

The ADVOCATE®

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 2007
VOL. 177 NO. 314 / 24 PAGES 2 SECTIONS

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NORWALK

Quaker school: White Barn plan is a 'green' one

By Lisa Chamoff
Staff Writer

NORWALK — A Wilton Quaker school that plans to relocate to the 18.5-acre White Barn Theatre property is making sure its new home stays "green."

The Connecticut Friends School, which last year entered into an agreement to purchase the property for \$6 million from a luxury home developer, last week filed site plans with the city's Planning and Zoning

Department.

The new structure, which would accommodate 125 students, is being built to meet Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design standards, which means it will be energy-efficient and environmentally sustainable.

The school said it will keep much of the property as open space.

School officials plan to share the site plans with the public at a

news conference at 1 p.m. Tuesday at the existing school at 317 New Canaan Road in Wilton.

"We'll be talking about the sustainable, or green, aspects of the whole project," said Kim Tsocanos, co-head of the school, founded in 1998.

The school is expected to open in 2009.

The new building's roof will have solar panels and a cistern to collect stormwater runoff to be used in the school's toilets. The

school also will have a geothermal heat system, according to plans.

Landscaping and site work also will be environmentally sensitive, Tsocanos said. Among other things, the school will put in plantings with deep roots to help maintain soil absorbency.

A traffic study filed with the Planning and Zoning Department noted the school would have insignificant impact on traffic along
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Newtown Avenue.

James Rogers, an architect with Butler Rogers Baskett in South Norwalk, said that while green building isn't the firm's specialty, it is working on four local school projects seeking LEED certification.

LEED standards were developed by the U.S. Green Building Council, a coalition of building industry professionals promoting environmentally sound construction.

Certification ensures a building is profitable, environmentally responsible and healthy for its occupants, according to the building council's Web site.

"Green design is a natural ingredient in the approach of schools to designing their educational buildings because environmental concerns and environmental responsibility . . . is a natural component of any school's educational

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Architect

underpinning," Rogers said.

Friends school officials announced last fall that they would have until the end of June to close on the property. The land was purchased from the Lucille Lortel Foundation by James Fieber's New Canaan-based development company for \$4.8 million last spring, after a long battle by neighbors to preserve it as open space.

The school would purchase the 12.5-acre Norwalk part of the property. The land in Westport was put up for sale by the Fieber Group at the end of last year, Tsocanos said.

Fieber could not be reached for comment yesterday.

The property was once home to the White Barn Theatre, an experimental venue founded in 1947 by the late arts patron Lucille Lortel. Lortel died in 1999, and the theater, based in a converted barn, closed in 2002.

Trustees of the Lucille Lortel Foundation, which previously owned the property, had said up to 23 homes could be built there. The school has been raising funds to close on the property by June, and Tsocanos said that although the effort

has been going well, "there's a ways to go before our board feels comfortable closing on the deal June 30."

The school's plans will require approval from the Norwalk Conservation Commission and Zoning Commission. A public hearing would likely be held at the April 18 Zoning Commission meeting.

Tsocanos said the school has been meeting with residents and local neighborhood groups over the past few months to share the plans.

"We've been trying really hard to share the story and to all the way along keep the neighbors involved," Tsocanos said. "We've been meeting with the leaders of the Save Cranbury Association since October, listening to their concerns, listening to how they already use the property so our design plan can . . . work with what they see ideally happening."