



Office of the
SELECT BOARD

TOWN OF NEEDHAM

TOWN HALL
Needham, MA 02492-2669

TEL: (781) 455-7500
FAX: (781) 449-4569

Ridge Hill Manor House and Garage Demolition Frequently Asked Questions October 25, 2021 Special Town Meeting

About the Ridge Hill Property

How many buildings are there at Ridge Hill?

There are three buildings on the approximately 3-acre site under the jurisdiction of the Select Board: the Manor House, a garage, and a barn.

What are the buildings being used for now?

The Ridge Hill Manor House is being used for miscellaneous storage. Materials belonging to the Exchange Club are in the process of being relocated to the Memorial Park Fieldhouse, and Conservation and Building Maintenance items are being relocated to other municipal buildings.

The garage is not currently in use. The garage was used in the past by the Park & Recreation Department for its Outdoor Living Adventure program; that program is now held elsewhere. The garage has also been used in the past by the Parks & Forestry Division.

The barn is used for storage by the Parks & Forestry Division, and by the Needham Community Theater, under a license agreement with the Town.

What is the current condition of the structures?

- The existing slate roof is in disrepair.
- The windows and doors need to be replaced; many windows are inoperable or otherwise damaged. Some doors and windows are currently boarded up.
- There is insect infestation in the exterior building façade and walls.
- The chimneys need re-pointing.
- There is visible exterior rot at the roof lines.
- The bulkhead door is in poor condition.
- Gutters and downspouts are missing in numerous locations.
- The structures are not ADA compliant.
- All mechanical, electrical, plumbing, and HVAC systems need to be replaced or upgraded.
- There is currently no working central heating system in the buildings.
- There is no fire suppression (sprinkler) system in the building.
- Paint is in a failing condition.
- There is failing and deteriorating stucco façade in numerous areas.

- There is vegetative growth on and adjacent to the manor house, patio, and garage, causing exterior damage to the structures.
- The domestic water is currently shut off in both structures.
- There are signs of water leaks and damage.

Demolition of the Ridge Hill Buildings

What buildings are included in the demolition plan?

The Ridge Hill Manor House and garage are proposed for demolition. The barn is in acceptable condition for continued use by the Town and the Needham Community Theatre. Saving the barn will allow it to be repurposed once plans for the site are finalized.

Why is the Town proposing to demolish the buildings?

Over the past decade, the Town has made significant capital improvements to other municipal facilities, including the High School, Memorial Park Fieldhouse, Fire Station #2, Public Safety Building (Fire Station #1 and the Police Station), modular classrooms at the Mitchell School, Rosemary Recreation Complex, and Jack Cogswell Storage Building. Given the deteriorated physical condition of the Ridge Hill buildings, the Select Board recommended to Town Meeting that funds be appropriated for a study to evaluate the implications of demolishing the Manor House and garage. The septic system for the barn will remain operational and can be used in connection with future development at the site. The Manor House discharges to seepage pits that must be abandoned.

Would it make sense to demolish the structures later when a project is approved for the site?

There is no plan for redeveloping the Ridge Hill property in the immediate future. Leaving the structures to deteriorate may be more costly and raises safety and security issues. Once the demolition is complete, the risk of fire (and risks to first responders) and vandalism are eliminated. The site will be left as a clean slate for the future.

What is the impact of delaying the demolition?

Delaying the demolition will result in increased costs and safety concerns. Waiting to demolish the structures will increase the Town's costs due to overall escalation. As the building exterior (roofs and façade) continue to decay, there will be an incremental increase in decay and rot, along with rodent and insect infestations, which will add to increasing operating costs prior to demolition. As these items continue to decay, the Town's liability for the property will increase. Since there are no code-compliant life safety features in the Manor House, and it is possible for individuals to gain access, there is a concern for life and safety. While the area is somewhat active during the daylight hours, there is evidence of vandalism because the area is isolated.

Further, none of the buildings currently has fire suppression or detection equipment tied into the Fire Department. If a fire were to occur during the overnight hours in one building, it is reasonable to expect it would spread to the others. Further spread to the adjacent conservation area is also possible, due to the isolated location of these buildings. A fire would have significant time to spread and cause damage to the surrounding forested area. Connecting the

structures to the wireless alarm system would be costly and require electrical infrastructure to be reintroduced to the buildings, increasing the risk of fire.

