

Common School Working Group Notes

Wednesday April 8, 2026 5:00PM – 6:30PM

Fairfield Town Office, Chester Arthur Room

Attendance: Julie Wolcott, Greta Brunswick, Sorel Chaput, Jeanne Hopkins, Deb Hastings, Mary Shreindorfer, Cathy Ainsworth, Kristen Hughes, Jim Cameron, James Gregoire

Agenda

1. Additions/Changes to Agenda. None

2. Debrief from Open House - What did we hear? Main takeaways?

- Notes on adapting the presentation for the future:
 - Could give better overview of the site's connection to the neighborhood, an overview of the site area that shows town common/athletic fields, school, library etc.
 - Give more reference to the Common Schools historic connection community as being built originally as a community hall and being adjacent to the town common. The name Common School relates to it being adjacent to Town Common.
 - Could have more developed slide on program for use of building.
- Notes on the decision point around income generating uses on the 2nd Floor –
 - There was some concern on whether office space would succeed – they have been tried in East Fairfield and been unsuccessful and co-working space next door also unsuccessful.
 - Office space at the Common School may be more viable than other office spaces in the community because of its nature being different. While in general there is stronger need/demand for housing, there are drawbacks to managing tenants at this location being so close to the school.
 - It was suggested that a realtor or architect could help test the feasibility of office space with a site visit of potential tenants to test interest.
 - What do we need to make decision on second floor use?
 - Next step for office space:
 - Have direct conversation with NCSS about potential need for office space: Todd Baumann
 - Consider working with realtor to test interest with broader outreach and potentially a site visit and showing of concept plans.
 - Consider resources to complete a cost/benefit analysis relating to the income generating uses.
 - Outline options for making office space or apartments successful – through property management.

- Notes on use of space in general, who is audience
 - School, kids, teachers – audience not going anywhere
 - Meeting space – a lot of space, but this would serve a different need, more capacity
 - Kelly Viens good resource in her capacity as rec director in the City
 - Design spaces with flexibility in use – space would meet needs and code specs for meeting/event/assembly space and also meet needs and code specs of a licensed afterschool or a licensed childcare. The goal would be to have the afterschool program and community multi-purpose use of the space co-exist, but the town could pivot with more emphasis on one or the other.

- Notes on phasing – What are the opportunities to phase the project.
 - How do you still complete a full-scale restoration and phase the project. So that initial phases make progress towards the next phases.
 - It was pointed out that it is important to have a clear plan and vision for the building before a plan for phasing can be realistically developed.
 - The CSWG asserted that it has developed a plan and vision and it has been shared with the community. The CSWG is looking to refine the plan and vision as needed.
 - More work is needed with an architect and cost estimator to parse out realistic and viable construction phases of the restoration project.

- Notes on plan clarity and level of development?
 - The CSWG has developed a plan and vision for the building, and they are currently doing community engagement. This work is funded by a Municipal Planning Grant. The slide from the Open House PowerPoint presents the following community needs:

Common School Working Group assessed community needs suited to the Common School:

1. **After-school program near Fairfield Center School and potential for child care**
 - Ideal space for Black Creek After School Program to use
2. **Multi-purpose community space for classes, meetings, assemblies, etc.**
 - Appropriate for municipal and community use, local organizations and businesses, individuals
 - Larger more open space than currently available in town (~ 90 people)
3. **Recreation programming, team changing and meeting rooms.**
 - Will involve coordination with school athletic programs, after school program and recreation commission
4. **Income-generating uses**
 - Apartments
 - Office space for rent

- The program for the building proposes to be designed and coded to accommodate all the prioritized needs, with flexibility for adaptation as needs or demands change or become more refined. The slide from the Open House PowerPoint proposed the following program in summary:

BUILDING USE OPTIONS

1. The CSWG and GVV came up with 2 options to present to the public.
2. The options are nearly identical at the lower level and first floor in terms of layout and use.
 - Lower level addresses Recreational Use needs.
 - First floor addressed Community use needs and after-school programming needs.
3. The second floor addresses community need and income generating need via two options:
 - Commercial rental space = max 4 offices spaces with shared amenities
 - Residential rental space = (2) 700sf 1-br units.

- It was noted that the attempt to find an income generating use could be making vision less clear. This is unique to finding an income generating use for the 2nd floor, which was identified early by the CSWG as an important priority.
- Other topics that came up at the Open House include energy efficiency, renewable energy and parking.

3. Next Steps

- Additional work with Chi, to finalize plans.
 - Work with Chi to develop scope and estimate for next step needs.
 - Cost/benefit analysis?
 - More work to define how project and estimate could be completed in phases?
- Septic design, have \$3,000 in MPG grant. How much for design, how much to raise? – Put together proposal from Bernard and Gervais for Selectboard.
- Survey is component of MPG. CSWG supports continued effort to advertise survey. Advertise, front/porch, community center (send to Andre), post case with QR code at stores, Library
- Seek a letter of support from Black Creek After School Program. What is the licensed capacity, other needs, etc. Julie will get this done.
- Seek a letter of support from the Recreation Committee? Letter of support. Julie will try to get this done

Other items

- Fundraising – what can be done.
- Cost/benefit analysis could be beneficial to present #s to Selectboard to show value of investment.

4. Next Meeting Date

- Wednesday April 29 at 5:00pm at Town Office.