

Sandy Hook memorial commission looking at potential sites

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NEWTOWN -- The group appointed to decide how the town should memorialize the victims of the [Sandy Hook Elementary School](#) massacre has been so deliberate about its decision-making that, until recently, it had not even decided there would be a monument at all.

The last thing members of the [Sandy Hook Permanent Memorial Commission](#) wanted to do was presume how the families most affected by the tragedy want to remember the 20 first-graders and six educators who were killed.

As a result, the commission has taken a full year collecting input from the 26 families and groups close to the tragedy -- such as families of survivors and emergency services workers -- to be sure that each voice is heard and weighed. The commission was so committed to this outreach that it set no timetable for its decision.

But as members prepare for their regular monthly meeting Thursday night, they have clearly reached a consensus that there should be a memorial.

"I think all of our conversations have been directed towards the construction of a memorial," said Kyle Lyddy, the chairman of the commission. "At this stage in our discussion, I can't see us going back and saying that there won't be a memorial."

The commission expects to hear an update Thursday night from a subcommittee that has been investigating potential sites.

"The fact that they are looking at a possible location means they have resolved the question about whether or not there will be a memorial," said First Selectman Pat Llodra. "They do their work by consensus, and they have moved on."

Llodra and the [Board of Selectmen](#) appointed the 12-member commission in 2014 to recommend how to honor the victims of the Sandy Hook shootings and comfort those touched by them. Four members of the commission had loved ones killed in the shooting.

The commission met with families to get their input and has been keeping them updated on progress each month. Of the 26 families, 18 have remained in contact with the commission. One family disagrees with the idea of a memorial, Lyddy said.

The commission next spoke with school staff, school parents and first responders. The commission held two open forums for the public in January and met again with families of those killed.

Members of the commission also spoke with planners involved in the Columbine Memorial and the National September 11 Memorial and Museum.

A key part of the outreach was a survey that shows 95 percent of Sandy Hook parents think there should be a memorial. The majority of parents said the memorial should be outdoors and include natural elements such as gardens, trees and running water. The overall feeling should be solemn, reflective, inspirational and serene, parents said.

"We have closed out the information-gathering stage," said Lyddy, the younger brother of [Christopher Lyddy](#), who represented Newtown in the [General Assembly](#) in 2012 and served on Gov. [Dannel P. Malloy's Sandy Hook Advisory Commission](#). "The location is the next big phase."

So far, the site requirements have been basic, said [Rob Sibley](#), Newtown's deputy director of planning and land use, who has been helping the subcommittee identify open land.

The families' preference is that it be someplace in Sandy Hook that is easy to get to but still secluded from environmental noise.

The commission does not have a land acquisition budget per se, Lyddy said. But it does have an \$80,000 fund that was created after the tragedy because donors were sending checks to the town with "memorial" written in the subject field.

"The idea is to bring the families a list of three to five properties where a memorial could be built," Lyddy said.

The commission is not making any decisions about design until a consensus is reached about the location, he said. Already, designers have submitted a half-dozen ideas to the town, including a memorial fountain by a Glastonbury resident [Lisa Barrett](#).

Llodra said the commission's progress represents another step in Newtown's recovery.

"This is a significant task because it will memorialize a horrific event that happened to families in our community," Llodra said. "So they are being very careful to hear everyone's voice."

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