

Permanent Memorial Commission Shifts Focus To New Site

July 22, 2016



John Voket

It appears that former opponents to a High Meadow site at Fairfield Hills being considered for a permanent memorial to honor and remember the victims lost at Sandy Hook Elementary School on 12/14 are supporting a new site under consideration, just a few hundred yards further northeast.

The Sandy Hook Permanent Memorial Commission (SHPMC) announced at its July 14 meeting that the panel has reoriented its energies toward securing a site adjacent to the northeast corner of Wasserman Way and Nunnawauk Road, and is apparently abandoning any efforts to develop a site at the High Meadow.

The site now under consideration, according to officials, was set aside by the state for possible town use with the help of the late state representative Julia Wasserman. And while it is still owned by the state, the town has secured permission to move forward with any due diligence required to evaluate the environmental integrity of the parcel.

A request to tap funding for any environmental testing from the Sandy Hook Permanent Memorial Commission will be made in August, according to Town Planning Director George Benson. If the memorial commission votes to spend funds under its purview, further clearance to use those funds must be granted by a majority vote of the Boards of Selectmen and Finance, and the Legislative Council.

“So we’re looking at a process that could take a couple of months,” Mr Benson said. He will bring the request forward to selectmen when that board meets on August 15.

Mary Gaudet-Wilson and Holly Kocet, who are among a small but vocal contingent of residents publicly opposing the proposed High Meadow site, both attended the last SHPMC meeting and came away happy to learn that a new and more environmentally conducive site is under consideration.

Ms Gaudet-Wilson told *The Bee* she is very pleased that the memorial panel is refocusing on a site that “has many fine attributes.”

“This site offers privacy yet can be easily accessed; it has the potential for a view; utilities would be readily available. And best of all, it is not a multiuse parcel, which avoids conflicts with other stakeholders,” Ms Gaudet-Wilson said. “The SHPMC has wisely chosen a site which meets the needs of the commission and the community at large. In choosing a noncontroversial site the commission is setting the stage for a memorial which can be embraced by all of Newtown.”

Ms Gaudet-Wilson added that “the commission is to be congratulated for arriving at this juncture through its own hard work and by working collaboratively with members of the public.”

Ms Kocet echoed those congratulations, also thanking commission volunteers for their work and for considering an alternative site for the 12/14 memorial.

“Upon visiting the site, one can see that it has a wonderful meadow with a forested backdrop and views looking northward,” Ms Kocet said. “I can’t imagine a better site in all of Newtown more perfect. I wish the commission great success as they move forward with the memorial.”

Kyle Lyddy, who chairs the SHPMC, said the panel is now fully engaged in vetting this new site.

“We’re kind of in a holding pattern until George Benson is able to ascertain whether there is any soil contamination at the site,” Mr Lyddy said. He said there is a proposal on the table from a vendor that would perform the soil testing, but several of the SHPMC commissioners have additional questions they want to have answered before moving forward with contracting the work.

Mr Lyddy said part of the concern is whether the entire parcel needs to be tested, or just the piece under consideration for a memorial site.