

Queens Civic Congress
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The Phased Transition of Creedmoor Campus to Alternative Long Range Use

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History

New York State [NYS] is projected to return almost 300 acres of the Creedmoor Campus to market use over the next 10 years. The State's short-term plans call for selling off separate eight and 26 acre parcels. Dispositions of parts of Creedmoor - an integral part of the Queens Village-Bellerose landscape for 125 years - pose significant challenges for the structural, cultural and economic stability of the surrounding communities.

The stated purpose of the NYS effort to change the status quo is to eliminate outstanding bond indebtedness for underused facilities. NYS originally designed Creedmoor to serve a population over 7000. Projections for FY2003 have reduced that population to under 600.

NYS recommends the current sale of (Creedmoor) property at market value to reduce current bond debt. The community could accept that premise, provided the disposition maintains the community services now available and that the impact of the transition imposes no negative impacts on the surrounding community or additional infrastructure costs.

The Queens Civic Congress [QCC] recommends that NYS provide for community participation in both planning and implementation to ensure appropriate impacts. Over the last 20 years, the NYS Office of Mental Health [OMH] randomly divested portions of the Creedmoor property. Those dispositions took place without a comprehensive vision of the result and consequences. A more intensive withdrawal calls for a master plan. Within the context of progressive reuses, a master plan maintains the traditional role of Creedmoor as a campus providing recreational, cultural, educational, medical, mental health, open-space, residential and employment services.

Achievement of Mutual Objectives

The QCC believes the process of transition fundamental to successful long-term reuse. Therefore, the QCC has drafted this initiative to serve as a Master Plan. The Master Plan will guide the process of NYS-OMH's withdrawal from facilities at Creedmoor and determine the long-term reuse of surplus buildings and parcels. The Master Plan recognizes Creedmoor's existing traditional mixed and vital roles in the community, including: mental health services, alcohol and drug rehabilitation, education services for children with special needs, sports and recreational facilities, intermediate community residences, and community service non-profit organizations. The Master Plan process synchronizes this withdrawal and reuse to the mutual benefit of NYS-OMH and the surrounding community.

The adoption of a coordinated Master Plan enables:

- the State to retire its debt – sooner and more predictably;
- the State to generate greater revenue than under a non-coordinated plan;
- the community to assist and cooperate in the process in order to achieve significant input in the transition process;
- the community to be enhanced and reinforced with compatible uses; and
- the new Creedmoor Campus to be a community resource.

Planning Objectives

Planning by sections enables rational reuses of existing spaces and maximizes opportunities to maintain the existing green space and building footprints and support development compatible with community needs. This planning process also provides pre-determined structural guidelines for strategic, phased NYS-OMH withdrawal, which in turn enables a more marketable divestment plan, and eliminates the randomness which causes community anxiety. Planning also provides for community needs, including public schools, recreation, local employment opportunities, various housing modes to enable seniors to remain in the community

The QCC proposes the division of the Creedmoor campus into eight land use sections:

- A.** Public School Educational Campus
- B.** Winchester Green
- C.** Creedmoor Oaks
- D.** Hillside Administrative Park
- E.** Education Opportunity Campus
- F.** Fineson Campus
- G.** Ballfield (St. Francis Prep)
- H.** Union Turnpike

As previously stated in the July, 1997 QCC Civic Master Plan for Creedmoor, all property currently and previously part of Creedmoor dating to its establishment as an entity in 1872, acquisition by New York State in 1912, and subsequent expansion shall be subject to a *Civic Master Plan* which shall have the following criteria and goals for any alternate re-uses:

- Preserve the integrity and indivisibility of the 125 year-old Campus
- Preserve the existing open space, greenery, and recreational amenities
- Provide controlled public access to the greenbelt and ballfields via NYC DPR
- Conserve the campus atmosphere by using existing buildings before new construction
- Ensure compatibility among existing and future uses
- Encourage responsible community-based non-profit use of existing space where appropriate and economically feasible
- Limit any new construction to structures conforming in scale, architecture, and density to the existing built environment
- Preserve Creedmoor's rich historic heritage through zoning designation as Special District and landmarking as an Historic District
- Provide tax revenue to the City through selective re-use options
- Prevent destabilization of the surrounding middle-class community
- Preserve local air quality and reduce the waste of natural resources
- Work within the existing utility infrastructure of the Campus

Land Use Sections

A. **Public School Educational Campus**

(26 acres - Cross Island Parkway/Grand Central Parkway/Commonwealth Boulevard)

High School/ middle school/ elementary school/ library/ community theater/ recreational building/ natural open space-kettle ponds/ playing fields/ Queens Greenway connector between Alley Pond Park and the Queens county Farm Museum. Remove Buildings 38 and 39. The community's existing schools do not provide sufficient classroom space as existing homes, coops, condos and rentals recycle from residents without school age children to families with children. The schools would require ballfields which would also serve community needs due to a profound lack of ballfields for youth activities. Some ballfields to the immediate west also serve the western part of the borough. The kettle ponds, a natural resource, located adjacent to the Alley Pond Greenway, currently in development, should be preserved. The Greenway corridor through the educational campus will reconnect several major recreational/cultural amenities for expanded public access, including Building 51. The community already enjoys access - which should be maintained - to Building 51 for recreational and cultural purposes. The school campus should be designed by a single prominent architectural firm to enhance the aesthetic sensibilities.

