



UConn WEST HARTFORD CAMPUS

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT REPORT AND VISION STATEMENT

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Prepared for the West Hartford Town Council by:

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PROJECT BACKGROUND	3
PROJECT PURPOSE	3
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROCESS	4
ONLINE COMMUNITY SURVEY	5
COMMUNITY FORUMS	7
ADDITIONAL ENGAGEMENT EFFORTS	9
VISION STATEMENT OVERVIEW	11
VISION STATEMENT	11
GUIDING PRINCIPLES	12
APPENDIX A: ONLINE COMMUNITY SURVEY RESULTS	
APPENDIX B: COMMUNITY FORUM RESULTS	
APPENDIX C: COMMUNITY FORUM PRESENTATION	
APPENDIX D: PRESENTATION BREAK-OUT BOARDS	
APPENDIX E: COMMUNITY COMMENTS RECEIVED	

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PROJECT BACKGROUND

The University of Connecticut (UConn) West Hartford campus is a 58-acre property bounded by Trout Brook Drive, Asylum Avenue, and Lawler Road. In August of 2015, UConn announced plans to vacate its West Hartford campus and relocate its operations to a new campus in Downtown Hartford. The relocation was completed in August 2017.

In the summer of 2016, UConn and the Town of West Hartford entered into a purchase agreement for the campus subject to a due diligence period. This due diligence period was extended several times ending in December 2017. During the due diligence period, the town conducted survey work, delineated wetlands, assessed environmental conditions, and conducted development analysis based on current zoning. Due to concerns over environmental contamination and liability associated with an undefined environmental cleanup, the Town Council voted to terminate the purchase agreement with UConn in December 2017. UConn has subsequently begun marketing the property to prospective buyers and is “willing to consider a sale to any buyer for any use.”

PROJECT PURPOSE

While the Town is not moving forward with purchasing the UConn campus, it nonetheless has a role to play in shaping the future of the property. The Town Council, as the Town’s chief land use authority, is responsible for approving any changes to the zoning regulations that may be required for development to take place. The Town Council has affirmed its commitment to conducting a robust public outreach process to understand community sentiment regarding the future








use of the campus. The results of the community engagement process have informed the town as they develop a vision statement for the property. The vision statement will assist UConn in marketing the property, will inform prospective developers, and will guide the Town Council in its future land use decisions.



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

The Town of West Hartford Community Development Department, with assistance from Milone & MacBroom, Inc. (MMI), conducted the community engagement process between January and March of 2018. The community engagement process blended digital and in-person techniques and included a project website, an online survey, three visioning forums, a visioning session with the Bishops Corner Neighborhood Association, and solicitation of community comments. The results of the community engagement process are summarized on the subsequent pages.

Project Timeline

TASK	JANUARY	FEBRUARY	MARCH	APRIL
Project Kickoff				
Online Community Survey				
Develop Impact Assessments				
Community Forums		 		
Draft Vision Statement and Report				
Final Vision Statement and Report				

ONLINE COMMUNITY SURVEY

An online survey was implemented and launched in January of 2018. The survey asked respondents a series of questions on how they use the campus today, how they feel about different types of development on the campus, and their top concerns regarding the future development on the campus. The survey ran for approximately four weeks in January and February of 2018. Residents were notified of the survey through the town website, email blasts, local media outlets, and direct mailings to those who live within $\frac{1}{4}$ mile of campus. Over 2,700 people participated in the survey. The key takeaways from the survey are summarized below (original question underlined):

About the Respondents

- About 20% of respondents were under age 35, about 40% of respondents were between age 35 and 49, and about 40% were over age 50.
- Over 90% of respondents live in West Hartford. About 20% of respondents live within a $\frac{1}{2}$ mile of the campus.

Are there any types of land uses that West Hartford is lacking?

Respondents were asked whether they thought West Hartford had too little, too much, or the right amount of different land uses.

- In general, respondents felt that West Hartford had “about the right amount” of residential, commercial, and active recreation uses.
- A majority of respondents thought that West Hartford does not have enough passive recreation facilities

(walking paths, bike trails) or cultural amenities such as art galleries, theaters, and museums.

