure apartments are conducive to that. He wondered if the Community Center would be turned into support for several hundred apartments, whereas mixed use would not cause that volume of traffic. He was in favor of limited, mixed use.

Mr. Rau felt it was important to get a reliable developer to make an investment, and he did not feel it would be done for the kind of mixed use Mr. Chaudhary was talking about. He expressed that people in apartments should be able to use the Community Center pool. He was in support of one of the three discussed buildings being made into an apartment.

Mr. Ahuja was open to the idea of housing, but only with constraints, limited area within the campus, and in support of the vision.

Mr. Smith also liked the idea of one of the three buildings being developed, rather than all of them. He was not completely opposed to some housing, but was not in favor of unlimited housing anywhere on campus.

Mr. MacRae felt that Cochran House was on the periphery on campus, making it more suitable for apartments than more central buildings like Shelton and Kent. He was not in favor of changing the Vision Statement from 2013. He was in favor of apartments in Cochran House. He believes it may provide an opportunity to get rid of one big risk element with limited impact on traffic flow through the campus and perhaps buy some time, where we can learn what makes sense once the community and senior center open up.

Mr. Carley discussed proposals from developers.

Ms Zukowski's view on housing was that if it were in support of the vision, such as for mixed use, it would be worth the cost. She is not convinced of the argument of cost-avoidance, pointing to the roughly 30 million dollars in bonding that is ending in the next five to ten years. She felt that it was possible in the next five years to take down Kent to make it available for developers, but Mr. Carley explained that developers usually aren't interested in erecting a building where they don't own the land.

Mr. Chaudhary pointed out developing all three units is not possible in terms of adding parking spaces. The hydrostatic pressure is also a consideration, as paving large parking lots could impact the water table. He liked the thought of housing being "in service" of the vision. He agreed with Mr. MacRae that if a building is going to be developed for apartments, it should be Cochran; however, he wondered if it was fair to the residential houses across the street from Cochran to turn it into apartments. Ms Zukowski pointed out that there is a dangerous blind turn off of Mile Hill South, which may mean that traffic flows instead through the campus to the traffic light.

Mr. Ahuja motioned to include the following the following in the FHMP: "Limited rental units are allowed as part of development provided such units are clearly ancillary to any mixed use development and above commercial use, and do not constitute the bulk of the development. The development shall directly contribute to the realization of the vision statement for the Fairfield Hills property." Mr. Smith seconded. Ms Zukowski asked for discussion.

Mr. Smith was concerned that this statement could be a foot-in-the-door for someone to develop all three buildings. Mr. Chaudhary responded that the wording of "ancillary" and "does not constitute the bulk" protected them from that possibility. Ms Zukowski asked to table the motion and wanted to talk about standalone apartments.

Mr. Rau asked Mr. Carley what the value of apartments would be to Newtown. Mr. Carley felt it would bring traffic to businesses, would be a proper use of the property, and that it was necessary to attract a developer. Mr. Carley said any developer interested in Fairfield Hills has always included apartments as part of what they were looking to do.

Mr. Ahuja made a motion that no building shall be used solely for apartments. Mr. Chaudhary seconded. Mr. Chaudhary mentioned that the FHMP is permissive in nature (tells you what can be put on campus), not prohibitive (what can't be put on campus). He was afraid that saying "you can't do apartments" would open the door for someone to say, "the Plan doesn't say I can't necessarily do X."

Mr. Chaudhary suggested adding to the earlier motion, "This allowance shall not be construed as allowing standalone apartments." The Committee wondered how this would impact Cochran, which might have been used as a standalone apartment.

Mr. MacRae said he was in favor of Cochran becoming an apartment, so he didn't support the statement due to Cochran house.

Mr. Ahuja withdrew his motion regarding standalone apartments.

Ms Zukowski moved to put the motion regarding the vision statement back on the table. Mr. Chaudhary seconded.

Mr. Ahuja motioned to amend his previous motion as follows: "Limited rental units are allowed as part of development provided such units are clearly ancillary to any mixed use development and above commercial use, and do not constitute the bulk of the development. The development shall directly contribute to the realization of the vision statement for the Fairfield Hills property. This allowance shall not be construed as allowing standalone apartments." Mr. Chaudhary seconded.

