



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
2021 Special Town Meeting Article 35
April 21, 2021

How many buildings are there at Ridge Hill?

There are three buildings on the 3+/- acre site under the jurisdiction of the Select Board – the manor house, a garage, and a barn.

What buildings are included in the demolition plan?

The manor house and garage are proposed for demolition. The barn is in acceptable condition and is in use by the Town and by the Needham Community Theatre. Saving the barn will allow it to be repurposed in the future once plans for the site are finalized.

What are the future plans for the 3-acre 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 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. It was the sense of the working group that an ideal use of the Ridge Hill property would be one that is focused on education and/or recreation, one that might support shared use of the parcel, and one that is respectful of the conservation land.

What happened after the 2012 Working Group recommendation?

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.

Why is the Town proposing to demolish the buildings?

Over the past decade, the Town has prioritized capital improvements at the High School, the Memorial Park Fieldhouse, Fire Station #2, the Public Safety Building (Fire Station #1 and the Police Station), modular classrooms at the Mitchell School, the Rosemary Recreation Complex, and the Jack Cogswell Storage Building. Since no immediate use has been identified for the area, and given the physical condition of the structures, the Select Board recommended to Town Meeting that funds be appropriated for a feasibility study and design of the demolition.

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 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 (**\$398,000**), 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 & Miscellaneous (**\$122,500**).

Why is the cost of the demolition so high?

This project is a demolition and site restoration project. The project scope was detailed and conservatively estimated based on current construction/demolition costs, including escalation. The manor house and garage have hazardous building materials within the existing structures. These materials need to be professionally handled, abated and disposed per federal and state regulations as part of the demolition project. This comprises a major portion of the project cost, along with the size of the structures to be demolished.

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

There is no plan for redeveloping the Ridge Hill property in the five-year capital improvement plan. Leaving the structures to deteriorate will be costly and raise 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 if a project is proposed for this area in 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, adding operating costs prior to demolition. As these items continue to decay, the Town's liability for the property will increase. While the area is somewhat active during the daylight hours, there is evidence of vandalism because the area is so isolated. There is a big concern about life safety and access. There are no code compliant life safety features in the manor house, and it is possible for individuals to gain access.

In their current state, none of the buildings has fire suppression or detection equipment tied into the Fire department. If a fire were to occur during the overnight hours, spread from one building to the others could be expected. Further spread to the adjacent conservation area is also a potential reality, 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 will 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.

What are the buildings being used for now?

The Ridge Hill Manor House is being used for miscellaneous storage. The materials belonging to the Exchange Club will be relocated to the Memorial Park Fieldhouse and building maintenance items will be relocated to various buildings and the Daley Building. The Conservation Department also has items stored in the building, which will be relocated. The garage was used in the past by the Park & Recreation Department for its Outdoor Living Adventure program, that is now held elsewhere. The garage has been used in the past by the Parks & Forestry Division. The barn is used for storage by the Parks & Forestry Division, and the upstairs barn is used by the Needham Community Theater under a license agreement with the Town.

What is the current condition of the structures?

- There is failing and deteriorating stucco façade in numerous areas.
- There is vegetative growth on and adjacent to the manor house, patio & garage causing exterior damage to the structures.
- The existing slate roof system is in need of repairs.
- The windows and doors need repair or replacement, windows are broken and/or damaged.
- 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 do not meet current codes for ADA compliance.
- 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.
- The domestic water is currently shut off in both structures.
- There are signs of water leaks and damage.