

Town of Farmington  
Farmington Village Center Committee  
September 4, 2018

**Present**

Bruce Charrett	Kevin Ray
Michael Gurski	Nancy Nickerson
Sarah Willett	Portia Corbett
Liz Sanford	Betty Coykendall
Ruth Grobe	Brian Connolly

**Staff**

Kathy Eagen  
Bill Warner  
Rose Ponte  
Anna Savastano

**A. Call to Order**

Chairman Charette called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM.

Chairman Charette explained that this is an advisory committee to the Town Council. The focus of this meeting is to hear from the community concerning whether the Town should purchase the former Parson's lot from the DOT.

He outlined the following housekeeping rules:

- Meeting agendas will always be posted on the Town's website
- All meeting schedules will be posted on the Town's website
- There will be two public comment opportunities to allow for ample time for public comments.
- Comments will be limited to 3 minutes

The Committee members introduced themselves.

Chairman Charette read the Charge of the Committee and announced that the Charge of the Committee is posted on the Town's website.

**B. Reading of the minutes**

To approve the attached August 1, 2018 minutes

A motion was made and seconded (Nickerson/Connolly)

**A. Motion carried**

**C. Presentation, William Warner**

Bill Warner gave a PowerPoint Presentation highlighting the work and studies that have been completed to date on the Parson's lot; including a summary of the process that must be undertaken should the Town decide to purchase the property. Bill's presentation focused on whether or not the Town should purchase the Parson's property. He listed the pros and cons of owning the property. The presentation is posted on the Town's website.

Chairman Charrette asked the committee members for comments before opening up to public comments.

Sarah Willett asked if the Town would become a landlord if they purchased the property.

A. Bill Warner explained the Town would select a preferred developer through a competitive RFP process. Once selected, the developer would purchase the property from the Town. The developer would be required to submit the project to TPZ for approval.

Ruth Grobe inquired about a market study that was referenced in a letter written by Mr. Matt Pogson.

A. The market study was completed in September 2016 by BL Companies as part of the Town's due diligence.

Kevin Ray questioned if the Town does not purchase the property and it goes to auction can the Town match the auction price.

A. Bill Warner explained that according the wording of the Conveyance Bill Legislation that is not an option.

#### **D. Public Comment**

Chairman Charrett asked that members of the public identify themselves and their addresses. Speakers were selected to speak by the rows in which they were seated.

Dave Cadigan, 44 Garden St. asked if the Town purchases Parson's property would there be any consideration to transferring the Town Green from its current location to the Parson's Property.

A. Mike Gurski said that at this time FVGLA would not consider swapping the Town Green for the Parson's Property.

Kathy Wadsworth, Meadow Lane, said she attended all the charrettes, and several options discussed during the charrettes left the Parson's property as open space. She asked if the Town purchased the property and left it as open space would that change the purchase price.

A. Bill Warner explained that federal money was used to purchase the property and that funding must be returned back to the Federal government. State of CT would be looking to recoup those funds.

Jennifer Proto, Waterville Road, stated that she is very familiar with the conveyance process and questioned the wording of the bill.

A. Bill Warner explained that the wording she is referring to was not the bill that was passed during the June special session.

Ms. Proto, Waterville Road, stated that she lives in the Village and has concerns with the Village Zone. She thinks it's a great idea to have higher standards for the area; however, best and higher uses are not always desirable. She urges TPZ to revisit the Farmington Village Zone regulations.

Mimi Meade, Garden Street, wondered if the Town is only focusing on Parson's property or is the Town also considering the other properties in the area. She asked what price the State paid for the Parson's property.

A. The state paid \$925,000. The Town is only focusing on whether or not they should purchase the Parson's property. The other properties are private.

Peter Melly, Basswood Road, asked how many stories does the Village Zone regulations allow.

A. Bill Warner answered, the Farmington Village Zone allows for 40 Feet.

Jack Kemper, Lovely Street, asked Bill Warner if developers have expressed interest for this property, if so what are the particulars. He would be very interested in additional parking being made available for Farmington Commons owners.

A. Bill Warner stated that several developers have expressed an interest in mixed use development.

Andy Barron, Basswood Road, asked if there is any consideration for the possibility of re-erecting the Phinehas Lewis House and turning it into a museum.