B. **Winchester Green**

(12 acres frontage - Hillside Avenue/Winchester Boulevard)

Low density, R3-2 housing set in the center of the site to preserve surrounding green space, senior assisted housing, medical, best public transit access, accessible to Hillside Avenue stores. The Victorian house must be preserved and appropriately reused, possibly in a relocated directional orientation.

Maintain existing dense (100 or more 100-year-old trees) green perimeter (200 feet) buffer zone. New construction must maintain buffer and accommodate trees. Mirror-imaging of Buildings 20 and 21 within above limits.

The configuration of this property nearest to transportation points, the residential communities across Winchester Boulevard and Hillside Avenue, local stores and existing schools make this site most suitable for market rate housing aimed either at families and/or seniors.

C. **Creedmoor Oaks [with Community Center/Campus Promenade Mall]**

This site contains community use access building, meeting halls, public space, fountain, and provide interior public access to campus and Ball Fields, Creedmoor Living Museum. Open to the public. Maintain the campus approach and building footprint on this site. Reuse on this site appears ideal for condo style community or market rate housing for seniors, mixed with senior assisted living and nursing facilities. The existing campus layout and building types also support a professional offices site.

D. Hillside Administrative Park

Current location of Rose House, this section enjoys direct access to Hillside Avenue, public transit, adjacency to PS 18, YMCA and Little League fields. The 200 foot green buffer zone and distinctive architecture of this Building emphasizes its importance as one of the most visible sections of the campus and must be maintained intact. Its unique location lends itself to an administrative, educational office, or medical office function, if its current usage changes. Demolition of Building 25, derelict since 1960 and vacant; will provide needed on-site, off- street parking for the occupants of this section, with direct access via Hillside Avenue. Open Hillside Avenue Main Gate to N/S destination traffic, including divided street with center mall, extending to Union Turnpike eastbound. Provide necessary parking and additional construction for Sections D, C-2&3. If RCCA (Rose House) remains: add Board of Education offices, Medical/Professional Office Space, other administrative uses; direct access to Hillside Corridor. If RCCA moves to Section C1: then, senior assisted living; continuum of care residential

E. Education Opportunity Campus

Expanded Queens Lifeline Center (special needs education)/ post-Lifeline educational opportunity campus/Sylvan Learning center, etc. Provide access via Union Turnpike to allow immediately-needed on-site visitor and employee parking, which currently exists now, but is underutilized. [note: This is a specific case study of how the current lack of a master plan has impacted the adjacent community. While an adjacent on-site parking area lies vacant, the surrounding residential neighborhood is affected daily by dozens of cars on street, creating traffic obstructions and jeopardizing the safety of residents, school children, pedestrians and other transient traffic.] Lifeline serves grades pre-K to 8. Additional space would allow for expansion of its unique, therapeutic special needs education program not found in public school settings or development of appropriate high school level setting for its graduates.

F. Fineson Campus - Bernard Fineson Center - long term use.

If the Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (OMRDD) vacates this site, QCC recommends adding the southern portion of the Sector to Section D, Hillside Administrative Park, and the Northern portion to Section C: Creedmoor Oaks residential/ senior assisted residential/ medical usage. The eastern border should conform to existing R-2 along 240th Street. Possible direct access to Section G: St Francis Prep Ballfield. [If vacated, southern portion (3rd Street) added to D. Hillside Administrative District/ YMCA. North portion added to Section C: residential/senior assisted residential/medical. Eastern border on 240th Street to conform to existing R2. Possible access to Section G.]

G. Ballfield (St. Francis Prep)

Direct access via Hillside Avenue or Winchester Boulevard must be provided prior to completion of ball field reconstruction. Provide for parking on west side of field.

H. Union Turnpike

After adding ingress/egress, consolidation of utilities, mixed-use tenant-specific light industrial office applications (Bell Atlantic repair fleet) might be appropriate. Provide appropriate green buffer zone for Bellerose-Hillside community to east. This would provide employment opportunities for skilled blue collar workers once found in significant numbers on the campus. This section's current configuration, including building types, supports this type of reuse.

Proposal to Hire a Planning Consultant

The QCC proposes that a land-use planning consultant be hired to expedite a realistic determination of reuse options, as part of the transition process.

The consultant shall assist the CWG and NYS to accomplish the following goals:

1. preserving the style, structure, footprint and density of the existing campus,
2. rehabilitating buildings where feasible, and reconstruction in the same style where not feasible.
3. promoting re-uses which continue the contribution of the campus to the surrounding community.
4. creating functional, compatible entities within the future campus, as either modular or independent sections of related activity.
5. identifying campus sub-sections readily adaptable to phased rehabilitation or reconstruction.
6. predicting patterns of need, including establishing an intra-campus traffic flow pattern using the existing interior street grid, accessibility, parking, providing non-critical access points at Hillside Avenue, Winchester Boulevard and Union Turnpike as needed, infrastructure and proposed uses.