

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 through 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.¹ 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%
Performing Arts and Community Center (Q13)	65%
Artisan/Craft Market (Q23)	63%
Events Space (Q22)	61%
Water Fountains ² (Q32)	61%
Playground/Water Park (Q21)	59%
Theater for Performing Arts (Q52)	57%
Art Gallery / Museum (Q53)	56%
Main Street (Q15)	56%

¹ 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.

² The term "Water Fountain" was ambiguous. Some thought "Drinking Fountain," others thought "Water Feature."

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.

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 non-favorable 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	Ttl 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	Ttl 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 the to 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 any gender differences in responses 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 answers 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. Split comments are listed under the original write-in comment and are indicated with a preceding "...". To see a full listing of the comments, 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 like a more dedicated sports/youth destination, a shopping (with or without housing) destination, and 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 hickey rink. Other features included:

- An educational campus for the 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 doggie drinking fountain, and
- A community garden for growing one's own fruits and vegetables

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