

The Planning and Zoning Commission held a Public Meeting in conjunction with the Economic Development Commission and Fairfield Hills Authority on Thursday, December 11, 2014 at 7:00 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 (Diapraxi – facilitator); George Benson, Planning Department Director; a partial list of additional meeting attendees is on file.

Ms. Zubizarreta began the session at 7 PM.

Notes from Public Meeting on Thursday, December 11, 2014

Re: proposed zoning change to allow a limited number of rental units at Fairfield Hills

Input from community members, before the small group conversations

(These statements have been grouped according to themes; no changes have been made to individual items.)

Historical context

- 1) In 1991, when we got the land for 3.9 million instead of 17 million, we got a good deal. Part of the premise was, that we would have something for everyone there.
- 2) In the original studies, some housing was included, along with many other things. That was later changed.
- 3) At one time, there was proposal to have clinic there. People supported this, but it fell through.

Reasons why some of us favor the zoning amendment:

- 1) For some of us, the current state of the campus is an embarrassment and an eyesore.
- 2) Some of us have a desire to make it a LIVE campus.
- 3) Some of us would like to see proposals from developers. To even be able to look at the proposals, we need to open the gate. Otherwise they won't take the time and pay architects to design and submit them.
- 4) With many layers of approval that are needed, we still have opportunity to turn down specific proposals we don't like.

- 5) Some of us feel that some housing is necessary to have some limited development at Fairfield Hills. It could be like the grain of sand that the pearl grows around.
- 6) Some of us feel that there is a need for more apartments in town.
- 7) Some of us feel that Fairfield Hills is lacking enough life.
- 8) Some of us are concerned that this town has less tax income than surrounding towns.

Reasons why some of us don't favor the amendment:

- 1) Some of us feel that there has never been consensus for housing, so why pursue this now.
- 2) Some of us don't want any retail, either, at Fairfield Hills.
- 3) Some of us don't want any development at Fairfield Hills. Just want it saved undeveloped for future generations.
- 4) Some of us feel there's been good progress at Fairfield Hills. There are trails, community center. A lot has been done.
- 5) Some of us feel we don't need the income from development at Fairfield Hills. We already have some money in the budget set aside to take down some of the buildings.

Concerns and questions that some of us have

- 1) Concern that there would be more traffic from rental units; school buses, other forms of traffic.
- 2) If it is 40 apartments, it's likely to be 80 adults. How much parking would be needed for 80 adults? Where would it go? And where would the parking for commercial units go? It may be about 250 parking places that would be required. Would there be a huge parking lot surrounding all of the buildings?
- 3) Extra burdens on school system, water, fire, police: how do potential costs compare to potential income?
- 4) Concern that we are not getting the full story. We need the cost of projected services, as well as the benefits.

- 6) Who will be the supervisor and collect money on the apartments? Who will be the landlord?
- 7) We have much empty retail space in town right now. Hard to imagine new businesses will succeed at Fairfield Hills.
- 8) Small amounts of apartments won't make a significant difference with regard to supporting local business.

- 9) Concern that we would be giving up town land for the benefit of developers.

Some responses to the questions and concerns

- 1) Some of us think that it would be possible to design something attractive for parking.
- 2) Based on initial concepts, we are thinking the potential proposal could bring in \$300,000 estimated tax revenues.
- 3) Some of us want to see this number attached to a square footage from a developer.
- 4) Some locations in town don't have mixed-use.

Ideas on how to deal with the issue

- 1) Some of us don't want the conversation to come up again.
- 2) Some of us feel that town should be communicating both pros & cons, gives & gets – not just advantages of proposal.
- 3) Some of us support the possibility of a referendum.
- 4) We could do a survey instead of a meeting. Some of us feel that more people would favor a skating rink or a clinic instead of apartments.

Input from community members, after the small group conversations

*(Again, these statements have been grouped according to theme, without any intent to change individual items. The two starred items below ** were shared afterwards with the facilitators, not shared in the large group.)*

Concerns that came up in small group conversations

- 1) Concern about the additional expenses of security, police, fire, education.
- 2) Concern about losing money on this, because of costs of education if there are children in the apartments.
- 3) It would be good to hear from the existing tenants: ambulance, park and rec. They may not want to make any concessions to new tenants in terms of noise, etc.

Surprising information that came up in small group conversations

- 1) Some people are not interested in reducing the cost of Fairfield Hills to the town, by introducing apartments. They are willing to pay more taxes, to not have development.
- 2) **About 1/3 of Garden Club members of Newtown have moved out in last 10-20 years because of taxes.
- 3) **Story of a developer in another town that began a project, stopped, and the town was stuck with

having to pay for the demolition and completion costs for the entire project.

Questions still unanswered / information that would be helpful

- 1) It would be good to have a better understanding of the connection between housing and loans.
- 2) It could be helpful to see possible examples of mixed use in other areas.
- 3) Cash flow projections of development costs would be useful, to anticipate if developer will cover remediation costs.
- 4) People will want to know, if something like this will lower taxes or increase taxes.
- 5) We need more data on what are the rights of renters, regarding possible concerns about noise, concerts, fireworks.
- 6) If we agree to having some mixed-use that includes apartments, do we want to go to RBF and have different developers compete, to see who will give us the best deal?
- 7) What would the terms be?
- 8) What is the NET value to the taxpayer, considering real costs and contingencies?

Clarifications that were offered

- 1) Apartments are important to a developer who is creating mixed-use because they improve cash flow, not because they help those businesses be successful.

Three comments offered toward the end of the meeting, that exemplify the different perspectives:

- 1) Why are we in a hurry? There is a lot going on, on the campus. It's the third year we have had an arts festival there. We have community gardens.
- 2) Newtown lacks a center. This could help create more of a central locus, help enliven the FFH area at night.
- 3) Newtown consists of several different villages, each of which has its own center. We also have three mobile home parks. We have other places we could develop for apartments and retail.

Conversation about costs of not developing Fairfield Hills

- 1) What would be the cost of not doing anything, except to take down the buildings?
- 2) Some people have estimated it at \$50 million to tax payers.
- 3) In 2011 CIP documents, Mr. Reed estimated long-term cost to develop buildings and infrastructure at \$30 million.
- 4) Other people feel that those costs are underestimated, and that it would be fair to say between 30-50 million.

Ideas for moving forward

- 4) Could be good to do a survey.
- 5) We could have an advisory referendum to give input on housing at Fairfield Hills.
- 6) We could put a broader question on an advisory referendum. It costs \$8,000 to do an advisory referendum.
- 7) If we have a referendum on the community center, we could attach this to that.

The meeting ended at approximately 9 PM.