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Morris freeholders worry about possible sale of Greystone land

Say state must abide by 1999 law protecting acreage

*By Michael Daigle
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PARSIPPANY – With the state budget crumbling faster than the old buildings at Greystone Park Psychiatric Hospital, the Morris County freeholders are concerned that 130 acres of the old state hospital could be sold to private developers.

Freeholder John Murphy told other members of the board at their Wednesday work session that towns surrounding Greystone – Parsippany, Morris Township, Morris Plains and Denville – have passed resolutions calling for the state to follow state law and dedicate the 130 remaining acres of the hospital site to be used only as open space, recreation or similar uses, or for programs developed by the state Department of Human Services.

Murphy said the concern is that the state has said it plans to put the acreage that includes the historic main building up for sale.

In January, the state Treasury Department's division of property management and construction declared that the 130 acres of Greystone were surplus land, and in March the State House Commission approved the designation, setting the stage for the Treasury Department to advertise the site for sale and start a bidding process.

Local officials last spring expressed concern that the property could be sold, but none expressed an interest in becoming the owner.

State Treasury Department spokesman Tom Bell said Friday that no decisions have been made regarding the Greystone land. The department is performing due diligence on the property, including examining preservation possibilities, he said. Local officials will be informed of any decisions, he said.

The freeholder board passed a resolution Wednesday to be sent to the towns and Gov. Jon Corzine saying that any sale of the property for private use would violate the 1999 law governing the transfer of surplus Greystone property.

The freeholder's resolution said the board opposed the State House Commission decision and opposed any legislative attempt to amend the existing legislation.

Private development is "inconsistent with the very substantial investment of time and resources made by Morris County" as it developed its portion of the site, and private development "would generate problems for local municipalities with respect to zoning and planning regulations as well as the potential increase in the cost of municipal support services and costs for local infrastructure maintenance and upkeep," the county resolution said.

The 130 acres the state is selling are at either end of the site and along Central Avenue, running to

West Hanover Avenue.

The new 450-bed psychiatric hospital opened this year on the western end of the 671-acre site.

Morris County purchased 306 acres of the site in 2002, and dedicated the property to open space, passive recreation, the creation of a ballfield for use by the Miracle League for handicapped players, and two rinks for ice and in-line skating, which opened this summer. The county has spent \$8 million clearing its portion of the land of dilapidated buildings. Extensive photographs were taken of all the buildings prior to their demolition.

The freeholders also introduced Wednesday an ordinance for \$1.35 million for the design and renovation of the 80,000-square-foot Central Avenue Complex, which will be used to house mental health-related nonprofit groups.