A. Bill Warner explained we are working with Farmington Historical Society on that project.

Jay Bombara, Mountain Road, stated the he appreciated the Farmington Historical Society's efforts in protecting the Mountain Road house. He stated that we need to control the Parson's property. In his opinion, as long as the Town controls it; the worst that can happen is we don't find a developer that will redevelop the property and if that happens the Town can keep it as open space. He encourages the Town to purchase it.

Oliver Jones, Farmington Avenue, stated that he and his family have given up lot for everyone to use this property. His father fought the owners of Parsons Property for years; Mr. Jones had to put up with his father's rage. He feels he and his family are the only ones that have sacrificed because of this property. This is the gateway into Farmington. The Town has to buy the property and the Town should also buy his property. He has 74 years' experience in this part of town. He feels he hasn't been consulted and he would like to be consulted.

Beth Bracken, Garden Street, asked if the market study had taken the current condo project into account.

A. The current condo project had not been built when the market study was conducted, however, the consultant was told about it.

Michele Beaulieu, Stratford Road, stated that it's a fresh of breathe air to hear something will be done for our gateway. The project must have to have mixed use, not just housing. The Town needs to make sure that they vet the developers to ensure that this project is successful. We can't look at dilapidated buildings. Mixed use is the ideal situation.

Chairman Charette, Main Street, asked to clarify zero setback rules in the Farmington Village Zone.

A. Bill Warner explained that the regulation is vague; however, The TPZ Commission can require a buffer zone on a case by case basis.

Two public comment letters and an email were read into the record. They are attached.

Chairman Charrette asked if the Committee had any general thoughts that can assist the committee.

Liz Sanford agreed with much of the evening's comments. She expressed concerned about easement issues. She asked if they were any state and federal rules to assist with the brownfields issues associated with the property.

A. Kathy Eagen explained that there may be funding available if the Town purchases the property but it is important to hire an environmental consultant to help the Town navigate the various situations that could arise in terms of Brownfield concerns with the property.

Portia Corbett, Mountain Spring Road, stated that the Town needs to move forward. It's important that we get as much information as possible in order to make the smartest decisions. She stated that we need to get the word out because the more people that know the better it will be for the Town.

Betty Coykendall asked Chairman Charrette if he could ask for a show of hands from the audience in favor, against or uncertain about the Town purchasing the Parson's lot.

The results are as follows:

In favor: majority

In against; no one raised their hands

Uncertain: 1 person

Nancy Nickerson stated that we needed more information. She asked what the estimated cost of the property was, what was the State's timeline to sell the property and how the environmental issues should be handled.

A. Bill Warner explained that the State is required to obtain two appraisals for the property and that could take some time. An estimated price is about \$200,000 per acre. As for the environmental, he explained that additional studies need to be conducted to better understand

the environmental issues on the property. Once they are identified we would work with DECD to redevelop it as a brownfield property, with grants from the state. We could also negotiate with the developer for the developer to clean it.

Nancy Nickerson asked if he anticipated a use restriction for residential

A. Until further studies are conducted that would be difficult to determine. If it was deemed restricted for residential then it could end the project.

Nancy Nickerson asked that given the state's financial situation can we count on them to help with clean-up.

A. Bill Warner explained that the State and Federal government have funds set aside for Brownfield remediation.

Ruth Grobe asked if the Town should hold a referendum to decide this issue.

A. Kathy Eagen answered that would be a decision for the Town Council to make.

Nancy Nickerson asked how would the council buy it.

A. Kathy Eagen explained the Council could decide to go to referendum, or depending on the price could budget for it as a capital expense.

## **E. New Business**

### **1) To discuss the committee's next steps**

Kathy Eagen explained we are looking for consensus from this committee about next steps. The Committee stated that based on public input and information received to date the ownership and control of the property was in the Town's best interest. The staff will continue to gather information for the next meeting.

#### **To review and approve the FAQ**

A motion was made and seconded (Nickerson / Corbett) to review the FAQ.

Kathy Eagen stated that the attached Q&A is just a starting point. The running list will continue to be updated.

Bruce added that this document that will evolve as we hear more questions from the community.

Liz Sanford asked if the Garden Club has been involved in the process up to this point.

Mike Gurski explained that FVGLA is partnering with the Garden Club and they are hiring a landscape architect. They hope to start working on the green by spring of next year.

Nancy Nickerson thinks it's a great idea to have the Q& A document. She thanked the community that came out for this meeting.

