

Fairfield Hills Advisory Committee

Recommendations

March 22, 2000

Committee Members:

A. Winthrop Ballard
Karen Blawie
Joseph Borst
Alvah Cramer
Pat Denlinger, Secretary
Ian Engelman
Michael Floros, Chairman
Alan Martin
Walter Motyka
James Osborne
Moiria Rodgers
Jack Ryan
K. Michael Snyder
Brian White

Summary of Recommendations

Purchase of Fairfield Hills Hospital

It is the unanimous decision of the Fairfield Hills Advisory Committee to recommend that the Town of Newtown purchase Fairfield Hills Hospital from the State of Connecticut, consisting of 185 acres and 1+ million square feet of buildings. We believe the purchase provides the town the opportunity to satisfy numerous needs, while at the same time giving the town the control of any development/reuse of the balance of the property. We believe this is a significant step towards meeting the 1993 Plan of Development. Our recommendation to purchase is conditional on the creation of an independent development authority to implement the Master Plan.

185 acres represent roughly 0.5% of the land area of Newtown and will not be able to satisfy every current and future municipal needs. Taking control of this parcel is the first step for the town to develop a more active role in managing the development of our community. We believe this model of town leadership and working with developers is the best way to manage future growth and municipal needs.

Reuse Plan

The Fairfield Hills Advisory Committee's top priorities were to maintain the open space, vistas, entry plaza, campus setting, thereby enhancing the quality of life in Newtown. We recommend the adaptive reuse of the majority of the buildings. Since parking is limited some buildings must be demolished to provide parking for the remaining buildings. We also feel the single family homes and duplexes should be removed to create space for schools and recreation.

It is our opinion that one viable option consists of 6 elements:

1. Open Space
2. Land for 2 Schools (with inclusion of Watertown Hall 21+ acres)
3. Buildings for Town Offices
4. Community/Recreation Center
5. A mixed use Entry Plaza (mixed commercial uses)
6. Revenue Generating areas (core campus)

Development Authority

We strongly recommend the creation of a development authority by an ordinance through the Legislative Council. It is essential this authority be outside of the political process so the vision is maintained regardless of administrations and political agendas. This authority will have responsibility for the execution of the master plan, soliciting bids, selecting a partner and working with that developer to create sustainable economic development on the property.

The authority should be structured so the funds received from the "leasing" of the land and/or buildings go to the authority to be used to provide minimum necessary maintenance of the property. The tax revenues received on the business property are assumed to go into the general fund. If the 5/6 school is not built on the Watertown Hall 21+ acres, then that land should be included in the FHAR Zone. Doing so, will guarantee that the revenue stream from the development of the "core campus" will pay for the maintenance of the playing fields on the Watertown Hall acreage.

The contract with the developer should include performance guarantees that allow the town to terminate the contract if the developer has not progressed in a timely manner. The town will always remain the owner of the property while the development authority manages the implementation of the master plan.

Budgeting and Maintenance of the Property

The land and buildings set aside for use by the town will require town resources to be responsible for maintenance. The Open Space and Community Center could be the responsibility of the Parks and Recreation Department or Development Authority. The Board of Education could be responsible for maintaining the school area. The Town Government could be responsible for maintenance of the town offices.

Requirements prior to purchase

A number of operations and maintenance items must be immediately addressed once ownership of the land is transferred. The committee strongly recommends the following studies be completed prior to/in conjunction with negotiation of sale:

1. Structural assessment of buildings – including a life expectancy study of the buildings with no maintenance or heat.
2. Completion of Phase II environmental study for subsurface contamination
3. Operating Budgets to maintain at some predetermined level the security and stabilization of the proposed "to be retained" buildings.

Requirements prior to development

We strongly recommend the completion of the following steps prior to / in conjunction with the request for development proposals:

1. Establish the Fairfield Hills Development Authority
2. Master Plan for Fairfield Hills committee's plan for reuse and FHAR zone
3. Traffic Study for impact of any potential development on the campus
4. Land Use Study/wetlands study for the FHAR zone
5. Property development/marketing costs and creation of RFP

Element # 1: Open Space (Existing Open Space, Norwalk Hall, Single Family homes & Duplexes)

Approximately 125 acres should be designated for open space and recreation. We recommend demolishing Norwalk Hall, 8 single-family homes and 10 duplexes. The use of this space would include passive recreation including hiking trails, open areas and woodland. Additionally, active recreation would include the construction of 5-7 playing fields to meet the needs of the Parks and Recreation Department.

