

# Town deliberates on how to remember Newtown victims

Tuesday, December 9, 2014 10:50 AM  
By Associated Press

NEWTOWN, Conn. -

One by one, those who lost loved ones in the Sandy Hook massacre have been weighing in on the search for the right memorial. Some have shared their thoughts in person or anonymously through surveys, but for others, the grief is still too sharp to participate.

The families are among hundreds in Newtown consulted in the early stages of the deliberate, wide-ranging effort to decide how to remember the 20 children and six educators who were killed at the school the morning of Dec. 14, 2012.

While remembrances abound across the region - including new playgrounds and ribbons in green, the color of the Sandy Hook school - Newtown is taking its time to decide what its permanent memorial should look like. A commission has been hearing proposals while looking for lessons from paths chosen by other tragedy-stricken communities including New York City; Littleton, Colorado; and Blacksburg, Virginia.

"The pressure is really just on making sure we do this right," commission chairman Kyle Lyddy said.

Artists and architects have been pitching ideas to Newtown since soon after the shooting, and the commission, while far from ready to make any commitments, has been hearing out proposals for concepts including murals, groves and memorial parks.

Scarlett Lewis, one of four commission members who lost children in the shooting, said it has been difficult to sit on the board as she grieves her 6-year-old son, Jesse. But she hopes the process results in a place of beauty where people can come together and pay respects by mourning, reflecting or counting blessings.

"This memorial is not only for the families who lost loved ones and the town, but also for the world who so generously gave of their thoughts, prayers and gifts that day and continue to keep us in their thoughts and prayers," Lewis said.

The 12-member commission, assembled in October 2013, so far has focused on gathering input with some 350 people in Newtown including school staff, survivors' parents and first responders responding to surveys with their preferences on setting, approach or whether there should even be a memorial. The work has progressed quietly, with a low profile compared with other aspects of Newtown's recovery, including a new Sandy Hook Elementary School to replace the building razed last year.

More victims' families gradually have been getting involved, with 18 now engaged, although Lyddy said some have indicated they simply are not prepared.

"There are some families that are either not yet ready or for their own purposes are not choosing to be active on a number of fronts," Newtown Selectman William Rodgers said. "You've just got to respect that. It doesn't matter what the reason."

At a commission hearing last month, Cindy Mattioli, the mother of another first-grader killed at Sandy Hook, said that while the idea of a carousel or playground has been suggested, she does not expect

the memorial to be fun. She would prefer it convey feelings of resilience. Brian Engel, a commissioner whose daughter was killed, said he would want people to walk away feeling hopeful.

The commission is not consulting the family of Nancy Lanza, the gunman's mother and the first victim of his rampage. Before driving to the school, where he ultimately took his own life, 20-year-old Adam Lanza shot and killed her inside the Newtown house where he had access to an arsenal of firearms.

"There was no consideration given to solicit information from the Lanzas," said Lyddy, 27, a marketing manager at a Newtown firm.

For the Newtown panel, Lyddy said, the importance of taking a deliberate approach was reinforced by discussions with other memorial commissions. He noted a memorial at Virginia Tech that went up within a year of the 2007 shooting - an array of 32 stones honoring the dead - was later altered to acknowledge the survivors, as well.

Public forums are planned in Newtown for 2015, the next step in a process that is expected to last several more years.