**A. Motion carried.**

**2) To authorize the Town Manager to sign an agreement with Tighe & Bond Associates for no more than \$5,000 for various environmental services**

A motion was made and seconded (Gurski/Connolly) to sign an agreement with Tighe & Bond.

Sarah Willet thought the environmental study had already been done.

Kathy Eagen explained that it seems like the State only cleaned up the area they touched. It is a very complicated situation and we need an expert to help us navigate. The phase 1 assessment report was 1400 pages.

**A. The motion carried.**

**3) Update from the Quality of Life Committee**

The Committee met earlier in the evening at 5:30. They decided they will hold a brainstorming session to develop a master plan with a matrix, and priorities. The goal of the committee is to hire a landscape architect and develop a comprehensive plan for the area.

An update was also given for the Route 4 DOT project. DOT is contractually obligated to return and make the Route 4 area acceptable. The Town will make sure the general Route 4 area gets cleaned up, and prepared for spring plantings, in the meantime mums will be planted.

Given the charge of the committee, Ruth Grobe would like to serve on the committee.

Kathy Eagen explained that everyone is welcome to attend the Quality of life committee meetings they will meet before the regular subcommittee meetings.

The next meeting is scheduled for September 17 and it will be a workshop meeting.

**4) To schedule a meeting for September 2018 or October, 2018 to prepare for the October 23, 2018 Town Council Workshop Meeting**

Kathy Eagen explained that we should schedule a second meeting in case it is needed to prepare for the October 23 joint Town Council Meeting/ Farmington Village Center Committee.

A motion was made and seconded (Sanford/ Nickerson) to schedule a meeting on October 11, 2018.

**A. Motion carried.**

**F. Public Comment:**

Demetrios Giannaros, Basswood Road, thanked the committee members for their time. He stated that he was state representative and knows the amount of time this will require. He agrees with everything Bea Stockwell stated in her letter. He feels the Town shouldn't leave this decision to the state he suggests that as long as everything checks out when the

Town completes their due diligence, then the Town should consider buying the property. He also stated that the Town can't be cheap with the environmental studies; \$5000 is the minimum that should be spent of Brownfield assessment studies. The Town should not shy away from conducting a Phase 2 assessment study.

Peggy Bliss, Reservoir Road, stated that she participated in the charrettes. She would like to know the result of the visual inventory. She stated that the Town needs an inexpensive place for seniors to live.

A. Bill Warner explained that the consultants used the visual survey to upgrade the design guidelines for the area.

Pete Melly, Basswood Road, stated that he is an ex-banker. He stressed the importance of obtaining a Phase 2 assessment. The Phase 2 should include drilling downstream. He stated that this is a scary property in terms of the environmental risk the Town would take if they buy it. He feels the Town should keep it for open space so we would not have to clean it up. He asked if the State is completely immune from the transfer act? He stated that if you own it for even one day then the Town would be responsible for remediating the environmental. He asked is there a way to hold the State responsible? He again stated that this is a very very scary property from the Brownfields prospective. He stated that no one will finance the developer if there is an outstanding environmental issue.

A. Kathy Eagen explained that hiring an environmental consultant is necessary for all the reasons Mr. Melly brought up in his comments.

Mimi Meade, Garden Street, asked according to the Town's charter, how much is the spending threshold before a referendum is required.

A. Kathy Eagen explained that anything \$400,000 and above requires a referendum. The cost of the Parson's property can be included in the Town's budget which is always voted by the community.

Janice Riemer, West District Road, stated that Farmington Historical Society would like to resurrect the Phinehas Lewis House on the Parson's Property and redevelop it as a welcome center. She stated that the welcome center would be a great opportunity to welcome people to our community.

Richard Koszyca, Copper Mine Road, stated the banker who previously spoke hit it the nail right on the head, the State took all the problems when they purchased the property by eminent domain. We should check with the Fire Marshall to see if he knows of any oil tanks that might be buried on the property. He is also concerned about pollutants from old used oil that have been dumped there for the past 50 -60 years, also to consider are the pollutants from the auto paint shop, and asbestos from the paint shop. We have to make sure the State of CT gives us a clean bill of health before we even consider buying it. He

would not touch it without making sure it is totally clean. It costs \$100 a square foot for asbestos cleanup alone. He also stated that he doesn't consider this area to be pedestrian friendly; instead he used Simsbury as a great example of a pedestrian friendly area. Farmington has a state road going through the middle of this area. In his opinion we are never going to be a walkable community.