Benefits:

- As many as 90 acres will be set aside for passive recreation.
- A trail system could make this area enjoyable by all.
- Between 25 -35 acres would be used to address the critical shortage of playing fields.
- Up to seven fields would be constructed over the next 7 -10 years.

- Properly constructed fields will take a higher usage rate.
- Maintenance of a centrally located complex of fields will be more efficient.
- Fields should be "rested" for a season to preserve their quality.
- Lighted fields would extend the hours of usage decreasing needs for additional fields.

Costs for Implementation:

Item	Description	Cost
Abatement	Asbestos/Lead in Norwalk Hall and Homes	\$ 370,000
Demolition	Demolition of Norwalk Hall and Homes at \$5/sf	\$ 262,000
Construction	Construction of 5-7 playing fields	\$ 1,500,000
Parking	Construction of parking for playing fields	\$ 300,000
TOTAL		\$ 2,432,000

Annual Costs:

Item	Description	Cost
Debt	Debt service on construction	\$ 150,000
Maintenance	Additional Personnel/Equipment	\$
TOTAL		\$

Element # 2: Land for School (Cochran House)

Approximately 21+ acres should be designated for the construction of a school. Timing of the school construction will be dependent on the needs of the Board of Education. Combined with 19.6 acres at Watertown Hall the town will have the space for 2 schools.

Benefits:

- Town has flexibility to locate the 5/6 school plus one additional school as needed.
- Current enrollment is 4,693 students.
- Existing 6 school buildings can accommodate 4,913 students.
- The new 5/6 school will raise total school capacity to 5,913 students.
- Current housing growth, (averaging over 210 new homes per year since 1993), generates a projected additional 95 students per year.
- In the year 2009-10 the enrollment is projected to be 6,305. 375 students over building capacity (including the 5/6 school) at current class size requirements.
- With 20 acres "land banked" for the future the town has flexibility to address future school needs.
- According to current state reimbursement programs, demolition of Cochran House may be partially reimbursed by the State of Connecticut if combined with the construction of a new school.

Costs for Implementation:

Item	Description	Cost
Abatement	Asbestos/Lead in Cochran House	\$ 974,000
Demolition	Demolition of Cochran House at \$5/sf	\$ 968,000
TOTAL		\$ 1,942,000

NOTE: The demolition cost does not reflect the demolition of Watertown Hall as currently in the School Board Budget.

Annual Costs:

Item	Description	Cost
Debt	Debt service on abatement & demolition	\$ 195,000
TOTAL		\$ 195,000

Notes:

School Board & Superintendent have stated that land on this site does not meet the location requirements for a new elementary school that has been projected in the next 3-5 years. The use of preferred neighborhood elementary schools would mean placing the next elementary school closer to the population density in Sandy Hook.

Element # 3: Town Offices (Stamford and Stratford Hall)

Approximately 8 acres, including two buildings and required parking should be designated for municipal offices.

Benefits:

The space needs report recommends 32,000 sq. feet for municipal office space. Stamford Hall at 58,024 gross square feet can house all offices under one roof

First Selectman's Office, Finance Office, Town Clerk, Tax Assessor, Tax Collector, Probate Court, Registrar of Voters, Public Meeting Rooms, Building Department, Health Department, Land Use Agency, Human Services, Building Commission, Board of Education

Reduces the need for the \$11,239,504 Edmond Town Hall expansion.