The Committee voted on amending the motion:

Zukowski - Aye

Chaudhary - Aye

Rau - Aye

Ahuja - Aye

MacRae - Nay

Smith - Aye

In order for the motion to pass, the majority of seated members (6 of 10) was needed. As the vote was 5-1, the motion did not pass. The Committee did not realize this at the time and proceeded as though the motion had passed.

Mr. Chaudhary expressed that he feared Cochran becoming an apartment would lower the property values of the residents living across the street.

Mr. Ahuja shared that mixed use is a more palatable option than a standalone apartment building. Ms Zukowski felt that once a critical mass of people living on campus was reached, that would drive what kind of commercial businesses would go in, and it would be service of those living in the apartments and not the Town as a whole.

The Committee voted on the motion to recommend the following: "Limited rental units are allowed as part of development provided such units are clearly ancillary to any mixed use development and above commercial use, and do not constitute the bulk of the development. The development shall directly contribute to the realization of the vision statement for the Fairfield Hills property. This allowance shall not be construed as allowing standalone apartments."

Zukowski - Aye

Chaudhary - Aye

Rau - Aye

Ahuja - Aye

MacRae - Nay

Smith - Aye

In order for the motion to pass, the majority of seated members (6 of 10) was needed. As the vote was 5-1, the motion did not pass.

Postponement

Deb asked for a motion to postpone the rest of the discussion. Mr. MacRae motioned. Mr. Chaudhary seconded. Motion passed with all in favor.

Adjournment:

Mr. MacRae motioned to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Chaudhary seconded. All were in favor and the meeting was adjourned at 9:23 p.m.

*Respectfully submitted,
Christine O'Neill, clerk*

Attachments:

Communication from Kinga Walsh, Chair of the Community Center Committee

Financial Summary



Christine O'Neill <christine.oneill@newtown-ct.gov>

Communications

1 message

Deborra Zukowski <debz.newtown.ct@gmail.com>
To: Christine O'Neill <christine.oneill@newtown-ct.gov>
Cc: Kimberly Chiappetta <kimberly.chiappetta@newtown-ct.gov>

Wed, Jun 12, 2019 at 5:49 PM

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Kinga Walsh via Newtown CT** <cmsmailer@civicplus.com>
Date: Thu, Jun 6, 2019 at 9:53 PM
Subject: Form submission from: Contact Deborra Zukowski
To: <debz.newtown.ct@gmail.com>

Submitted on Thursday, June 6, 2019 - 9:53pm

Submitted values are:

Your Name: : Kinga Walsh
Your e-mail address: kwalshccc@gmail.com
Subject: Community Center and Fairfield Hills Survey
Message:
(a copy was also sent to Neil. please forward to the entire committee)

Dear Fairfield Hills Master Plan Review Committee,

On behalf of the Newtown Community Center Committee, thank you for taking the time and effort to survey Newtown's residents on the Fairfield Hills campus. Some of us participated in the survey but all of us would appreciate you consider the following points when you finalize your recommendations.

As you know, the Community Center (CC) and Senior Center (SC) are scheduled to open in July 2019. Specific to the CC, some of the amenities and/or activity areas identified in the survey will be directly addressed by the CC. Specifically, on the recap document:

"View on Current Status" (page 2):

- 1) Bathrooms: Two exterior-access bathrooms were built into the Center and will be open to the public during the day (final hours are under discussion with P&R). The public may also see, however, a need for some along the path away from the existing buildings too.
- 2) Food: The Center will have a café that will offer light food and beverage options throughout the day. Also, this café will be a joint effort with the school district's Transitions program (participants will work at the café as well as have other jobs during the day in the Center).
- 3) Resting Areas: Although this is likely more specific to areas along the trail and not near the Center itself, please know that the Center is open for ALL Newtown residents as a gathering place. The lobby and wide hallway areas were specifically designed and furnished with this in mind.
- 4) Outdoor entertainment: A long-term goal of the Center is to offer indoor and outdoor programming options that utilizes the open space adjacent to the Center as well as the campus as a whole. Original design plans included a band-shell and amphitheater. We are in the process of establishing a "Friends of Newtown Community Center" 501c3 that will address certain fundraising needs to develop/enhance the original design plans for the outdoor space.

