



Upper Dublin Township  
Office of the  
Fire Services Administrator



801 Loch Alsh Avenue Fort Washington, PA. 19034 215.643.1600 ext. 3272

March 11, 2008

FACILITIES STUDY COMMITTEE

RECOMMENDATION OF SITE FOR NEW MAIN FIREHOUSE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND REPORT

On February 20, 2008, the Facilities Study Committee voted to recommend the former Bonsell Nursery property, 1245 Fort Washington Avenue, Fort Washington, as its first choice for the new main firehouse.

After a thorough nineteen month investigation, the committee members voted their preference for the following three (3) remaining site choices as follows:

**First Choice:** The former Bonsell Nursery property located at 1245 Fort Washington Avenue, which is site number four in the Facilities Study Report.

**Second Choice:** The Lenahan property located at 1256 Fort Washington Avenue.

**Third Choice:** The Field of Dreams located at the rear of the municipal complex at 801 Loch Alsh Avenue, which is site number one in the Facilities Study Report.

Note: The numeric number assigned to potential sites was assigned at the beginning of this process and is not related to a specific preference.

By way of background, in August, 2006, the Upper Dublin Township Board of Commissioners directed that a Facilities Study Committee (Hereafter referred to as the Committee) be created to address the future housing and firematic needs of the main firehouse for the Fort Washington Fire Company, No. 1 (Hereafter referred to as the FWFC) in the upper-end of the township. The award-winning FWFC has provided volunteer fire and rescue service to Upper Dublin Township for one hundred years.

Accordingly, an effort was initiated to select committee members with specific skill sets that would assist the process of guiding this project.

The Facilities Study Committee comprised the following people and respective positions:

Fort Washington Fire Company, No. 1: (Approved by the President)

Timothy F. Evard, President (2006 and 2007)

Brian A. Newhall, Chief (2008 - Assistant Chief)

Michael P. Duffy, Deputy Chief

Robert L. Toner, Jr., Deputy Chief (2007 - Deputy Chief, 2008 - Chief)

Robert G. Lester, Chief Engineer

Dr. Jeffrey M. Fogel, MD, President (2008 - replaced Mr. Evard)

Upper Dublin Township: (Approved by the Township Manager)

C. Craig Samtmann, Fire Services Administrator

Timothy P. Schuck, Fire Marshal

Daniel W. Supplee, Director of Public Works

Township Resident Advisory Representatives: (Approved by the Board of Commissioners)

John T. Losier, 1825 Thornbury Drive, Maple Glen

Nicholas D. Melair, Jr., 1681 Whitehouse Road, Maple Glen

Deborah S. Kuhn, 1256 Hazelwood Drive, Fort Washington

Terry R. Yemm, 1097 Fort Washington Avenue, Fort Washington

Note: As a result of the Facilities Study Report suggesting that a new firehouse be built in the general area of Fort Washington Avenue and Susquehanna Road, on January 8, 2008, the Board of Commissioners appointed Ms. Kuhn and Mr. Yemm to the committee, so they could represent their neighbors in that general area. On March 5, 2008, Ms. Kuhn resigned from this committee.

At the direction of the Township, the committee identified and selected a consulting firm with subject matter expertise that would provide a professional and unbiased evaluation of the future housing and firematic needs of the FWFC. After screening twelve firms and interviewing six firms, three firms provided presentations to the committee. To avoid a conflict of interest and ensure an honest evaluation, each candidate firm was informed that being retained for this evaluation would not automatically guarantee its selection for the renovation or new construction phase.

The committee unanimously voted to select the Mitchell Associates Architects firm, Voorheesville, New York to conduct the Facilities Study. The Mitchell Associates Architects firm designed the Horsham Fire Company main firehouse located at 315 Meetinghouse Road in Horsham Township.

The following three (3) options were evaluated during the study:

1. Renovate the current main firehouse at 220 Summit Avenue in Fort Washington.
2. Renovate the current main firehouse at 220 Summit Avenue in Fort Washington and build a new sub-station in the Maple Glen area.
3. Eliminate options one and two in favor of building a new main firehouse in the center of the upper-end of the township.

The Facilities Study Report was presented to the Board of Commissioners on August 28, 2007, recommending option number three. Many potential sites were evaluated and eliminated as inadequate before the Facilities Study Report presentation.