Jen Proto, Waterville Road, questioned what would happen if the Town sells the Parson's Property to a developer and the developer doesn't follow his plan or he sells the plan to another developer? She stated that the Town needs to rework the current Village Zone Regulations. Zoning enforcement in town is lax, and that's why people are frustrated. What's needed is enforcement with real teeth. A full time zoning enforcement officer is needed and large fines need to be imposed. She also stated the village is not a pedestrian friendly area. In the Route 4 DOT project instead of stamped concrete in the walkways, there should have been a hedge planted along the sidewalk separating the sidewalk from the road. She stressed that the Town needs to think about better enforcement, higher fines and increasing the zoning enforcement personnel. Rules are not being enforced, as an example she stated that the dumpsters in her neighborhood are being picked up at 2:00 am and no one is doing anything about it.

A. Bill Warner explained that this developer like any other developer would be required to follow the plan as approved by TPZ.

Alexia Bouckoms, Talcott Notch Road, stated that pedestrian friendly area is great but we need to improve wheel chair accessibility. Currently it is very difficult to navigate the area in a wheelchair.

**G. Executive Session**

A motion was made and seconded (Nickerson/ Willett) to go into executive session.

**A. motion carried.**

**H. Adjournment**

A motion was made and seconded (Nickerson/ Corbett) to adjourn at 9:35 PM.

**A. motion carried.**

**Respectfully submitted**

**Rose Ponte, Economic Development Director**



# CHARGE OF COMMITTEE

***The Committee will develop recommendations to the Town Council regarding the future use of the Parson's property including ownership, control and use.***

# Parsons Property

Write a description for your map.

Legend



Google Earth



100 ft

# Current Zoning

## Farmington Center Zone

- Mixed use zone – retail, restaurant, office, apartments, condos, attractive public spaces;
- Higher density “downtown style development”;
- Ideally retail and restaurant on first floor, apartments & office on upper floors;
- 2 and 3 story buildings close to and framing the street;
- Minimal setbacks, 80% lot coverage
- Shared parking

# Current Zoning

## Farmington Village District Overlay Zone

“The regulations establishing village districts shall protect the distinctive character, landscape and historic structures within such districts.”

- Design and placement of buildings;
- Color, size, height, location, proportion of openings, roof treatments, building materials and landscaping
- Proposed signs and lighting
- Maintenance of public views;
- Design, paving materials and placement of public roadways;
- Other elements the zoning commission deems appropriate to maintain and protect the character of the village district.

Conn. Gen. Stat. §8-2j(b)

# SHOULD THE TOWN OWN THE PARSONS PROPERTY? A 3 PHASE APPROACH

- Phase 1 – Securing Right to Buy / Public Input
- Phase 2 – Due Diligence
- Phase 3 – Going forward

# PHASE 1 - SECURING CONTROL

- **CT Legislature June 2015 Special Session - House Bill 7107**
- **Signed by Governor July 6<sup>th</sup>, 2015**
- **Special Act No. 15-1, Gives town right of first refusal to purchase property.**

# PUBLIC PARTICIPATION – SPRING 2015

- March 26<sup>th</sup> - SWOT analysis (over 200 participants)
- March 27<sup>th</sup> - Urban Design Classroom(over 60 participants)
- March 28<sup>th</sup> - Model building (over 100 participants)
- September 11 - Final presentation (over 100 participants)

Broad cross section of the community - definitely not “all the same faces” – over 500 participants.

# PUBLIC PARTICIPATION





# FINAL PRODUCT – THE START OF A VISION



94 page document memorializing the 3 days  
and making great recommendations

# PHASE 2- DUE DILIGENCE

## JUNE 2016 – NOVEMBER 2016

Phase 1 Environmental Site Assessment for Parsons site – DOT completed clean up in areas where they worked but not the entire property, transfer act;

Market Analysis – small neighborhood retail, restaurants and multi-family rental;