"Views on Future Services and Features" (pages 3 & 4):

- 1) The "performing arts and community center (Q13)" should be listed as "performing arts and cultural arts center". Unfortunately, the recap incorrectly lists an amenity and this may cause some confusion. The Community Center's goal is to host performing arts and cultural arts options, however. Activity rooms and the multi-purpose room were designed with this goal in mind.
- 2) Event space, banquet/wedding hall facility: these will all be addressed within the almost 5K sf multi-purpose space in the Center. The multi-purpose room's design is a large space that can be broken into two or three smaller areas to satisfy multiple needs such as a wedding, fundraiser dinner/auction, vendor fair, general banquet, etc. The Center has a commercial kitchen available for catering.
- 3) Art gallery: the 18' wide hallways were planned to allow for seating and relaxation as well as for art gallery options. A ventilation system was installed to help ensure pool humidity stayed within the pool area so as not to harm any artwork on display.

As mentioned in the planning meeting held a few months ago at the Senior Center, we hope that any recommendations take into account what already exists/will be opening within weeks on the campus (i.e., NYA, Asylum Brewery, CC, SC, Municipal Center) and recommendations for new enhancements minimize/eliminate duplication to town options already in place (e.g., movie theater at ETH).

Thank you again for your consideration! We welcome the opportunity to meet to discuss the Community Center's goals, plans and options.

Regards,
Kinga Walsh
CC Chair

OPERATIONAL COSTS

Streetscape Maint.	\$5,670.00
Snow Removal (Sidewlks)	\$4,198.20
Envonmental testing	\$4,740.88
FairfieldHills.org	\$550.00

Mowing contracts	\$47,500.00
Materials	\$22,000.00
Snowplowing (roads)	\$18,645.00
Post-Event Clean-up	\$1,855.00
Admin (by hours)	\$7,500.00
Labor (by hours)	\$54,406.00
Other	\$50,000.00

Currently, there is not a "budget" line-item for security or emergency repair. I am inserting a placeholder here to make sure that such important costs are a part of our discussion

Total Annual Costs	\$217,065.08
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INCOME

Par. Con. common fees	\$1,905.12
NVA common fees	\$6,070.26
NYA common fees	\$19,375.00

Brewpub Lease	\$2,400.00
Par. Con. Lease	\$12.00
NYA Lease	\$27,500.00

Events fees	\$550.00
Taxes	\$50,980.00

NYA/RE: \$37,917, NYA/PP: \$1,589, and BrewPub/PP: \$11474
 Comparable biz in Monroe used to estimate personal property

Total Annual Income	\$108,792.38
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Brewpub add'l 10-20 lse.	\$7,560.00
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Total Annual Income 10yrs post BrewPub	\$116,352.38
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The Brewpub lease is \$200/mo years 1 - 5, \$500/mo years 6-10 and \$830/mo yrs 11-20.

Bonding

year	amount	Notes
2000	1250000	
2002	800000	
2004	5030000	
2005	3000000	
2007	13020000	11,000,000 was for the Municipal bldg.
2009	1000000	290,000 was for the new baseball field
2010	3400000	
2011	425000	
2014	200000	
2015	502000	Yr 2015 - 2019 bonding amount of
2016	4347000	4,969,000 broken into approximate
2018	120000	years of bonding. This is an estimate.
Total	33094000	Other notes: Another \$1.4M for fields, including at NHS. \$1M for ETH.

Bonding

Total Fairfield Hills Debt over next 20 years (give or take a year)

Year	Amount
2019	33094000
2020	31844000
2021	31844000
2022	31044000
2023	31044000
2024	26014000
2025	23014000
2026	23014000
2027	9994000
2028	9994000
2029	8994000
2030	5594000
2031	5169000
2032	5169000
2033	5169000
2034	4969000
2035	4467000
2036	120000
2037	120000
2038	0

