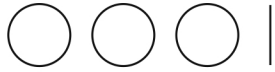


'We pray that we're almost there': Sandy Hook memorial could finally be constructed



Rob Ryser

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Ben Waldo, left, and Dan Affleck, architects with San Francisco-based SWA, who won the contract to design the Sandy Hook memorial.

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NEWTOWN - A public forum on Monday about plans to convert a 5-acre forest near the Sandy Hook school into a memorial for the 26 first-graders and educators killed in 2012 will be the final presentation before residents vote on the \$3.7 million project at the end of April.

“We’ve worked and worked and worked and we pray that we’re almost there,” says Alan Martin, a member of the volunteer steering committee that’s been working for eight years to memorialize the victims. “We’ve narrowed it down from 16 sites and 190 designs and pared the cost down from \$11 million. It’s been a mission.”

The public forum, planned for 5:30 p.m. Monday, will be livestreamed on the Facebook site of the weekly publication, The Newtown Bee. The goal is to give voters the latest information about a project that has maintained its singleness of purpose despite disheartening setbacks.

After design alterations due to the town’s limited budget, Newtown’s preferred concept has been preserved of a walk through nature to a reflection pool, with a “sacred sycamore” growing in the center.

Landscape architects Ben Waldo and Dan Affleck of San Francisco-based SWA will be on the panel at Monday’s virtual forum along with other construction consultants and the chairman of the volunteer steering group, which includes families that lost loved ones in the mass shooting at Sandy Hook school.

“We are hopeful the residents will endorse this,” Martin said. “Like any project that costs money there will be a certain percentage of people who don’t want money coming out of their pockets, but we do hope this will pass.”

The \$3.7 million memorial project will be one of three propositions along with the 2021-22 budget on the April 27 ballot.

As such, Newtown’s leaders have to remain neutral about its passage.

“The town can’t be in a position of promoting an outcome on the ballot, except to remind everybody about the project,” said First Selectman Dan Rosenthal. “This project has been out in the public domain for many years now, so hopefully there is enough of an awareness about it for people to make an informed decision.”

“Should voters approve the project, construction on the memorial could begin as soon as the summer, with the goal of opening the grounds to public on the 10th anniversary of the Sandy Hook tragedy on Dec. 14, 2022.

Details about the project are available on the town’s [website](#) under the tab, Sandy Hook Permanent Memorial.

“It’s a beautiful memorial and design,” Martin said.

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