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Group wants to persuade commission to change Greystone vote

Plan to market shuttered hospital property may conflict with law

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A state commission will take a second look Monday at its previous approval of a plan to market and sell the 130-acre site of the old Greystone Park Psychiatric Hospital in Parsippany, with local residents and officials expected to urge the board to reverse course.

They say the State House Commission, which in March voted to sell the abandoned property, including the massive old state hospital, was unaware of a 1999 state law that restricted future uses of the tract to parks, farms, open space or historic uses.

"We are just asking them to adhere to the law," said Assemblyman Jay Webber (R-Morris), who will join a contingent of Morris County legislators and a

group of Greystone area residents who hope to convince the commission to change its vote.

A potential major development of the tract would be undesirable, said area officials.

"You'd be talking about traffic problems and the need for more services and higher taxes," said Morris Plains Mayor Frank Druetzler. "It would really change the complexion of the area."

"We certainly don't want this type of major development to occur," said 10-year Morris Plains resident Maureen Murray, who is organizing a bus trip to Trenton on Monday morning for concerned residents.

A petition drive also is under way in the Greystone area, with residents being asked to sign their names to a statement opposing development of the hospital tract.

Assemblywoman Marcia Karrow (R-Hunterdon), a commission member who could not make the March State House session, said she is aware of the law protecting the Greystone land and thinks the marketing proposal conflicts with the law.

"I know Morris County was concerned about a huge development in an area that was long set aside for a state hospital," said Karrow, "I know they worked hard to ensure that land would never be overdeveloped."

State Sen. Anthony Bucco and Assembly Minority Leader Alex DeCrose (both R-Morris), who are expected to attend Monday's State House session, have said 1999 and 2001 bills they sponsored called for land and structures not needed by the hospital to be used for parks, natural areas or historic uses.

However, Treasury officials questioned the intent of Morris area officials. They said some legislators and

local officials have toured the site with developers for potential projects such as creating a nursing college and retirement housing village.

"We have been working with local government officials in determining the best outcomes for the Greystone property..." said Treasury spokesman Thomas Vincz.

When the old Greystone closed in July, the state declared the hospital and auxiliary structures on 130 acres as surplus. With the blessing of the State House Commission, the Treasury Department retained commercial real estate broker Cushman and Wakefield to prepare the site for sale or lease.

The land, which has been part of the hospital campus for 132 years, is zoned rural residential, according to a town official.

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