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Middletown fights Brookdale land sale

■ **The college's plan to sell land goes against the open space policy, Mayor Raymond J. O'Grady says.**

By **SONYA BEARD**
FREEHOLD BUREAU

MIDDLETOWN — The Township Committee has passed a resolution opposing Brookdale Community College's decision to sale land at Phalanx and Newman Springs roads.

At its Monday meeting, the committee discussed alternatives that

would keep a 5.8-acre lot in the center of Lincroft from being developed.

The college put the land up for sale to raise money toward the purchase of a new student activity center. Last Wednesday, the college received two bids, one of \$730,000 and one of \$1.5 million. The college had advertised for bids in the second week of June.

The decision to sell caught the township by surprise.

"We never dreamed Brookdale would sell off some of its land for development," Mayor Raymond J. O'Grady said. "We thought the land was always deemed as a trust for open space."

Neighbors of the college campus, who said they were assured the land never would be developed when they moved into their homes, have submitted a petition with about 900 names to the committee, seeking help in stopping the land sale.

The college fully intends to sell the land, said Peter Burnham, Brookdale president.

"I am willing to talk if the township has some viable options," he said.

But the bottom line is that the college needs the money, he said.

The land is zoned for commercial use, the college needs a student activity center, and there's a bid of

\$1.5 million, Burnham said.

"It's a challenging situation to step away from," he said.

Residents argued the area is already too congested and that commercial use was not what the previous owners intended when they sold the property to Monmouth County more than 30 years ago.

"Certainly the residents and township have strong feelings, and we are sensitive to that," Burnham said. "We consider ourselves to be good neighbors, and we want to continue to be."

Selling the land goes against the township's open space policy, O'Grady said, and it goes against Middletown voters' wishes as well.

Residents voted for an open space preservation referendum last November.

The committee discussed options such as the township purchasing the property or asking the county to do so, O'Grady said. The committee has not yet approached the county.

"I would like to see it preserved as open space or a park," he said.

Burnham said he is willing to sit down and discuss the situation but he has to talk to the college board of trustees at the board's July 7 meeting. County officials could not be reached for comment yesterday.

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