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EDITORIAL

# Keeping Greystone green

The caravan was just one lone bus but the message was writ large.

Residents near the former Greystone Psychiatric Hospital in Parsippany want the facility and its grounds to remain as is, an open-space oasis that communities can enjoy for recreational purposes for years to come.

Morris Plains and Morris Township are particularly worried about plans by the state to possibly sell 130 acres of the more than 300-acre tract to developers for housing.

Parsippany is, too. Morris County's largest municipality has valid concerns about access roads winding their way through neighborhoods on their way north to Route 10 that would affect traffic in both Parsippany and Denville to the west.

But access roads making their way through to West Hanover Avenue to the south would be traveling only through the new development, which is now the current Greystone property.

Traffic would be dumped directly from the development onto West Hanover Avenue. Westbound traffic would affect Randolph. East-bound traffic on West Hanover Avenue heading ultimately to Morristown or Route 24 would simply add to the traffic quagmire of current morning and evening rush hour on the road, a road that already has traffic back up at the Hanover Avenue/Speedwell Avenue intersection packed so densely bumper-to-bumper drivers can experience the frustration of watching the light change three or four times before they even crawl up to the intersection.

What would a new development of 100, 200 or even 300 new homes bring? The towns shudder to think.

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The isolation of representatives in Trenton may be partially responsible for allowing the land to become acceptable for housing, but representatives who actually live in Morris County have long been aware and on Monday made their feelings heard loud and clear.

We find it remarkable the State House Commission, the eight-member government body formed in 1953 that oversees the selling of state land and unanimously voted last March to allow development at Greystone, was unaware that in 1999 the Legislature passed a law declaring that any land or structures on the site not needed by the hospital may be used only for recreation, farmland preservation, open space or historic preservation purposes.

Two recent members of the commission who had voted for allowing development, Sen. Gerald Cardinale, R-Bergen, and Assemblyman Declan O'Scanlon, R-Monmouth, an alternate, both learned about the law following their votes and have brought their concerns to the commission's attention.

Armed with the law and perhaps fortunate the housing market is in such shambles across the entire country that real pressure to build housing does not exist, the residents on the bus were welcomed, if not with open arms, then at least with sympathy.

Legislators in Morris County whose districts would be affected by the sale - Sens. Joseph Pennacchio and Anthony Bucco, and Assemblymen Jay Webber and Alex DeCroce - were at the meeting. Mayors, including Morris Plains Mayor Frank Druetzler, were at the meeting.

And so were regular citizens, about 35 in all and all with the same message: Let Greystone Park remain a park. Was their message heard?

It appears so. The residents learned from the commission it is in no hurry to sell the land.

The commission will continue to hear arguments on the matter when it reconvenes in March.

When it does reconvene, perhaps at that point a petition drive started less than two weeks ago but that has netted more than 300 signatures, may grow to net thousands more.

It's one thing to keep your fingers crossed and merely hope for the best. In our area, legislators and the residents who voted for them are doing their best to put words and hopes into action.