Why can't the Town simply board up the windows to prevent vandalism?

Boarding-up windows is used on a temporary basis as a short-term fix. If windows are boarded up and there is insufficient interior lighting, there is risk to anyone entering the facility, with or without permission.

When was the feasibility/design of the demolition funded?

Funding for the feasibility study was approved under Article 13 of the 2019 Annual Town Meeting.

What is the cost of the demolition?

The Estate Manor House and Garage Demolition Study, completed by Dore & Whittier, was presented to the Select Board on January 12, 2021 and is available [here](#). The current budget estimate is **\$650,000** and consists of:

- Demolition/Construction Tasks **(\$397,000)**, including Site Preparation, Clearing & Earthwork, Hazardous Waste Remediation, Demolition, Site Improvements, Mechanical/Electrical/Plumbing, Escalation, and Design Contingency.
- General Requirements & Conditions/Bonds/Insurance/GC Fee **(\$72,600)**.
- Designer Costs/Testing/Inspection/Moving etc. **(\$56,900)**.
- Construction & Owner's Contingencies **(\$123,500)**.

Why does the projected demolition cost appear to be high?

This project is both a demolition and site restoration project. The project scope was detailed and conservatively estimated based on current construction, demolition, and restoration costs, including escalation. It also includes contingency costs based on the potential for project and below surface unknowns.

The Manor House and garage have hazardous building materials within the existing structures. These materials must be professionally handled, abated, and disposed of as part of the demolition project per federal and state regulations. These regulations ensure community and worker safety, promote fair business and hiring practices, and provide the insurance requisite for public projects. This comprises a major portion of the project cost, along with the size of the structures to be demolished.

The Town asked for, and received, a unit cost comparison per square foot and estimate from Dorr & Whittier, which found that the estimated demolition costs are in line with similar public projects, including the work done on the site of the new Sunita Williams School.

In addition, the contingencies included in the estimate are based on percentages. Those percentages are conservative since the Town does not yet have a full complete set of plans and design/construction documents for the project. The percentages used for contingencies in the

current estimate are a bit higher than usual, but within reason, based on this specific study and the construction scope parameters provided for this project.

How will the demolition project be funded?

The demolition project will be funded by savings from previously appropriated projects that came in under budget or that later received funding from non-Town sources.

Future of Ridge Hill Site

Are there future plans for the site that encompasses the three buildings?

The Select Board and stakeholders have been studying the potential use of the Ridge Hill structures for the past decade. A working group consisting of representatives from the Select Board, School Committee, Conservation Commission, Historic Commission, Planning Board, Park & Recreation Commission, and the Finance Committee last met in 2012 to brainstorm future uses including agriculture, education, museum, arts and performing arts, recreation, commercial/retail/restaurant/medical, conference/retreat center, housing, administration, and reversion to conservation use. The working group concluded that an ideal use of the Ridge Hill property would be one that is focused on education and/or recreation, supports shared use of the parcel, and is respectful of the conservation land.

What has happened since the 2012 Working Group recommendation was made?

The Select Board and Conservation Commission met during the interim period to discuss general concepts for the potential re-use of Ridge Hill and the Nike Site. The Board and Commission recommended - and the 2017 Town Meeting approved - funding for an initial environmental assessment to identify important ecological functions, evaluate existing and potential infrastructure, and analyze which portions of land might be suitable for development or redevelopment. The study, completed by Weston & Sampson in 2018, is available [here](#).

On February 11, 2020 the Select Board held a public hearing to discuss the 2018 Ridge Hill/Nike Site Condition Assessment, plans for demolition of the structures, and long-term planning for the entire area. Many residents expressed their opinions about use of the property, including farming, active recreation facilities, and passive recreation. Any future re-use of the 3-acre site will be considered in the context of the larger Ridge Hill Reservation (under the jurisdiction of the Conservation Commission) and the Nike Site (under the jurisdiction of the Select Board). There are no immediate plans for developing the Nike Site or the 3-acre portion of the Ridge Hill Reservation under the jurisdiction of the Select Board, and no project is included in the FY2022 – 2026 Capital Improvement Plan.

On August 17, 2021, the Select Board voted to seek funding for the demolition of the Ridge Hill buildings and to begin the Ridge Hill/Nike Assessment Phase 2 Project, including working with the stakeholders regarding potential future uses of the site.