



Since 1877 – Best for Local News and Advertising

Permanent Memorial Commission Pursuing Site In Corner Of High Meadow

Top of Form

Bottom of Form

By [John Voket](#)

Friday, November 20, 2015 at 10:46 am



Photo:

Commissioners are one step closer to a permanent memorial to honor those killed on 12/14 with the announcement this week that all future conversations will center on a piece of land within Fairfield Hills.

After working closely with Deputy Director of Planning & Land Use Rob Sibley and making a courtesy visit to share details with the Newtown Conservation Commission November 9, the Sandy Hook Permanent Memorial Commission told *The Newtown Bee* this week that a three- to four-acre-site tucked into a corner of the High Meadow at Fairfield Hills provides the optimal location for a 12/14 memorial.

“All future conversations will center on this piece of land,” said memorial commission Chairman Kyle Lyddy. “The commission is aligned with this location based on our [ideal qualifying site] criteria, accessibility, and infrastructure.”

As recently as a few weeks ago, committee volunteers and Mr Sibley were still considering three parcels. In a late September correspondence, Mr Lyddy identified the criteria that helped narrow down options for a site from about a dozen to three, all which provided accessibility, secluded/free from noise, natural settings/views, proximity to Sandy Hook, and infrastructure (roads, water, electricity, parking, etc).

But for the reasons Mr Lyddy noted, the panel's energy will now be devoted to securing an area of the High Meadow, while at the same time preparing a Request For Proposal so anyone interested in tendering design ideas can do so for formal consideration.

Mr Lyddy said the commission anticipated some initial concerns, including the site's proximity to a paved walking trail used daily by hundreds of residents and visitors who may not want to be exposed to the memorial and those who might come to visit it.

He said the ideal location should provide topical sight line barriers between the trail and the memorial.

Mr Lyddy said if the High Meadow proposal comes to fruition, vehicle and handicapped access to the memorial would be provided via an abandoned farm road that runs along the northwestern tree line.

He said a small parking area for handicapped visitors may need to be developed close to the site, but improvements could also be made to a cul de sac at the bottom of the High Meadow trail entrance to accommodate other visitors' vehicles.

"We felt it was important that we share our ideas with the Conservation Commission as a courtesy, because we want to work with them to hopefully secure an appropriate site, but also to better the ecology of the area by doing some improvements," he said. "The last thing we want is to undo any of the conservation commission's open space initiatives."

Mr Lyddy said most of the conservation panel appeared to support at least the idea of locating a memorial somewhere along the far edge of the meadow.

While the memorial commission plans to take December off, Mr Lyddy said its members will continue to contact and correspond with representatives of the Fairfield Hills Authority, Parks & Recreation officials, and local police leadership to address any issues or concerns they may have about the proposed memorial site.

"In January we'll move into a design consideration and selection process, and create an RFP so anyone interested in submitting a memorial design can do so," he said. He added that that the committee is planning to request some type of advisory board possibly consisting of architects or academic staff from WestConn or Yale to help guide that part of the process.

"The 26 families will also be a big part of this — they will see all the final design proposals first before we put them out to the public," Mr Lyddy said. "We're hoping to have [the RFP] solidified three to six months after our site selection is approved. All input we received from the families, Sandy Hook educators, and others will be part of the design RFP criteria."

Mr Lyddy said the committee also wants to be sure the process is as open as possible, so citizen ideas could be considered alongside any being submitted by professionals. To that end, the memorial commission may seek to provide nonprofessionals with some design support to ensure they fulfill all aspects of the RFP if they have a viable memorial concept in mind.

In a letter being circulated to the 26 families of 12/14 victims, Mr Lyddy confirmed that locking the High Meadow site is still fraught with challenges.

“There are many challenges our commission needs to work through as we attempt to navigate the many layers of the Town of Newtown’s Government processes,” he wrote.

The letter also introduces the idea that fundraising will need to be part of the memorial creation process.

“Currently there is \$130,000 in an account set up by the Town of Newtown that was earmarked after 12/14,” he wrote to families. “Until we know the scope of the project, we are unaware of specific costs.”

To that end, he said the commission is looking into setting up a 501(c)(3) that would be administered by the town.

“All dollars that are in the town’s account would be transferred to this 501(c)(3) account,” the letter states. “The purpose of this is to allow those who want to contribute (individuals, corporations, other not-for-profits) to donate to a 501(c)(3) and not specifically the ‘Town of Newtown.’ We’re doing this to avoid confusion as everyone who currently wants to contribute needs to write a check to the Town of Newtown and add ‘Memorial’ in the memo. It also allows groups who can only donate to another 501(c)(3), to do so.”

He added that the Memorial Commission “hopes to do this with as small of an impact to the community as possible.”