



Simon's Rock Village Committee Update

At an Open Meeting on June 24, 2026 the **Simon's Rock Village Committee (SRV)** provided updates on the alumni-led initiative to preserve and repurpose the former Simon's Rock campus in Great Barrington, following Bard College's decision to close it last year.

The panel outlined progress over the past year, which included evaluating the campus and its re-use potential, developing a preliminary business model, and engaging with Bard and its real estate broker (JLL). The committee has also refined SRV's long-term mission. Although Bard rejected a detailed proposal from SRV last summer to operate the campus under a Memorandum of Understanding pending eventual purchase, the failure of the only known bid in February suggests the future of the property is still to be determined.

SRV has broadened its mission beyond acquiring the campus, to include preserving the educational philosophy of Simon's Rock, and advocating for better state-level responses to college closures. Participants at Wednesday's meeting discussed funding challenges, redevelopment options, housing needs, and possible partnerships, while inviting volunteers to join working groups.

Meeting Summary

1. Opening and Introductions

The organizing committee consisting primarily of Simon's Rock alumni who have been working together since shortly after Bard announced the campus closure in late 2024.

Panelists discussed:

- Their personal connections to Simon's Rock
- Their professional backgrounds
- Their motivations for preserving the campus and its educational legacy

2. Origins of Simons Rock Village

The committee explained that shortly after Bard announced the closure, alumni organized to determine whether they could help preserve the campus.

That effort evolved into **Simons Rock Village**, operating under the nonprofit **Youbilee (501(c)(3))**.

Its initial objectives included:

- Preventing abandonment of the campus
- Preserving important community facilities
- Developing a financially sustainable future use
- Maintaining the educational values associated with Simon's Rock

3. Vision for the Campus

Following extensive community outreach, SRV identified **intergenerational housing** as the strongest practical direction.

The proposed vision combines:

- Housing for families
- Affordable housing for workers
- Housing for retirees
- Educational programming
- Arts and culture
- Community gathering spaces
- Agricultural uses
- Environmental stewardship

The goal is to create a mixed-use village that preserves the spirit of Simon's Rock while addressing regional housing shortages.

4. Progress Since Last Year

The committee summarized accomplishments including:

- Meeting with alumni, community members, and local organizations
- Developing conceptual plans
- Creating a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for Bard
- Monitoring Bard's sales process
- Growing the organization to approximately **700–800 engaged supporters**
- Building a website, mailing list, and social media presence
- Receiving regional press coverage

5. Bard's Sale Process

The committee reviewed what is known about Bard's efforts to sell the campus.

Highlights included:

- Bard hired JLL to market the property.
- Bids were requested early in the year.
- Only one serious known bidder submitted an offer.
- That bid was apparently rejected.

Members believe Bard is primarily motivated by a wish to maximize financial returns on the property while also managing broader institutional challenges. The Town of Great Barrington has recently announced plans to remove the 271-acre campus from its tax-free nonprofit status.

6. SRV's Three Strategic Pillars

Chad Klapes introduced a revised organizational framework consisting of three major goals.

Pillar 1 — Campus Stewardship

Continue working toward obtaining all or part of the campus and preserving it in ways consistent with Simon's Rock's educational and social values.

Pillar 2 — Educational Legacy

Preserve and promote the distinctive Simon's Rock educational philosophy.

Plans include:

- Alumni focus groups across graduating generations
- Documentation of the Simon's Rock educational model
- Publications
- Workshops
- Educational programming
- Continued intellectual community

Pillar 3 — The "Bigger Village"

Expand beyond Simon's Rock itself to address the nationwide closure of innovative liberal arts colleges.

Possible activities include:

- Partnerships with similar institutions
- Shared advocacy
- State-level policy initiatives
- Research into sustainable campus reuse

7. Organizational Structure

SRV intends to organize volunteers into working groups aligned with the three strategic pillars.

