

# Quaker school submits plan for White Barn

5 acres would be open space

By Lisa Chamoff  
Staff Writer

WILTON — Officials from the Connecticut Friends School yesterday unveiled their plans for the White Barn Theatre property in Norwalk, which include a 24,000-square-foot environmentally friendly building and open space.

The nine-year-old Quaker school, currently based on Route 106 in Wilton, is looking to close on its purchase of 12.5 acres of the property in Norwalk's Cranbury neighborhood by the end of June.

The school last year entered into an agreement to purchase the entire 18.5-acre property for \$6 million from a luxury-home developer. Kim Tsocanos, co-head of the school, said the school will pay less because the land in Westport was later put up for sale separately. She would not comment on the amount the school will pay.

At a news conference yesterday at which the plans were unveiled, Mayor Richard Moccia said the school did a good job of keeping neighbors and the city apprised of its plans for the property — which it has filed with the city Planning and Zoning Department — and addressing concerns.

The main development is the school building, which would accommodate up to 125 students

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from preschool through eighth grade. The structure would be nestled in a hill at the center of the property, so only a third of the building would be visible from a pond on the property, Tsocanos said.

Co-head Mark Dansereau said most of the development would be on the center of the property, which he said neighbors appreciated.

"Neighbors call it the disappearing building," he said.

The structure would have a "green" roof, covered in soil and grass, which would provide insulation and ecological stormwater management. The roof also would have solar panels to generate electricity and a cistern that

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**Kim Tsocanos**

Co-head, Connecticut Friends School

would collect stormwater runoff to be used in the school's toilets. Windows and skylights are being designed to capture natural light in the classrooms during the day.

The school is looking to meet Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design standards for the building. Tsocanos said school officials hoped to break ground next January and open in September 2009.

The former White Barn The-

atre, founded in 1947 by the late arts patron Lucille Lortel and closed in 2002, would be used as an arts building, with school performances staged there.

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 will seek public funding to put 5 acres of the property, which includes a pond, into a conservation easement and allow public access.

"As long as we own the property, we absolutely want to invite the public onto trails . . . and use it as a teaching tool to the

entire community and region," Tsocanos said.

Joanne Jackson, president of the Save Cranbury Association, which worked with the Norwalk Land Trust to try to preserve the property as open space, said the groups have been meeting with the school over the past several weeks.

"Save Cranbury Association and the Norwalk Land Trust continue to be very supportive of Connecticut Friends School," Jackson said. "Although we have not reached agreement with Connecticut Friends School on the public open space aspect, we are in the process of reviewing their plan and conservation application, and we are optimistic that the school's plans will be sensitive to the environment and neighborhood."

The city's Conservation Commission received the school's plans last night. D. Seeley Hubbard, a member of the commission, commended the school for its plans at the news conference.

"I just think that . . . this is going to be a win-win for everybody in Norwalk," Hubbard said.