Costs for Implementation:

Item	Description	Cost
Abatement	Asbestos/Lead in Stamford Hall	\$ 262,500
Renovation	Renovation and upgrade Stamford at \$58/sf (excludes furniture/equipment to fit out)	\$ 3,378,000
Abatement	Asbestos/Lead in Stratford Hall	\$ 52,500
Renovation	Renovation of Stratford Hall at \$58/sf (excludes furniture/equipment to fit out)	\$ 525,000
Parking	Construction of 190 parking space for town offices	\$ 190,000
TOTAL		\$ 4,408,000

Annual Costs:

Item	Description	Cost
Debt	Debt service on Stamford Hall construction	\$ 385,000
Debt	Debt service on Stratford Hall construction	\$ 55,000
Maintenance	Annual Maintenance on Stamford at \$7/sf	\$ 400,000
Maintenance	Annual Maintenance on Stratford at \$7/sf	\$ 63,000
TOTAL		\$ 903,000

Notes:

This space would include a town meeting room for town government meetings. The space created in Edmond Town Hall can be used for additional community activities. The Board of Town Hall Managers and Borough of Newtown Offices can stay at Edmond Town Hall. Stratford Hall will be designated for municipal use at a future date. Costs for Stratford Hall will not be incurred until the building is used.

Element # 4 Community Center (Plymouth Hall)

Plymouth Hall has been designated as a multi-generation community center. The building includes a theatre, bowling alley, gymnasium, recreation and arts space. With required parking this represents 3 acres.

Benefits:

- Additional site for many Parks & Recreation indoor programs.
- Parks and Recreation relies nearly 100% on schools for program locations.
- The programs on school grounds are disrupted because of increasing school enrollments, fire marshal regulations and other conflicts. An 8-week program can take 12 weeks to run, creating havoc for instructors and students.
- Parks and Recreation, Youth Services, The Senior Center, The Teen Center and possibly others in a Community Center, sharing resources and facilities.
- Many new and varied programs can be developed in this facility with the existing infrastructure:

Gymnasium:

- Daytime aerobics
- Pre-school programs
- Fitness Center with paid memberships
- 4 Bowling Alleys with canteen

Arts rooms:

- Woodshop
- Ceramic room with kiln
- Music area with practice rooms
- Home economics/cooking area

Auditorium:

- Theatre classes and productions
- Dance classes and productions

Costs for Implementation:

Item	Description	Cost
Abatement	Asbestos/lead in Plymouth Hall	\$ 269,500
Renovation	Renovation and upgrade @ \$58/sf (excludes equipment to fit out)	\$ 3,835,830
Parking	Parking upgrade and construction of 189 parking spaces if required	\$ 189,000
TOTAL		\$ 4,294,330

Annual Costs:

Item	Description	Cost
Debt	Debt service on construction	\$ 428,000
Maintenance	Annual building maintenance at \$7/sf	\$ 463,000
TOTAL		\$ 891,000

Notes:

The current senior and teen centers can be renovated for other uses or sold. We have made no assumptions for income if the senior and teen center properties were sold.

Element # 5: Entry Plaza (Newtown & Woodbury Halls)

Newtown and Woodbury Halls have been identified as a site for a community entry plaza. The buildings and approximately 4 acres should be designated for mixed use.

Benefits:

- The creation of a town plaza/courtyard/green/outdoor public meeting area.
- With a number of sports fields, and open space surrounding this area we see the need for small businesses that are open evenings and weekends.
- Parking can be shared with recreational uses.

Costs for Implementation:

Item	Description	Cost
Abatement	Asbestos/lead in both buildings	\$ 328,500
Renovation	Renovation of both buildings @ \$58/sf	\$ 3,930,776
Parking	Construction of 195 parking spaces	\$ 195,000
TOTAL		\$ 4,454,276

Annual Costs:

Item	Description	Cost
Debt	Debt service on construction	\$ 445,000
Maintenance	Annual Building Maintenance @ \$7/sf	\$ 474,000
TOTAL		\$ 919,000

Potential Annual Income:

Item	Description	Revenue
Retail	Restaurant, coffee shop, light retail - estimated 25,250 sf at \$12/sf	\$ 303,000
Office	Small business/professional offices - estimated 25,250 sf at \$10/sf	\$ 250,000
TOTAL		\$ 553,000

Notes:

Two reasons we do not recommend using these buildings for municipal uses:

1. All municipal offices can not fit in one building
2. Municipal offices are closed at night and on the weekends so citizens will not be drawn to the area.