What do you think of the campus today?

- A majority of respondents did not visit the campus over the last year – Only 48% of respondents visited the campus.
- Respondents who live near the UConn campus visit it regularly - about 75% of respondents who live within $\frac{1}{2}$ mile of the campus visited the campus over the last year.
- The campus is most commonly used for recreational activities.
- Existing trees and green spaces are the most well-liked characteristics of the campus as it exists today



*Existing green spaces and trees, such as the large white oak on the east campus, were well-liked by survey respondents.
Photo courtesy of CT DEEP*

Please indicate your level of support or lack thereof for different uses on the UConn West Hartford campus

- Over 85% of respondents support recreational uses on the UConn campus.
- Cultural institutions (78%) and educational institutions (61%) also had strong levels of support
- Professional office (16%), government/municipal (16%), multi-family residential (18%), and medical office (18%) had the lowest levels of support.
- Popular write-in responses included a dog park (183) and Children's Museum (66)

What are your top three concerns associated with any future development on the UConn campus?

- Loss of open space was listed as a top concern for about 60% of respondents.
- Traffic (55%), intensity of development (52%), and fiscal impacts to town services (45%) also frequently listed as top concerns

For the full results Online Community Survey results, please see Appendix A.

Community Survey: Write-In Excerpts

Community Impacts and Concerns

"Please be sure future development is attractive and maintains a lot of green space with a significant setbacks from the road and no visible parking lots."

Potential Future Uses:

"I would like to see a combination of uses with open space, development clustered on parts of the property, with special care taken to protect wetlands."

"Strongly support development that adds to the tax rolls without additional burden on town expenses"

"I strongly support this site for the Children's Museum relocation"

"Strongly support a park or green space. Perhaps a building could be converted to a cultural use and another converted to recreation..."

"West Hartford needs a dog park and this site is perfect for it..."

COMMUNITY FORUMS

Community Forums were held at the West Hartford Town Hall auditorium on February 28, 2018. Due to the large number residents interested in attending, three identical sessions were held at 4 p.m., 6 p.m., and 8 p.m. A total of 250 persons participated in the three events. The event was broadcasted on West Hartford Community Television. Each workshop began with a 45-minute presentation which included discussion of the project background and purpose, a review of the campus as it exists today, and an overview of hypothetical future uses of the campus. Following the presentation, attendees participated in an interactive survey and then broke out into smaller groups to discuss hypothetical future uses of the campus. The results of the community forums are summarized on the following pages.

For the full community forum materials and results, please see Appendices B, C, and D.



Interactive Survey

An interactive survey was implemented at the community forums to gauge community sentiment regarding the future vision for the UConn West Hartford Campus. The survey utilized audience response software that was linked to the presentation, allowing workshop attendees to vote in real time. The key takeaways from the interactive survey are:

- General agreement that the campus presents an opportunity for some grand list growth. About 60% of respondents agreed with this statement and another 25% were neutral
- General agreement that the east-side and west-side parcels should be treated separately. About 60% of respondents agreed with this statement and another 25% were neutral
- Strong agreement that the ballfields, basketball court, and playground on the corner of Trout Brook Drive and Asylum Avenue should be retained for community use.
- Strong agreement that existing green spaces should be retained to the greatest extent possible, especially in areas bordering single-family residences. Some of these spaces should be publicly accessible for community use
- Preference for demolition over reuse of existing buildings

