

Shenendehowa schools selling patch of land that residents want preserved

Clifton Park residents want open space, but Shen's price may be too high

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Clifton Park

Developers have eaten up most of the routes 9 and 146 Northway corridors in Clifton Park. But there is one patch of land left untouched -- a 34-acre wooded stretch that runs from Route 146 to Moe Road, behind the Hannaford Plaza and the YMCA.

Its owners, the **Shenendehowa School** district, might be handing it over to developers soon: The district wants to sell to the highest bidder at a price no less than \$1.5 million.

But Clifton Park residents, who enjoy the land's well-worn paths, are working to stop them. **Susan Burton** and her Friends of Clifton Park Open Space plan on descending on the district's **Board of Education** meeting at 7 p.m. Tuesday to urge the board to sell the property to the town.

"It's a pristine piece of open space," said Burton. "It's a unique resource that can enhance the value of the area. Once we lose it, it's gone forever."

Burton says that speakers will discuss their vision of a central park for Clifton Park. She will also share a petition with more than 800 signers asking the school board to work with the town so it can acquire the property because "this site can serve as a needed counterbalance to our bustling business district."

The town likes that idea too. But just last August, the school rejected the town's bid for the property.

"We submitted a very attractive offer," said Town Supervisor **Phil Barrett**. "Due to its location and beauty of the parcel, it fits in nicely with the town center plan."

The town offered cash and a partnership with the district's adjacent school, Shatekon Elementary, on developing playing fields. Barrett said he thought the partnership would add value to the proposal because the town could not hit the \$1.5 million minimum bid.

"We did not receive a constructive response," said Barrett who would not disclose the cash total. "I surmised they were not interested in a partnership."

At that point, the school district had only one other bid. It came from DCG Development for \$1.7 million, but the developer withdrew the offer before the school board could act on it.

Days after the town bid was rejected, the school district resubmitted its request for proposals. This time, the town offered more money, again at an undisclosed figure, but did not offer the partnership with the school on playing fields.

Barrett said he has received numerous emails and calls on the land with residents encouraging the town to buy it. While he wants the town to do so, he said, "We have a real concern with trying to compete with developers on the price. Developers have deep pockets and there is a real difference between buying property that you can make money off of and buying to keep it as an open space."

The town does have competition. DCG Development confirmed that it will present another bid to the school before the deadline of Oct. 31.

Burton says she hopes the school will accept the town's offer.

"Together they can keep it in the public domain," said Burton. "The town is financially sound and so too is the school. This is the time to consider what legacy they want to leave behind."

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