Thereafter, the committee began to identify potential properties that could support the new firehouse in a general area referred to as the "Bulls-eye." The Bulls-eye is a general area located around Fort Washington Avenue and Susquehanna Road. Most of the evaluation criteria included acreage, ownership, accessibility, cost and response time for both firefighters responding to the firehouse and fire apparatus responding to the incident scene. Since the township is nearly built-out, it is impossible to locate a perfect site.

The Facilities Study Report identified seven potential sites for the new main firehouse. Five of those sites were evaluated and eliminated. The remaining two sites are included in the three sites outlined in this recommendation.

The findings and issues regarding the former Bonsell Nursery property, the Lenahan property and the Field of Dreams are as follows:

Note: The below referenced Twiford property and Lenahan property were developed for potential purchase by the Township approaching each respective owner.

The former Bonsell Nursery Property, 1245 Fort Washington Avenue, Fort Washington:

1. This property is owned by the Township.
2. The new firehouse can be built without delay.
3. Fire apparatus entering Fort Washington Avenue is not considered a problem. Summit Avenue is narrower than Fort Washington Avenue. There is sufficient space to widen Fort Washington Avenue in the future, if needed.
4. The Township purchase of the Twiford double-lot property at 1255 Fort Washington Avenue, adjacent to the Bonsell property, will allow a one-story firehouse to be built. The Twiford family is actively engaged in the preparation for an offer of sale.
5. The firehouse can be designed to face away from the neighborhood behind it.

6. There is sufficient frontage to provide an apparatus apron that can lead to a driveway which extends along Fort Washington Avenue toward the Twiford home that will include landscape buffering and the elimination of a straight entrance/exit onto Fort Washington Avenue.

7. There is sufficient land to provide for privacy landscaping around the property.

8. A fenced and protected playground for children and a recreation field for children and adults could be built in the rear of the property, away from the fire apparatus. That will help support the concept of a community firehouse.

9. A rain water detention system can be installed to control the water on the Bonsell property and eliminate the current water issues with neighboring properties, at no cost to the neighboring properties.

10. The school zone concerns. An independent engineering firm conducted a traffic survey, which concluded that there are no safety issues involved. This report is posted on the Township website.

11. The committee found that the distance of the school zone and the timing of the warning lights are longer than standard practice in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

12. The firefighter vehicles responding to the firehouse and the apparatus responding to a call are being operated by drivers who have been specially trained, as opposed to inexperienced high school drivers or impatient adult drivers.

13. This is a large property, which would permit a campus setting including the parking lot. Part of the parking lot could be a pervious surface.

14. Large scale training drills will not be conducted at this site. This type of training will continue to be conducted at the FWFC Fire Training Grounds at 1502 Twining Road behind the Twining Valley Golf Course.

15. A firehouse siren alert will not be installed at this site. The fire siren at the rear of the municipal complex will remain.

The Lenahan Property, 1256 Fort Washington Avenue, Fort Washington:

1. The Lenahan family has expressed an interest to the Township in selling their property to the Township because they wish to down-size their residence.

2. In order for the Lenahan property to support a firehouse, land from The Church of the Open Door, 1260 Fort Washington Avenue, must be included. The church administrator is willing to consider a sale of its grass lot between the driveway/parking lot and the Lenahan property. The board of directors will decide if a sale is appropriate considering

the potential expansion of the associated school. The administrator stated that the church wants to be a "good neighbor and do what is right for the community."

3. In order for the Lenahan property to support a firehouse, land from the Gordon property, 1252 Fort Washington Avenue, must be included. The Gordon family initially expressed no interest in selling any or all of their property. The Gordon family requested that their home be connected to the new public sewer system that would be installed along Fort Washington Avenue to support the firehouse. That connection would be provided by the Township at no cost. A water detention easement would be needed along the Lenahan property border. The Gordon family wants to maintain ownership of the land where the easement would be located, so they could sell it when they decide to sell the remainder of their property. That position would cause difficulty for the Township. The sale of part of the Gordon family's property would diminish its future development value. The Gordon family has declined developer purchase offers of three million dollars (\$3,000,000), so even a partial property purchase would be expensive. The potential sale may be involved/delayed with the resolution of the family owned Tank Car of America Corporation, 1725 Walnut Avenue, Oreland. A definitive sale is not evident, as opposed to the potential sale of the Twiford and Lenahan properties.

