

REUSE/REDEVELOPMENT OF THE COMMON SCHOOL

Vision and Cost/Benefit Analysis of Potential Opportunities

Prepared by an informal committee of Fairfield residents that met on 12/8/2023, 1/12/2024, 2/2/2024 and 2/16/2024.

Residents that participated in at least one of the 4 meetings: Julie Wolcott, Damian Boomhower, Mary Schreindorfer, Ron Bocash, Sarah Allerton, Sorel Chaput, Torrey Crossman, Jeanne Hopkins, Becky Cassel, Paul Pellitier, Jim Cameron, Bill Roberts, Bridget Howrigan. Support by Greta Brunswick resident and staff of Northwest Regional Planning Commission.

PROPERTY DESCRIPTION, HISTORY AND CURRENT USE: The property is 4.2 acres is owned by the Town of Fairfield, split by Soule Drive, and historically referred to as the Town Common. Today, the property includes the Common School building, a basketball court, soccer field, baseball/softball field, small shed, port-a-let, swing set and small play structure.

The Common School building was originally built as the Town House in 1809. In 1828, the first floor was leased to the school district for use as a school. In 1896, the first floor was divided into two classrooms for continued use as a public school. In 1936 the building was moved from the hill where the Fairfield Elementary School (built in 1964) is located to its current location on a new foundation with a full basement. The foyer on the north side of the building was added at that time. There is no state wastewater and potable water supply permit (on Town water) on file for the Common School. Reportedly, there is a holding or septic tank to receive the effluent with an unknown outfall.

The Common School remained in use as one of three public schools in town until 1988 when they were consolidated into one and it was vacated. From 1988 to 1995 the building was not used. In 1996, the Common School was leased by the school district for music and art classroom space until 2021 when it was no longer needed. Since it was vacated by the school district, it is used for recreation committee storage and reserved for a few community fitness classes and meetings, but overall, highly underused. The cost of heating is expensive (~11,000 per year). An energy audit was completed in 2023 and identifies several improvements that would improve energy efficiency. Other studies/evaluations of the building include a 1999 Structural Assessment by Engineering Ventures and a 2020 architectural schematic for an addition of the south side of the building to provide new bathrooms and an ADA lift to all floors. The town has made a variety of piecemeal improvements to the building since the 1999 structural assessment.

The grounds of the property are used primarily by the school district for athletic programming, physical education, recess and for school bus drop off and pick up. It is unknown whether any formal arrangement exists between the town and school for use of this property.

PRINCIPLES FOR REUSE/REDEVELOPMENT OF COMMON SCHOOL: The committee identified the following overarching principles to guide the reuse/redevelopment of the Common School property.

- The vision and cost/benefit analysis should drive decisions around restoration versus new construction.



- Reuse/redevelopment should retain and/or respect the historic character of the 1809 community landmark with the understanding that the property is a prominent component to the character and sense of place in Fairfield Center village.
- The property should remain in town ownership as a community public space for all ages and recognize the importance of its place on the school campus.
- Adequate management of the space may require additional town staff capacity; there may be opportunities to share resources with other communities.
- The impact on the taxpayers both for the cost of the project and for maintaining what is built must be factored into the decision.
- Revenue generating uses should be prioritized.
- There is a need to address the wastewater system for continued use.

VISION FOR REUSE/REDEVELOPMENT OF COMMON SCHOOL: Reuse or redevelopment of the building and grounds, whether the building is restored or newly constructed, should support one or more of the following community-based uses:

- 1) Fairfield Community Recreation Programming Support. The property should support community and school recreation programming with changing rooms, bathrooms and general storage. An indoor basketball court is desired, which is more suitable for new construction and less compatible with a historic restoration project. Coordination with school athletic programming staff would then be necessary for management and use of the space.
- 2) Multi-Purpose Flexible Space for Community Programming. The property should provide space for adult and senior classes and activities and extracurricular activities and clubs for school age children. Additionally, there should be space for historical displays. The space could be rented or reserved by community members for special functions or events.
- 3) Afterschool and/or Child Care Program Space. Due to its location adjacent to the school, the town could fulfill a local need for convenient after school and child care programming by renting space to private or non-profit businesses for this purpose.

