

Brookdale opts out of land sale, pleasing critics

■ The college had planned to sell the 5.8-acre parcel to raise money.

By **SONYA BEARD**
FREEHOLD BUREAU

MIDDLETOWN — At a special meeting last night, Brookdale Community College officials decided not to sell a parcel of land on Newman Springs and Phalanx roads.

The 5.8-acre lot was at the center of a controversy last month when the college decided to accept bids from developers for the property.

Middletown residents, who were already frustrated with congestion in the area, said they felt betrayed that the college would consider selling property they were told never would be developed.

The Middletown Township Committee came out against the sale at its June 21 meeting. The Monmouth County Board of Freeholders also opposed the sale of the property.

"I am sure it will all work out in the end and the property will be preserved," said Harry Larrison Jr., director of the freeholder board. "There's already so much congestion. We need some breathing room."

College officials listened.

Brookdale President Peter Burnham said during the height of controversy that he was open to alternative solutions to selling the property, but the college needed the money to finance construction projects.

The college put the land up for sale to raise money toward the funding of a \$12.5 million student activity center.

On July 16, the college received two bids. The low bid of \$730,000 came from C.J. Hesse Inc. of Belford. The high bid of \$1.5 million was from Site Development Inc. of Mount Laurel.

"Brookdale has been extremely successful and they have to keep building buildings to keep up with the flow of students coming in," said Larrison, who added adding that selling the land was just a thought.

The land is zoned for "neighborhood village commercial" use, which is appropriate for a bank or small office complex.

George Toop, who's lived in Lincroft for 50 years, described his sentiments in one word: "Great!"

Toop, who purchased his land from the previous owner, Geraldine Thompson, said that's what she would have wanted.

"That is what were fighting for, and what we believed in," he said.

Residents submitted a petition with more than 900 names to the Middletown Township Committee.

Now residents have formed the Lincroft Village Green, a community group that plans to turn the Brookdale parcel into a park with a gazebo and benches. The group also vows to protect other property from development in the Lincroft area.

□ Sonya Beard: (732) 922-6000, Ext. 7755.