4. Parking would be an issue at this site due to the narrowness of the property, even if the Upper Dublin School District allowed us to relocate its tennis courts at the rear of the property.

5. Since this site is 1.8 acres, it will only support a firehouse if we can use the Church of the Open Door property and the Gordon property.

6. Initially, this site was only intended as an alternate site for the Field of Dreams in the event the Field of Dreams was selected as the site for the new firehouse.

7. School district officials stated "they were very specific about not being interested in doing anything that would delay their current plans. Examining the Lenahan property for school district use would cause such a delay," referring to the construction of a new high school.

The Upper Dublin School District Field of Dreams, Rear of the Municipal Complex, 801 Loch Alsh Avenue, Fort Washington:

1. This property is owned by the Upper Dublin School District. School district approval must be granted for use of this land.

2. The Upper Dublin School District still has a new bus maintenance garage included on its plans for a new high school.

3. The school district will not allow a driveway from the Field of Dreams through the playing fields to Fort Washington Avenue.

4. The Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) access road along the Route 309 Expressway will not extend to Loch Alsh Avenue as initially thought. The access road will be a private road for Township vehicle use from Highland Avenue to the Township public works department building. Continued access to Loch Alsh Avenue will be provided via the Township public library parking lot driveway. There will not be a private access road from Loch Alsh Avenue to Susquehanna Road, as initially thought. Fire apparatus will use the proposed new school district driveway from Loch Alsh Avenue to Susquehanna Road.
5. The area has serious rain water issues that affect neighboring properties even along Highland Avenue. There are designated wetlands adjacent to this area.
6. This is a busy Township operations area involving activity from the public works department, the parks and recreation department and the police department.
7. State grant funding requirements are involved in the use of this site. Therefore, mandatory relocation of the Field of Dreams is required. An alternate site would have to be located.
8. The school district "Pit" field below the Field of Dreams is now scheduled to serve as the temporary parking lot for the high school during construction of the new high school.
9. The firehouse would not be in a visible location for the community inclusion theory.
10. The school district stated that it is not anticipating a final decision soon.
11. The school district has too many unresolved variables at this time.
12. For those concerned with the school zone, this site would place the fire response traffic more in the school zone than the Bonsell property.
13. This site was identified before the school district received election approval to build a new high school. Therefore, the suggested relocation of the bus maintenance garage to this site was not known when the committee began searching for a potential site.
14. The site is not near residential property, avoiding negativity by some neighbors.
15. It is reported that the school district will be 30% deficient in athletic fields due to the square footage of the new high school. This site would be an issue since the Field of Dreams itself is not large enough for a firehouse and part of the adjacent athletic fields would be required to support a firehouse.

Township owned properties:

1. Parcel Number 540006870006, located behind the homes in the 600 block of Susquehanna Road, adjacent to the Upper Dublin Township Sports Park (SPARK)

(former Bub Farm) and the school district playing fields behind the bus maintenance garage. It is used for rain water control.

2. Parcel Number 540009409005, located between Susquehanna Road and Meetinghouse Road and between the townhomes of Tannerie Woods on Honey Run Road, etc. and Joel Drive. It is used for rain water control that also feeds into the field behind the homes in the 600 block of Susquehanna Road.

3. Parcel Number 54006B038, located on Susquehanna Road between Crystal Valley Drive and the rear of Denston Drive. It is used for rain water control.

600 block of Susquehanna Road, between the former Bub Farm and the SPARK and the Route 309 Expressway, as suggested by retired Commissioner William J. Bryers, Ward 7, (There is a creek that runs behind these properties):

Webster, 649 Susquehanna Road - Not interested in selling their property.

Szabo, 645 Susquehanna Road - Approached the Township with an interest in selling their property. The property is two acres, which would serve as an alternate site for the Field of Dreams. The lot is too small for the firehouse and neighbors on each side are not interested in selling their properties.

Andrews, 637 Susquehanna Road - Not interested in selling their property.

Rudolph, 631 Susquehanna Road - Not interested in selling their property.

Friel, 625 Susquehanna Road - Not interested in selling their property.

Vogin, 619 Susquehanna Road - No response to my contact. There is insufficient acreage for a firehouse. It could serve as an alternate site for the Field of Dreams. The Transcontinental Natural Gas Pipeline is adjacent to the property. The property is very close to the Route 309 Expressway Northbound off-ramp. The property is not advertised for sale.