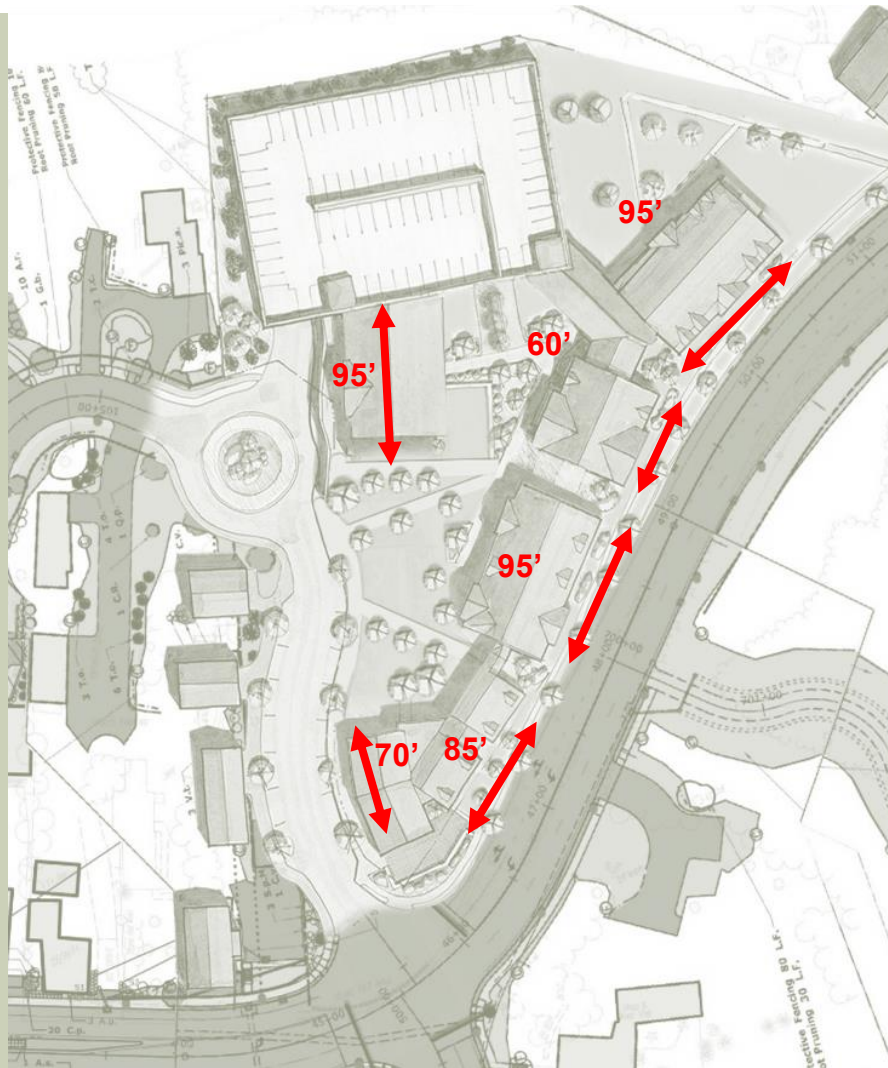
Conceptual plan and renderings- mixed use, attractive gateway into town, public gathering space along backage road;

Traffic and Parking Demand Analysis– Traffic Study completed - development at the scale envisioned will not have adverse impact on RT 4 traffic;

Design guidelines – much more comprehensive, approved by PZC.