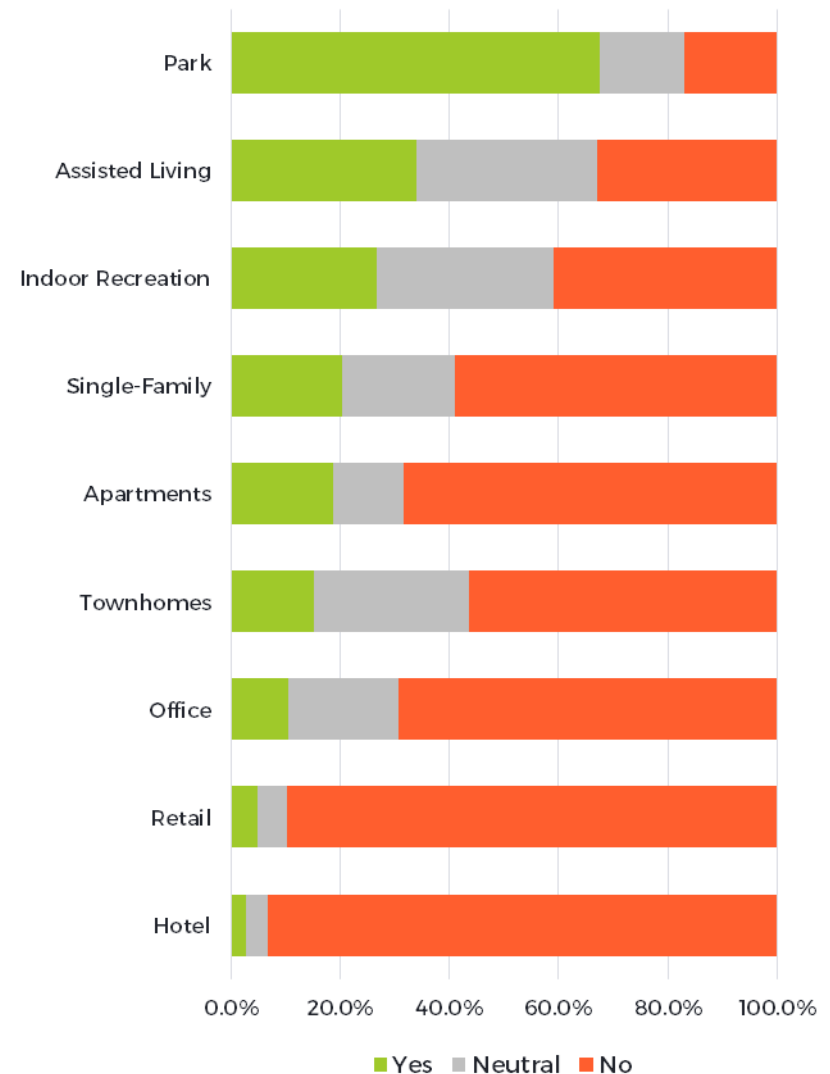
Impact Assessments

The project team developed a series of hypothetical development concepts for the east side and west side of the campus. This included three concepts that were developed during the due-diligence period that align with current zoning: single-family residential, townhomes, and a town park. Additional concepts were created for uses that would require a zone change, including a hotel, retail, office, indoor recreation, apartments, and an assisted living facility. Separate concepts were created for the east and west side with the understanding that the campus could be developed with multiple uses. Institutional uses were not included in the impact assessments because their size, layout, and needs are unique to each institution and therefore their impacts are difficult to quantify. Nonetheless, the Online Community Survey revealed strong community support for cultural institutions or educational institutions on the campus.



A breakout session at the February 28th community forum

Would the Following Uses be a Good Fit for the East Side of the UConn Campus?



The purpose of the concepts was to provide the public with additional information on impacts associated with those uses, including estimates of traffic impacts, parking requirements, intensity of development, tax generation, municipal fiscal impacts, and whether or not that use was permitted under current zoning. The concepts and impact assessments were presented at the community forum, and discussed in breakout sessions. Attendees were asked to vote on whether or not a particular use was a good fit for the UConn West Hartford campus.

- The Town Park concept was the most well-liked use on both the east- and west-sides of the campus
- Attendees were split on assisted living and indoor commercial recreation – neither well liked, nor disliked
- Commercial uses such as professional or medical offices, retail, and hotels were not supported by attendees

A selection of write-in comments from the community forum breakout sessions are summarized to the right. Common issues that were cited by attendees included concern over property values in the surrounding neighborhood, traffic impacts, impacts to flooding, and concerns over property taxes.

