

The Planning and Zoning Commission held a Public Meeting in conjunction with the Economic Development Commission and Fairfield Hills Authority on Saturday, December 6, 2014 at 2:00 PM in the Media Center of Reed Intermediate School, 3 Trades Lane, Newtown, CT 06470.

These minutes are subject to the approval of the Planning and Zoning Commission

Present: Rosa Zubizarreta (Diapaxis – facilitator); George Benson, Planning Department Director; a partial list of additional meeting attendees is on file.

Ms. Zubizarreta began the session at 2 PM.

Input from Public Meeting on Saturday, December 6th, 2014
Re: proposal to allow a limited number of rental dwelling units at Fairfield Hills

Notes from presentation at beginning of meeting by George Benson, Director of Town Planning:

Potential benefits of proposed mixed-use development including apartments:

- 1) Income to offset the maintenance of Fairfield Hills;
- 2) Makes other kinds of development more likely, as banks requiring mixed-use to approve loans;
- 3) Also makes it more likely to be able to obtain grants, as they are tied to redevelopment plans.

Protections for town:

- 1) Per current land-use plan, any building would be limited to existing footprint of current buildings.
- 2) Even if the zoning ordinance is changed to allow apartments above storefronts, selectmen would still need to approve any specific project. This is different than how zoning works on private land. Town still has the right to not approve a particular project, since the town owns the land.

Input from Community Members

Most of the input below was shared publicly during the meeting, after an initial presentation (see notes from that, at end of document.) A few items were added after the meeting was formally over, as some participants continued to come up to share their concerns.

Concerns:

- 1) Parking for apartments could compete with parking for public use of area.
- 2) Apartments could be divisive as the people who would end up living there, may feel they "own" the place, and complain against other municipal uses. For example, people who rent there may complain against the noise levels from the emergency center and from the sports.
- 3) Concern that having residents in the apartments would mean that Fairfield Hills would need to be open 24/7 instead of closing at dusk.
- 4) Would hinder other possible options for economic development at Fairfield Hills. For example, it would preclude a corporate option.
- 5) Concern that economic development in Fairfield Hills would compete with development in other areas of the city that we are trying to develop as well, result in "economic cannibalism".

- 6) Concern that we are "giving away the farm", by setting aside 3.5 million in town budget for abatement AND also wanting to amend zoning to allow for residential use. Recommendation that we try only one of these at a time.
- 7) Some of us *want* change, and are concerned that others seem to be digging in their heels, and saying "let's not even talk about this. Bethel is a good example of what mixed-use can look like.
- 8) Concerns that this would open the floodgates to *more* housing, especially if it is just a small group that is deciding this.

Questions

- 1) How much is being spent currently on Fairfield Hills?
- 2) What is the current revenue that Fairfield Hills is bringing in?
- 3) What if we did no remediation, and just allowed the buildings to remain as is?
- 4) How many buildings can be taken down with existing funds that have been set aside?
- 5) Will the amount of money that the apartments bring in, be more than the cost to educate the additional children that this implies?
- 6) Would the apartments include a designated play area? Would residents be allowed to use alcohol at their gatherings, which is in contradiction of current ordinances?
- 7) What is the motivation for the town to propose this? Is there a need for housing?
- 8) What is the larger context? What are the other places in town that are available for mixed use? What are the other locations that are available to develop housing?
- 9) Why does Fairfield Hills need to be self-sufficient, income-wise? Why couldn't this be a cost that is shared to have a "town jewel", our own "Central Park"?
- 10) What would it look like, for Fairfield Hills to be "done" or "complete"?

Potential solutions offered

- 1) Have a referendum to get more people's input than the ones who are here at the meeting.
- 2) Ask citizens if they would be willing to foot the bill of the upkeep of Fairfield Hills with a special tax, and then we wouldn't need to look for economic development there.
- 3) Include the questions in the November election; some people don't want extra referendums due to additional cost.
- 4) Include some advisory questions on the next budget referendum.
- 5) Create a regional sports complex at Fairfield Hills that would draw in business. Include a skating rink and an Olympic-sized pool.
- 6) Create age-restricted apartments that are smaller.
- 7) Use this location to create 2-bedroom apartments for people with developmental disabilities. They don't have cars or children, and currently have a shortage of living options.

Correspondence

The session ended at approximately 4 PM.