# SCALE COMPARISON



*Elm Tree Inn*



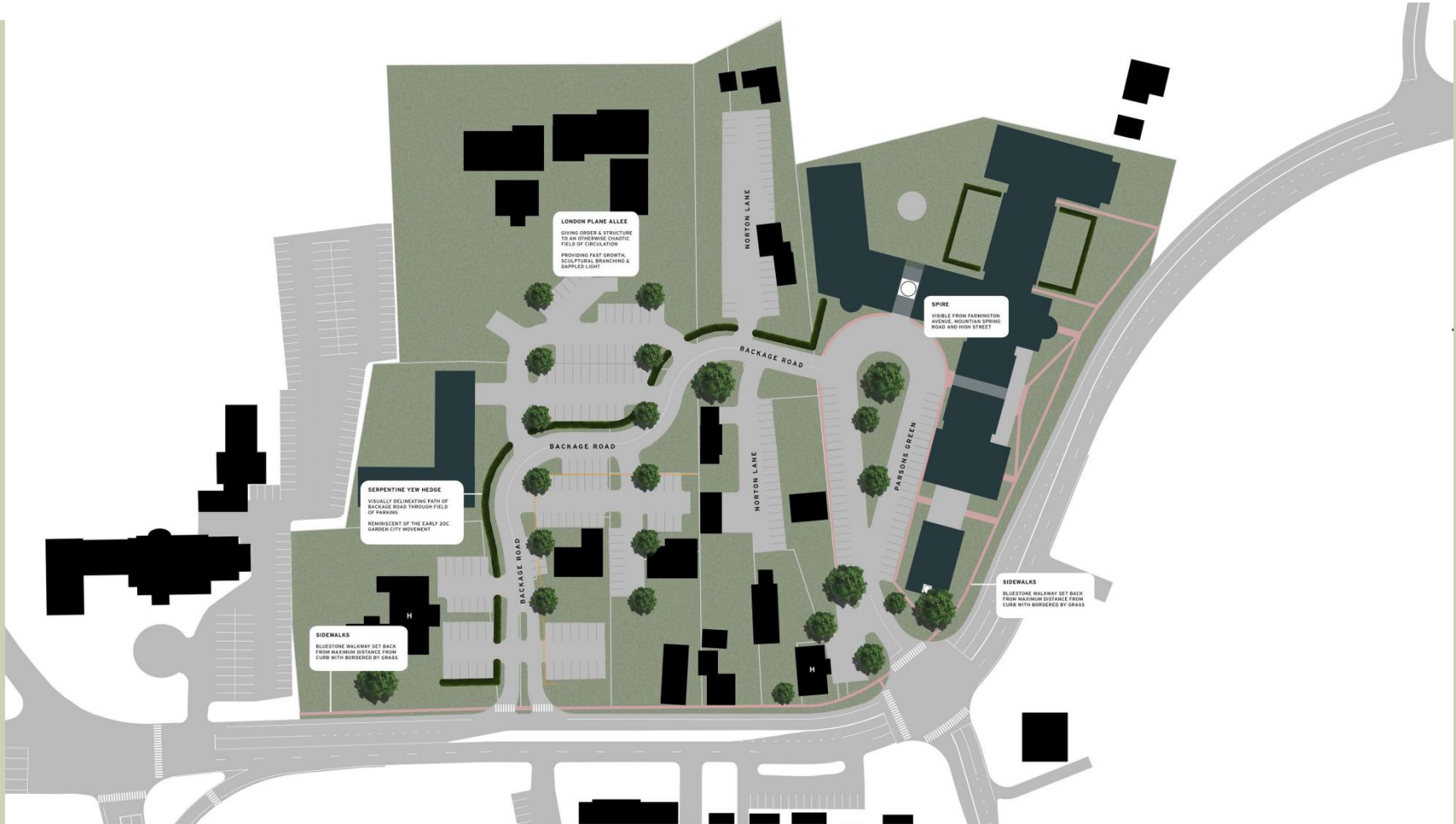
90 Foot Long Façade along  
2 ½ Story

*Hillstead Museum*



2 ½ Story  
110 Foot Long West Façade

# SB COUGHLIN PLAN



# SB COUGHLIN PLAN

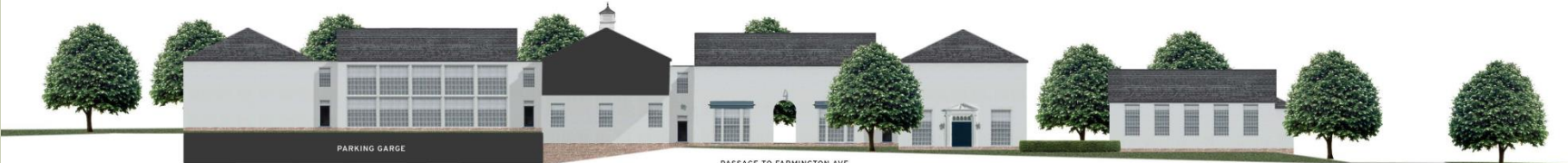


RESTAURANT

PASSAGE TO PARKING GREEN

GARDEN APARTMENTS

FARMINGTON AVENUE



PARKING GARAGE

PASSAGE TO FARMINGTON AVE

RESTAURANT

COURTYARD

PARKING GREEN



OPENING TO COURTYARD

PARKING GREEN

# TOWNS ACQUISITION OF PARSONS

## Acquire

### Pros

- Town partners with developer of its choice
- Control over entire design
- Council must approve developers master plan
- Incorporate Public Spaces & public parking
- Still subject to PZC

### Cons

- Purchase price (ability to negotiate and recoup)
- Environmental but...

