

Sale of Brookdale C.C. tract appears unlikely

County freeholders oppose commercial development of site

BY MARILYN DUFF

Staff Writer

The county hopes to dissuade Brookdale Community College from selling a 5.8-tract of land on Phalanx Road in the Lincroft section of Middletown for commercial development.

"I doubt very much it will be developed," County Administrator Robert J. Collins said Monday. "The freeholders feel it should be left open," he said.

Collins said he spoke with Brookdale President Dr. Peter E. Burnham Thursday and that Freeholder Director Harry Larrison plans to meet with the college president tomorrow to explore other ideas for funding to finance the college's planned student life center.

The meeting will be held at 6 p.m. at the college, according to Burnham's assistant Louise Horgan.

State Sen. Joseph Kyrillos Jr. (R-13) has also been invited to attend, according to Romeo

Cascaes, county director of public information.

Cascaes said it will probably be limited to Larrison and possibly one other freeholder.

The plan to sell the land has sparked fierce opposition from Lincroft residents who have collected close to 1,500 signatures on a petition opposing the sale, according to George Toop, who lives on the west side of Phalanx Road.

The college board of trustees is scheduled to decide July 7 whether to accept either of the bids received for the tract. One is for \$730,000 and the other is for \$1.5 million.

The college was hoping to use the money to help finance a \$12.5 million student life center, which is scheduled to open in April 2001 and will cost around \$13.8 million when bonding expenses are factored in.

Because the building will not be used for classrooms, the state will not match any county funds

made available, according to Horgan.

Cascaes said tomorrow's meeting will be to explore other options for raising the money.

"I will be happy when it is given back to the county or the township," said Toop, who purchased his property in 1945 from Lewis Thompson Jr., the son of Geraldine Thompson, who sold the Brookdale land to the county and for whom nearby Thompson Park is named.

"We're on top of this because we don't feel this should happen," said Toop. "This is not the way public property should be handled. It's the same as Marlboro (State Hospital). It's the same as the Chase tract in Holmdel," he said, referring to two large area tracts of land open space advocates are fighting to preserve.

Middletown Township Committee members passed a resolution last week opposing the sale

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of the property. They said they never anticipated seeing it developed, despite the fact that they rezoned it for neighborhood commercial use in 1993.

Asked about the rezoning, Toop said "nobody was aware of it."

The 5.8-acre tract was separated from the rest of Brookdale when Phalanx Road was realigned to eliminate what had been a five-corner intersection

Horgan said the college is "considering feedback from all sources."

The Brookdale sale has even been turned into a campaign issue by the Democratic freeholder and Middletown Township Committee candidates.

Democratic Township Committee candidate John Naughton called on the township to "petition the freeholders, who bought the large tract of land originally, to sell it to the township for \$1."

"If that isn't feasible then let's preserve it with our own open space funds," he added.

Naughton also questioned what committee members "were thinking when they approved the zone change" back in 1993.

Democratic Freeholder candidates Patrick L. Falcon, president of the Matawan Borough Council, and Tim Dowd of Freehold Township called it a "breach of faith between the Board of Chosen Freeholders and the Thompson

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family, who sold the land to the county for educational and recreation purposes back in 1961."

Horgan said previously the tract has no deed restrictions.

The original portion of Thompson Park, which is adjacent to Brookdale, is restricted.

"Mrs. (Geraldine) Thompson was very specific. She specified that it was to be used for public recreation spaces," said Monmouth County Park System spokesperson Laura Kirkpatrick.

Kirkpatrick said the county Parks System, which uses the imposing Thompson home as a visitor center and park system headquarters, is not involved with any discussions concerning the controversial Brookdale tract.

Toop would like to see the 5.8-acre tract preserved as a natural site, perhaps with a statue of William Leed, who acquired the land from the Indians, he said.

Other opponents have adopted the name Lincroft Village Green Committee, hoping to turn the parcel into a village green.

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