Jeffrey Gordon, 1256 Tressler Drive, Fort Washington, suggested, via Ms. Kuhn, that the Township public works department building be relocated off the municipal complex, so the new firehouse can be built on that site:

Findings: The significant expense is prohibitive. There are no known alternate sites available to accommodate the operation. There is a tremendous value in having the operation located with the Township offices. This location is environmentally classified as a Site Two due to its previous soil contamination caused by an underground diesel tank leak. Its current state is safe because it is encapsulated by the concrete. However, disturbing the current ground will produce exposure and mandate further remediation efforts.

Resident suggested that the new SPARK be relocated to the Bonsell property and the new firehouse built where the current SPARK is located. The suggestion was made during a neighborhood meeting on February 10, 2008, which was conducted at the municipal complex and attended by Commissioner Jules J. Mermelstein, Ward Five, President, and Commissioner Sharon L. Damsker, Ward Two:

Findings: The field is brand new. The cost of relocating the field is significant. It is believed that the SPARK will generate more activity than the firehouse.

The committee eliminated the following five (5) sites identified in the Facilities Study Report:

1. Site Two - The Rear of the Fort Washington Elementary School at Highland Avenue and the Route 309 Expressway. This site is owned by the school district. The site is located within a wetlands protected area. There is 19' deep swale that would have to be filled. This site receives a significant amount of rain water that also affects properties along Highland Avenue. It is the site of an old quarry that is filled with trash. This site has easements for a sanitary sewer, water, electrical and a private roadway.
2. Site Three - The Veterans Memorial Park at Highland Avenue and Farm Lane. This site is owned by the Township. This site is a former quarry filled with trash and vehicles. The possibility of methane gas emanating through the firehouse floor or the floor cracking from an unstable foundation is a concern. This site is already established as a memorial park.
3. Site Five - The Former Bub Farm (SPARK) at 725 Susquehanna Road. This site is owned by the Township. It has been developed into world-class soccer fields.
4. Site Six - The Mondauk Commons at Susquehanna Road and Dillon Road. This site is owned by the Township. This site is protected by use through a deed restriction controlled by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Harrisburg, and a special exemption would have to be granted. This site is established as a popular public exercise and recreation park. The existing exercise track would have to be relocated because the subject parking lot itself is insufficient space for a firehouse.
5. Site Seven - The Former Nelson Property at Susquehanna Road/Virginia Drive/North Limekiln Pike. This site is owned by Bruce E. Toll (B.E.T.) Development Company. It was suggested as a site for a single firehouse to serve the entire township, eliminating the Burn Brae sub-station, before B.E.T. purchased the property. Two restaurants will be built on this site. The township square mileage is too large for service by one firehouse. And volunteer firefighters cannot effectively respond to this site for a timely response to an incident scene.

After the presentation, the Board of Commissioners requested the committee to evaluate any site with even a remote possibility of success, to ensure all concerns were addressed. The additional sites are identified below. Other sites identified by well-meaning non-

committee members, but located outside the bulls-eye area, as far away as Pennsylvania Avenue in Oreland and Welsh Road in Maple Glen, were eliminated. Although not advertised for sale, the following other potential sites in or near the bulls-eye were evaluated and eliminated:

Highland Avenue behind the Stuart Creek Townhomes, between Route 309 Expressway and Creek Drive. The property is designated as wetlands. The site is not large enough to support a firehouse. The site appears larger on Google.earth. There are adjacent residential properties that would be needed for acreage.

Former Van Sant Farm driveway and school district athletic field on Fort Washington Avenue adjacent to the Fort Washington Elementary School. Excessive rain water causes flooding issues. The property abuts designated wetlands. The entrance and exit are in the middle of a school zone for an elementary school.

Giampa property, 925 Susquehanna Road, at the corner of Fort Washington Avenue and adjacent to the Church of the Open Door property, 1260 Fort Washington Avenue. The home is registered as historic. The corner lot would be difficult for ingress and egress of fire apparatus. The acreage is too small to support a firehouse.

Former Self Oil Heat Company property, 1323 Fort Washington Avenue. The property is currently used by a landscaping contractor. It is believed the property will be offered for sale. The property consists of two acres, which would not support a firehouse, but could serve as an alternate site for the Field of Dreams.