## Don't Acquire

### Pros

- Purchase price

### Cons

- State could keep property, could sit for very long time
- Environmental will complicate private development
- RFP for developer
- Highest bidder
- Design only subject to PZC review and approval.
- Far less public input
- Private parking - limited to businesses on site
- No public spaces

# STAFF RECOMMENDATION

- This is without a doubt the most prominent gateway into town.
- The development of this parcel will set the tone for all future development in Farmington Center.
- The development of this parcel will create a sense of place and brand image for the town.
- The only way to control the development of this parcel is to own it.

**Should Farmington own the Parsons property ?**



Dear members of the Farmington Village Center Committee and others to whom this may concern,

Unfortunately, I am unable to attend this evening's meeting. However, I have read the study reports and attended the charettes that were held at Miss Porter's, and I am aware of the current situation and pending purchase of the property known as Parsons Corner. With that said, I believe it should be purchased by the town and that it should remain either open-space or very lightly developed with buildings that are characteristic to what is already existing in the area. This opinion is derived from discussions with residents as well as the summary of the 2017 Master Plan Report for the Farmington Center Study Project. The researchers who conducted this study concluded that Farmington does not meet the criteria for a walking community or transit-oriented community and it is primarily an auto dependent community. Which means that the patrons of the proposed retail shops will drive to this location even if it is developed to be walkable, and it will cause more traffic in an already congested location of town. Which is already one of the town's residents' biggest complaints.

The 2017 study also concludes that retail in Farmington has suffered declines and shows 10% vacancy and that future demand may weaken for top-end luxury apartments typically located in urban areas. This is notable because many of the concepts presented at the charettes were of mixed use urban development. The study also states that Farmington's suburban demand should stabilize, which means that this need for urbanization is not as crucial as we are being led to believe.

I know this perspective is one of many. I know that our town has people who have very different perspectives than my own and I am sure that you can all agree that we do our best to represent all of those perspectives while making choices that develop a stable future for our amazing town. That is why you held charrettes, that is why you are holding this meeting tonight, and that is why I would like to propose that this entire subject be brought to a referendum vote during the next election. I believe that the voters should be given the choice, therefore I propose that you prepare a referendum question which gives four options.

Option 1: Do nothing and do not purchase the property.

Option 2: Purchase the property as open space to be made into a park.

Option 3: Purchase the property and allow a developer to build a low-density retail development.

Option 4: Purchase the property and allow a developer to build high-density retail with mixed use.

Each of these options should have a clear description posted on the town's website and should also be distributed to homes to educate the community on what each option would mean. It should include things such as tax revenue, traffic impacts, and renderings of each proposal.

I have my opinion, and I have voiced it. I am aware that my opinion is one of many, and it may not end up being the most popular. I am willing to acknowledge that my opinion may not be the right one. The question is whether the rest of you feel the same way. I think it's time we listened to the community and gave them the right to choose.

I hope you will consider my proposal.

Best Regards,

Matthew Pogson

September 4, 2018

To: Farmington Village Center Committee:

I regret that I am unable to attend tonight's meeting, during which the future of the "Parson's Parcel" will be discussed. I was able, however, to meet with the Town Planner, William Warner, on August 30, 2018, to review tonight's presentation.

I wish to go on record in favor of the purchase of the 3 acre "Parson's Parcel" by the Town of Farmington.

These are my reasons:

- ① The "Parson's Parcel" is the gateway to our town
- ② As sole owner, the Town of Farmington will have

complete control over what happens on that site

③ It will prevent a developer from maximizing the site, meeting minimal zoning regulations

④ It will serve as a lynch-pin, eventually connecting pedestrians from UConn Health Center with Farmington Village and Unionville Center, enhancing our bike-friendly community

⑤ The site plan submitted by Scott Coughlin, combining residential and business mixed use and providing underground parking has great merit

6. Long term, the taxes generated by this parcel will pay for its purchase price

I urge the citizens of Farmington to support this proposal.

Thank you.

Beatrice C. Stockwell  
26 Waterville Road  
Farmington, CT.

**From:** Tim Eagles  
**Sent:** Friday, August 24, 2018 4:05 PM  
**To:** Rose Ponte  
**Subject:** former parson's property

Rose- I cannot make the meeting on the 4<sup>th</sup>, but I would like to say that I definitely support the idea of the Town buying the property to be able to guide its development for either Town and/or commercial needs. Have a great weekend. -Tim

Tim Eagles, AIA, LEED AP BD&C  
Principal



architecture | engineering | management

*delivering responsible solutions*