

The Hour  
Wednesday, April 25, 2007

# Eco-school plans receive mixed support

## Connecticut Friends School plan proposes to refurbish White Barn Theatre property

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**NORWALK** — Connecticut Friends School's plan to reshape the White Barn Theatre property into a eco-friendly campus won praise from preservationists and criticism from several neighbors during a public hearing before the city's Conservation Commission Tuesday night.

For years, Save Cranbury Association has fought to prevent the picturesque property off Cranbury Road and Newtown Avenue from becoming a housing subdivision. On Tuesday night, JoAnne Jackson of the association lent the group's support to the Friends School plan.

"They have demonstrated a strong commitment to the conservation of

this valuable and environmentally sensitive property," Jackson said. "CFS's plan for this property represents the best practical alternative for the preservation of the White Barn Theater Property."

The plan calls for the Friends School to buy the 15.5-acre property, restore the theater, open an environmentally friendly school and preserve the bulk property as open space. Included are a wildlife sanctuary, walking trails, several acres for public use, and classrooms and organic gardening.

Because of the pond, Stony Brook and other water bodies on the property, Friends School needs a wetlands permit from the Conservation Commission to proceed with the project.

Jackson was one of six people signed up to speak in favor of the plan. Newtown Avenue resident Joe Pugliese was one of three people signed up to speak against the plan or express their concerns.

"We have a flooding problem that's got to be addressed before anything is done with that property. The other thing is whatever is built there should be sewered," Pugliese said. The plan itself "is nice and touchy-feely but does it really work?"

Preceding the hearing, several consultants explained details of the plan. One said it would actually enhance and improve wetlands on the property.

The White Barn Theatre Property

**See CRITICS, A4**

## Critics, supporters speak on eco-school plans

**From A3**

is home to a theater and museum created by the late actress Lucille Lortel. Lortel bequeathed the property to her foundation, which operated the theater for two years after her death.

The Friends School is raising money to buy the property

from the Fieber Group LLC. The asking price is approximately \$5.2 million. Jim Fieber, managing member of the Fieber Group, said the group has invested roughly \$5 million into the property and would not make a profit under the agreement worked out with the school and others backing the

plan.

Fieber dismissed the opposition expressed Tuesday night as coming from a "rogue few" neighbors.

"Ninety-nine percent of neighbors that I have talked to favor the school's application, the preservation of the land, and the few that are here

tonight, for their personal reasons, oppose the school," Fieber said. "I believe in what the school is doing. It's an interesting project. What they're doing has so much merit. This is a wonderful opportunity for the city of Norwalk to have a private day school."