The idea is to:

- Allow volunteers to contribute where most interested
- Produce regular progress reports
- Build momentum through smaller, focused initiatives

8. Campus Feasibility Study

Committee members described an extensive assessment conducted during the previous summer.

Major findings included:

Approximately:

- **50 rentable residential units**
- **40 rentable office spaces**

were identified that could potentially generate operating revenue.

The committee believes that renting roughly **60%** of these spaces could cover the basic operating expenses required to keep the campus functioning.

Potential tenants discussed included:

- Local residents
- Community organizations
- Berkshire Community College
- Summer arts programs
- Cultural organizations

9. Business Model

A recurring theme was that operating the campus appears financially feasible if used as a mixed-use community rather than as a traditional college.

Revenue sources could include:

- Residential rentals
- Office rentals
- Summer housing
- Educational programming
- Arts programming
- Partnerships
- Grants
- State redevelopment funds

However, the group acknowledged that acquiring the campus remains the major financial obstacle.

10. Redevelopment Challenges

Several practical issues were discussed:

- Shared underground utilities
- Water infrastructure
- Electrical systems
- Sewer systems
- Heating infrastructure
- Easements
- Parcel boundaries

These factors make subdivision of the property much more difficult than it appears.

Participants suggested that a condominium-style governance structure or land trust could ultimately be necessary.

11. Funding Challenges

The committee acknowledged that:

- They received generous financial pledges.
- Those pledges were not sufficient to submit a competitive purchase offer.
- Additional partners and investors may eventually be necessary.

Ideas discussed included:

- Public-private partnerships
- Land trust models
- State housing grants
- Partnerships with commercial developers
- Nonprofit ownership combined with taxable commercial uses

12. Comparison with Other College Closures

Marla Jamate discussed the growing number of liberal arts college closures, including:

- Hampshire College
- Eastern Nazarene
- Anna Maria College
- College of Saint Rose

The committee views Simon's Rock as part of a broader national issue affecting progressive liberal arts institutions.

13. State-Level Advocacy

One emerging objective is advocating for Massachusetts to establish policies supporting adaptive reuse of closed college campuses.

Ideas included:

- A statewide campus reuse commission
- Economic impact studies
- State funding for redevelopment planning
- Financing for adaptive reuse projects

The committee also discussed possible collaboration with the alumni organization forming around Hampshire College ("Hampshire Next").

14. Open Discussion

The remainder of the meeting consisted primarily of questions and discussion.

Topics included:

- Whether portions of the campus could be sold separately
- Infrastructure challenges preventing easy subdivision

- Tax implications
- Land trust possibilities
- Affordable housing
- Existing business planning
- Financial feasibility
- Whether changes in Bard leadership might create opportunities to reopen negotiations

One attendee suggested that, if Bard's governing board changes, SRV should consider making another formal presentation proposing that it operate the campus before any sale.

Overall Tone

The meeting reflected cautious optimism. While organizers acknowledged significant financial and logistical hurdles, they emphasized that:

- No sale has yet been completed.
- The organization has grown substantially.
- They have developed increasingly detailed operational and financial plans.
- Their mission has expanded from "saving the campus" to preserving the broader educational philosophy and community that Simon's Rock represents.

Followups:

In the coming few weeks, the next steps will include the launch of a supportive web-based form to begin onboarding volunteers to pursue the 3 Pillar Mission Structure as discussed above and further supportive communication and organization.

Our Panel was:

Maryana Bhak
Marla Jamate
Chad Klapes
Stephen Lieberman
Jonathon Lothrop

Future Notifications to be posted to the Simons Rock Village FB group and via our email list.
To assure you are on the mail list, please use the form on home page (bottom) at

simonsrockvillage.org

And don't forget to check the "Keep me informed." box.

"Thank you everyone for your continuing interest and support!"

-The SRV Team.

**These notes were generated in part by using AI to summarize our anonymized transcript from the Open Meeting of 6/24/26.*