The top floors could be used for professional or small "incubator" office space with short term (3-5 year leases). If needed, this space could be used for additional municipal space in the future. These costs do not have to be paid by the town, we could work with a developer through a lease arrangement similar to element # 6 or the Development Authority could act as a landlord for this minimal amount of space.

Element # 6: Revenue Generation (Core Campus)

Shelton, Canaan, Bridgeport, Greenwich & Kent

Optional for parking or other uses – Danbury, Fairfield, Bridgewater, Litchfield and Yale

Approximately 38 acres should be designated for revenue generation. Our assumptions are based on reusing the five buildings, (Shelton, Canaan, Bridgeport, Greenwich and Kent) on the core campus.

Benefits:

- The creation of a sustainable, economic zone that generates revenues to offset the investment the town made to own the property.
- The town maintains control of property through the structure of the long-term lease agreement.
- This area has been identified by the Housatonic Development Authority as the last premier location for economic development in Fairfield County.

- The developer assumes the development risk.
- The developer manages the buildings and collects rent.
The Development Authority gets "ground lease payments" to cover maintenance
- The town receives tax revenue on property and equipment.
- Corporate tenants will provide job opportunities in town.
- Corporate tenants support numerous local groups.
- Corporate tenants could provide training or part time jobs for high school students.
- Parking can be shared with recreation.
- Provides possible leverage with state against expansion of Garner Correctional Facility.

Costs for Implementation:

Item	Description	Cost
	Development of Master Plan & RFP	\$
TOTAL		\$

Annual Costs:

Item	Description	Cost
TOTAL		\$ 0

Potential Annual Income:

Item	Description	Revenue
Land Lease	Estimated at \$1/sf based on bldg space	\$ 380,000
R.E. Tax	Real Estate Taxes on building Est. at \$2/sf	\$ 760,000
Property Tax	Property tax revenue 4.16% of Real Est. Tax	\$ 32,000
TOTAL		\$ 1,172,000

These buildings represent over 900,000 gross square feet of space, consisting of a maximum of 400,000 square feet of usable office space. The town has no foreseeable

need for this quantity of building space. The demolition, asbestos and lead abatement make it uneconomical to raze the buildings for municipal use.

The cost for the town to either reuse or demolish all nine buildings would be significant:

- Demolition (including abatement) \$12,523,460
- Renovation (including abatement) \$62,623,936

NOTES: Revenue Generation (Core Campus)

A development partnership with an experienced commercial developer represents the most economically feasible reuse approach for the 38 acres. Under such a partnership, the costs of marketing, abatement and renovation of the buildings would be the responsibility of the selected developer. The options for reuse and revenue generation are numerous.

The Fairfield Hills Advisory Committee supports a redevelopment approach where the town maintains control of the property through a long-term lease and the developer assumes the development risk. Under such an arrangement, the developer would manage the buildings and collect rent, while the town would be paid an annual lease on the property as well as tax revenue on corporate property. As stated earlier we believe the only viable way to manage this process is to create an authority empowered to use land lease funds to maintain the property.

Committee History:

First Selectman Rosenthal appointed a 10-member committee in April 1998. There were 6 members added in April 1999. Two committee members resigned during the 11 months tenure of the revised committee.

The committee relied heavily on the strong body of work that was created by the 1998 version of the committee and the 1993 State Task Force led by State Representative Julia Wasserman.

The committee held regularly scheduled meeting from April 1999 through March 2000. We had 2 vision workshops facilitated by Vita Nuova. The first was November 9 and the second was February 17.

Presentations made to the committee:

Town organizations:

First Selectman
Planning and Zoning
Community Development
Finance Manager
Board of Education
Superintendent of Schools
Chairman of Parks & Recreation Commission
Babe Ruth
Youth Soccer
Friends of the Library
Numerous interested citizens

Consultants:

- Harrall Michalowski & Associates – Economic
- R.W. Bartley & Associates – Environmental
- Vita Nuova – Vision Facilitators

Developers:

- Bruce Becker, Becker & Becker
- Barry Hersh, Brookhill Redevelopment, LLC
- David Vickery, Spaulding & Slye, Colliers International