

'Don't develop Greystone'

Group urges continued open space to protect Morris Plains, Morris Twp.

By **JAMES LENT**
EDITOR

MORRIS PLAINS - A citizen's bus trip to Trenton Monday brought out about 35 residents to protest the possible selling of open space at the former Greystone Psychiatric Hospital in Parsippany to developers.

State Assemblymen Jay Webber and Alex DeCroce and Sen. Joseph Pennacchio, all R-Morris, Morris Plains Mayor Frank Druetzler and representatives of several other Morris County municipalities came to the meeting.

The group was joined by regular citizens, including Cutler

Road resident Maureen Murray, who came armed with a petition she had drawn up.

Cutler said that in just one and a half weeks she had netted 385 signatures from residents asking the state not to sell the land.

The 35 bus passengers had traveled to a meeting of the State House Commission, a group of state Senators and Assemblymen that oversees the sale and leasing of state land to private entities.

A unanimous State House Commission vote in March had lifted open space protection of about 130 acres of the more than 300-acre site in Parsippany to al-

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low housing development. Though the land is in Parsippany, any development would have primary access to Hanover Avenue that travels directly through the Morris Plains/Morris Township border, where traffic congestion is already a headache at rush hour, according to officials of both towns.

The access would also run north to Route 10 in Parsippany.

The commission's March vote

was soon followed by the Department of the Treasury, which hired a commercial real estate broker to market the property.

Druetzler, speaking after the meeting, which lasted about two hours Monday morning, said he noted to the commission that its actions to agree to sell the land were taken despite a 1999 state statute declaring that any land or structures on the Greystone site not needed by the hospital be used only for recreation, farmland preservation, open space or historic preservation purposes.

Druetzler had earlier noted two legislators on the Commission that had voted to release

the land for development, Sen. Gerald Cardinale, R-Bergen, and Assemblyman Declan O'Scanlon, R-Monmouth, both of whom were only recently elected. The two had said they were unaware of the 1999 law.

Scanlon, an alternate on the commission, was not at Monday's meeting, Druetzler said, but Cardinale was, and he expressed his reservations about selling the land in light of the 1999 law.

Druetzler, Pennacchio, Webber and Murray all said they came away from the meeting feeling better about keeping de-

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velopment at bay.

The commission assured the visitors the sale of the Greystone land was in no way imminent, according to Druetzler.

"I think going down there helped us," Druetzler said. "The commission got to see first hand how any development would impact the residents up here."

Druetzler also said he told the panel that traffic is not the only consideration. "There's a large deer population at Greystone," Druetzler said. "If the land is developed deer that are already a problem for the area will only increase if Greystone's herds are moved out."

Druetzler also noted Watnong Brook, which almost encircles the entirety of Morris Plains, would be drastically affected by runoff flooding from development at Greystone.

Pennacchio called the meeting "a good trip. The state knows exactly where we stand."

The senator, also speaking after the meeting, said it was paramount to make the state understand the sensitivity of the issue to residents.

"We tried to make it clear the tract must remain undeveloped," Pennacchio said.

Webber claimed the effort must not end now.

"The process is going to continue," Webber said. "Morris County has a rich history of keeping open space. The state has a responsibility to its citizens."

Murray said she is just getting

started. "The trip to Trenton came at the last minute," she said. "I put the petition together a week and a half ago. I'm sure I can get thousands of more signatures in the next few weeks."

Druetzler noted the State House Commission made no ruling and will reconvene on Greystone in March 2009.

He said the current slump in the housing market may also benefit the community in that the commission would be under little pressure from developers to move forward quickly.

"That's definitely an advantage for us," Druetzler said.

The various communities involved will now work with the Morris County Board of Freeholders to continue to fight the plan at the state level, he added.

Morris Township Mayor Robert Nace, who could not attend the meeting because of business commitments, has noted Morris Township is also profoundly opposed to any Greystone development.

The Morris Township Committee passed a resolution last month rejecting any development at the facility.

"We need to convince the State House Commission to keep Greystone as open space," Nace said Friday. "The sale of this property would be a disaster for Hanover Avenue."

Nace said that even though the Legislature has not been acting in secret on the matter, it has not been publicizing the possible development either.

"Gov. (Jon) Corzine sees it as a cash cow," Nace said.