Community Forum: Write-In Excerpts

"Combine something revenue generating, i.e., assisted living with dog park or public space."

"Please ensure that any plans will help remediate current flooding issues in neighborhood."

"Would like to see large indoor athletic facility. Too many town sports go to other towns to practice/compete."

"Concerned about traffic impacts on Lawler and Wilshire."



Participants commenting on the hypothetical development concepts and impact assessments at the community forum.

ADDITIONAL ENGAGEMENT EFFORTS

Bishop's Corner Neighborhood Association Visioning Session

A second community visioning event was held at the West Hartford Senior Center on March 9th, 2018 and was hosted by the Bishops Corner Neighborhood Association. A total of 15 people attended. This event was a slightly different format than the community forums and served as a visioning informational feedback session. A presentation was given on the Town's role in the property to date, a review of the existing conditions, and discussion of redevelopment impact scenarios. A survey was conducted to gauge sentiment regarding the future vision for the campus. The results of this survey largely mirrored those of the earlier community forums in that there was:

- General agreement that the campus presents an opportunity for some grand list growth.
- General agreement that the east-side and west-side parcels should be treated separately.
- Strong agreement that the ballfields, basketball court, and playground on the corner of Trout Brook Drive and Asylum Avenue should be retained for community use.
- Strong agreement that existing green spaces should be retained to the greatest extent possible, especially in areas bordering single-family residences and that some of these spaces should be publicly accessible for community use
- Strong preference for demolition over reuse of existing buildings

Community Comments

Additional community sentiment regarding the future vision for the campus was received in the form of written comments. From the end of January through the end of March, 49 individual written comments were received. The comments ranged from general requests for future grand list growth, to requests for specific sports facilities, a new municipal office complex, and the relocation of the Children's Museum. It should be noted that the Children's Museum submitted a previously conducted "Petition of Support" with signatures and comments from several hundred members of the public expressing support for the inclusion of the Children's Museum on any future plan for the campus. The full range of comments received is included in Appendix E.

VISION STATEMENT OVERVIEW

As result of the community engagement process, a broad-based vision statement and series of specific guiding principles was crafted to address many of the ideas, concerns and interests the community shared for the future of the UConn West Hartford Campus.

While this statement and set of principles cannot encompass all of the specific concerns regarding the campus, it echoes the most central themes expressed by the community. Importantly, it will serve to inform any prospective purchaser and be a useful tool for the review of future land use applications.

VISION STATEMENT

The future development or redevelopment of the UConn West Hartford campus should strike a balance between grand list growth, the protection of natural resources, and the preservation of areas for community use. The campus should maintain its open look and feel and unique blend of green spaces, forested areas, wetlands, and developed areas. Future development should be high quality, attractive, and at a scale and intensity that is contextually sensitive with the surrounding neighborhood. Through creative and thoughtful site design, future development should be set back from surrounding residential areas and should preserve the open look and feel of the campus while protecting environmentally sensitive areas. The playground, athletic facilities and supportive parking on the southeastern portion of the site are integral to the town and should be preserved for community use. Innovative ways such the creation of public-private partnerships to maximize areas for community use on the campus, such as an extension of the Trout Brook Trail, are highly encouraged.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- The UConn West Hartford campus presents an opportunity for some grand list growth in a contextually sensitive manner
- Explore development or redevelopment opportunities that provides for a mix of uses incorporating creative and high quality design that will enhance the Town's fiscal well-being
- Intensity and changes of use must be carefully analyzed and reviewed for compatibility with the neighborhood. Specific consideration should be given to ensure that the open look and feel of the campus is maintained; that ample buffers, trees and green areas are protected; and that public access to and use of meaningful areas of functional open space is preserved
- Embrace opportunities for the growth and retention of uses strongly supported by the community such as cultural, educational, and recreational, on all or portions of the campus
- Ensure future development or redevelopment protects and enhances environmentally sensitive areas, features, wetlands and floodplain resources
- Robust community engagement should continue as part of any effort pertaining to the reuse of the campus, especially those leading to land use decisions