Hanrahan property, 600 Susquehanna Road, between the Route 309 Expressway and the driveway to the Woods Apartments Complex. PennDOT owns an access easement for the expressway. Ingress and egress would be difficult due to the expressway and Woods Apartments Complex traffic in the area. The Transcontinental Natural Gas Pipeline runs through this property. The acreage is not large enough to support a firehouse. It is not ideal for firefighters quick response to the firehouse.

The rear of the Church of the Open Door, 1260 Fort Washington Avenue. The school will expand its building in the future. There are access issues for the Fort Washington Estates complex. There is play area and school for very young children on site.

The proposed new synagogue, 1311 Fort Washington Avenue. Even if the new owners were interested in selling, the acreage is too small for a firehouse.

The Hanamirian property, 1001 Susquehanna Road, between Fort Washington Avenue and Ascot Drive. Although the property is for sale, it is long and narrow, which would cause problems for firehouse placement and ingress and egress. The home at the corner of the property is registered as historic.

The Gordon property, 1252 Fort Washington Avenue, adjacent to the Upper Dublin Professional Center and generally across from the Bonsell parcel. Although the property

is not for sale, it was initially believed that it could present an opportunity to develop in conjunction with the new Upper Dublin High School project. The original intent was to build the firehouse on this property. However, the owner stated that purchase offers from developers have been rejected. As previously reported, currently the possibility exists for either the purchase of a small part of the property or an easement to support the firehouse on the adjacent Lenahan property at 1256 Fort Washington Avenue.

The Upper Dublin Township Municipal Complex – Salt Shed, 801 Loch Alsh Avenue. The salt shed would have to be relocated. This location is in the middle of the school zone for the Upper Dublin High School on Loch Alsh Avenue and the main driveway for township police, public works and parks and recreation vehicles. It is also the site of a former quarry.

The Upper Dublin School District recreation fields along Fort Washington Avenue between Loch Alsh Avenue and Thomas Drive. However, pursuant to Commonwealth of Pennsylvania standards for recreational fields in relationship to square footage of a school, the school district is facing a 30% deficit in recreational fields due to the size of the proposed new high school.

Temple University Recreational Fields, 550 Meetinghouse Road (near Butler Pike and the former Temple University Music Festival Theater). This site will not properly address the upper-end of the township. Other factors include it being outside the quick response area for most firefighters and that there is a lot of vehicular and pedestrian traffic near Temple University.

Temple University Open Space 580 Meetinghouse Road (adjacent to the Friends Meeting House Church at Meetinghouse Road and Fort Washington Avenue). This property is too small to support a firehouse. It is not ideal to the bulls-eye because it is outside the quick response area for most firefighters. The road is very narrow.

Robbins Park, 1419 East Butler Pike, at Meetinghouse Road. This site will not properly address the upper-end of the township. It is outside the quick response area for firefighters. It is a very popular nature and educational park.

The reasons why we should not delay the process of selecting a site and building the new firehouse:

1. There is no other land available for consideration now or in the foreseeable future.
2. The cost of the project will continue to increase.
3. The Maple Glen area requires better coverage for fire and rescue service.
4. The maintenance repairs to the older Summit Avenue main station will need continuous attention during the delay.

VOTING RECORD – NEW MAIN FIREHOUSE SITE RECOMMENDATION

	<u>BONSELL</u>	<u>LENAHAN</u>	<u>FIELD OF DREAMS</u>
Dr. Fogel:	2	1	3
Mr. Toner:	2	1	3
Mr. Duffy:	1	2	3
Mr. Newhall:	1	3	2
Mr. Lester:	1	2	3
Mr. Samtmann:	1	2	3
Mr. Schuck:	1	2	3
Mr. Supplee:	1	2	3
Mr. Yemm:	2	1	3
<u>Not present at meeting, voted via e-mail:</u>			
Mr. Losier:	1	2	3
Mr. Melair:	1	2	3
<u>Not present at meeting, out of country:</u>			
Ms. Kuhn:	3 (via e-mail)	0	0
	Desired to wait for possible unforeseen future sites.		
<u>Total First Choice Votes:</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>0</u>

Note: The properties are listed in order of most viability at the time of the vote.

This Recommendation Report and Executive Summary has been provided to the Upper Dublin Township Board of Commissioners, who will make the final site selection.

Respectfully submitted,

The Facilities Study Committee