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Legislators organize Trenton trip to protest sale of Greystone land

State weighs plan to offer 130 acres for development

*By Abbott Koloff
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A group of Morris County politicians and residents will take a bus to Trenton Monday morning to protest the possible sale of land at Greystone Park Psychiatric Hospital to developers.

The State House Commission, which oversees the sale and leasing of state land, plans to reconsider a decision to sell the land after Morris politicians informed some members that such a deal would contradict state law, state Assemblyman Jay Webber, R-Morris Plains, said on Saturday.

The commission had voted earlier this year to sell a 130-acre parcel of land in Parsippany that includes Greystone's former main building, Webber said. The state had retained a real estate broker to market the property, he said.

But Webber and other local politicians said a state law requires the property be used for open space or recreation if it's not used as part of the hospital.

"It's certainly not to be developed as residential or commercial," Webber said.

The old Greystone building was closed this past summer when a new hospital was opened. The state determined that the old buildings on 130 acres were surplus property. Local officials expressed concern about the potential for traffic that a residential development would bring.

Webber, state Assemblyman Alex DeCroce, R-Parsippany, and state Sen. Joe Pennacchio, R-Montville, issued a press release this week saying that the sale of the property to developers would "increase traffic, congestion and taxes, and decrease the quality of life in Morris Plains and Parsippany."

The land currently is zoned for residential use but not dense development, Parsippany Mayor Michael Luther said.

"There's a concern about intense development on that property," Luther said, adding that the surrounding area doesn't have roads to handle traffic that such a development would produce. "It was never contemplated for development."

DeCroce, one of the sponsors of the law limiting the use of the land surrounding the hospital, said he's concerned someone would try to build affordable housing on the property. Luther said developing the land would increase Parsippany's affordable-housing obligation.

"It needs to be open space or recreation," DeCroce said. "The law needs to be adhered to."