

Planned Brookdale C.C. land sale sparks fierce protest

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Residents want tract preserved

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Brookdale Community College's plan to sell off a 5.88-acre parcel to build a Student Life Center has met with fierce opposition from Lincroft residents.

Residents plan to do everything in their power to prevent the college from selling the land to a developer, preferring that it remain open space.

The tract is located on Phalanx Road and Route 520, next to the Amoco gas station on the southwest corner of the Middletown-Lincroft Road-Route 520 intersection. The Lincroft Elementary School is just west of the vacant wooded parcel.

Last Wednesday, the college accepted two bids, one for \$730,000 and another for \$1.5 million. The low bid came from C.J. Hesse Inc. of Belford and the higher bid was submitted by Site Development Inc. of Mount Laurel.

No formal action will be taken until the college trustees meet on July 7.

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According to Louise Horgan of the college president's office, the college does not require that bidders tell them what they plan to build. The bids can be rejected for legal reasons, she said.

The proposed land sale has angered Lincroft residents and triggered a grass-roots movement to stop it.

"There is a ground swell of opposition," said Mary Ellen

Hintz, a Lincroft resident for eight years and one of the originators of a petition drive.

The petition, which was delivered to the Township Committee early last week with 900 signatures, opposes the plan to auction the 5.88-acre lot and asks residents to join in "opposing this latest attempt to continue the over-development of the Lincroft Town Center and its associated increase in traffic and congestion..."

By Friday another 100 or more people had joined the petition drive and the movement was continuing to expand, Hintz said. The initial 900 signatures were accumulated over 12 hours "right after we found out about the sale on June 2," she added.

"There is a major traffic issue here," Hintz said. "When Brookdale is getting out and the

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Lincroft Elementary School is getting out, traffic gets backed up from the intersection of Route 520 and Middletown-Lincroft Road all the way to county-owned Thompson Park," she said. "We are not opposed to good sound development, but people can barely cross the street...(and) we are losing our sense of community and becoming one giant strip mall all the way down to Holmdel and even up to Red Bank."

According to township Planning Director Tim Anfusio, there are several permitted uses in the neighborhood village commercial zone, such as a bank, small office building, and a personal services-type business like a barber or a hairdresser.

The triangle-shaped lot was separated from the rest of the campus when Phalanx Road was realigned a number of years ago, Anfusio said. He noted that if the developer wants to build something that is not a permitted use, they would have to appear before the zoning board.

Horgan said that the college needs a student life center.

"Students have been asking for a student life center for many years and our crediting authority, the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, strongly recommended building one," Horgan noted.

The center would be built between the college commons, which contains a cafeteria, office space and some classrooms, and the gymnasium.

"The property is an asset that the college owns," she said. "By selling that piece of property, Brookdale can self-finance the project at no cost to the taxpayers."

But Hintz believes that there are other ways for the college to finance the center. "The \$1.5 million is pocket change when you consider that the building will cost over \$13 million."

Hintz, who is a retired Realtor, said that people who live on Old Phalanx Road will see their property values affected.

The student life center, expected to open in April 2001, will cost an estimated \$12.5 million. When bonding expenses are factored in, the total will be around \$13.8 million, Horgan said.

The college plans to finance \$2.5 million through the sale of the Phalanx Road property and revenue from food services and the college store.