FUTURE USE OF COMMON SCHOOL COST BENEFIT ANALYSIS				
	PROPOSED ACTION / ALTERNATIVE	BENEFITS / ADVANTAGES To fulfill vision	COSTS / DISADVANTAGES / CHALLENGES	RANKING
1	Basic Restoration: Vermiculite abatement, septic and energy efficiency addressed. New bathrooms first floor, basic exterior porch lift to 1 st floor.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Retains town ownership and use ● Retains historic landmark ● Upgraded bathrooms ● ADA access to first floor ● Lower cost of heating with efficiency upgrades ● Septic addressed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Renovated space \$229,000 ● Second floor floor remains uneven and bowed ● No ADA access to second floor 	

2	<p>Restoration+: Includes Basic Restoration and 1st floor ceiling work to improve 2nd floor, 2 meeting/team rooms on 1st floor with new bathrooms and changing rooms, refinishing 1st and 2nd floor floors. Community flex space on the second floor.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All benefits of Basic Restoration • Supports the vision for fieldhouse • Improves function and use of second floor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$276,600, plus any additional cost of renovation or fit up for field house • Investment in second floor, but no ADA access to 2nd floor 	
3	<p>Restoration++: Includes Restoration+ and an addition off the southside with an at-grade accessible entrance. Bathroom and an interior lift located in addition (see Gallup plans). Changing rooms, storage and team meeting space built into either first floor, basement or a combination. Community flex space on the second floor.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All benefits of Basic Restoration and Restoration+ • Provides full ADA access to the building. • Utilizes the basement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$555,000 (2020 estimate), plus any additional cost of renovation or fit up for field house • Will need capacity for managing use of facility • Coordination with school on use of fieldhouse portion 	<p>Prioritized as First Choice</p>
4	<p>Restoration+ or Restoration++, but with Addition or New Construction for Rec Programming: Includes restoration+ or ++ and either an addition or separate new construction to fulfill vision for community recreation. At minimum includes bathrooms and changing rooms accessible to teams, storage and team meeting space. May include an indoor basketball court.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All benefits of Basic Restoration and Restoration+ • May provide full ADA access to building and utilize basement (with rest++ option) • More community space available in common school with rec programming in addition or new building • Incorporate historic reference and character into addition/new construction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Costs unknown, but 1M+ • May need to clarify agreement with MRUSD on use of Town Common spaces • Will need capacity for managing use of facility • Coordination with school on use of fieldhouse portion 	
5	<p>Demolition of Common School and New Construction of a building that would serve community vision.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New energy efficient and ADA accessible building • Build to suit vision for community and recreation space • Retains town ownership and use • Potential to incorporate historic reference and character into new construction, or otherwise model after characteristic buildings, such as a barn. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$75,000 demolition cost • ~1-2M rough cost for new construction (depends on size and other unknown factors) • Loss of historic landmark in center of village • Potential for adverse impact on historic character 	

6	<p>Sell Common School for Housing or Educational Use: Building and lot (footprint and parking spaces) sold to a private entity with use stipulations and requirements to reuse and retain historic building and character. Options include senior housing (i.e. 4 1-bedroom units) or child care and afterschool programs, private schools. Build single story structure to satisfy the vision on remaining acreage. Space will be limited for this, more analysis needed.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retains historic landmark • Provides living units for senior single residents or educational use • Responsibility for building shifts to new owner • Lot and structure value \$200,000 toward vision 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Town loses control of space to private ownership and use • Likely conflicts with MRUSD bus pick up and use of grounds for school athletics, etc. • Need to clarify agreement with MRUSD on use of Town Common spaces • Space for new construction to satisfy community vision is limited • Cost of new construction unknown, estimate ~1-2M 	
7	<p>Demolition of Common School: No new construction, space remains open.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Town retains control of property • Town no longer needs to maintain building or pay for heating • Additional green/open space in town common area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$75,000 demolition cost • Loss of historic landmark in center of village • Loss of community multi-use flexible space • Does not fulfill vision 	