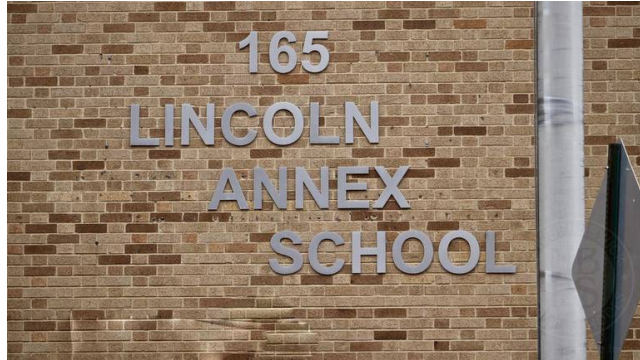

MIDDLESEX COUNTY NEWS

Opponents Of School Sale Want to 'Show Them We're Not Going Away'



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NEW BRUNSWICK, NJ - About 20 residents met Monday night to discuss strategies to block the possible sale of a neighborhood elementary school to Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital.

Their grassroots campaign to halt the sale of the Lincoln Annex School will start with attending the Nov. 19 school board meeting to voice their opposition. They are also planning a protest outside the school at 165 Somerset St. on Nov. 26 to, as one person put it, "show them we're not going away."

The meeting, hosted by the Fifth and Sixth Ward Neighborhood Association, was attended by a diverse group of residents. Some were parents whose children attend the school that is home for about 750 students in grades 3-7. Others were community activists and leaders, such as James Boyle of the Central Jersey Climate Coalition and Teresa Vivar, the executive director of Lazos America.

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Ron Rivers, a North Brunswick resident who ran unsuccessfully for the Assembly seat in the 17th District, attended

the meeting at the Hungarian Heritage Center on Somerset Street.

Along with condemning the possible sale of the Lincoln Annex School, those who attended Monday's meeting said it was important to reach the teachers and the parents of children who attend the school – perhaps by handing out fliers or using social media to loop them in.



New Brunswick Board of Education President Diana Solis said at the Oct. 15 meeting that board administrator/secretary Richard Jannarone and district director of facility design and construction Frank LoDolce had previously met with representatives of the New Brunswick Development Corporation (DEVCO).

Solis said that although the sale of the school was discussed, “There’s nothing on paper. There’s no official offer.”

The potential sale of the school came to light in September. Superintendent of Schools Aubrey Johnson revealed that there had been discussions to sell the school to the state's largest health care corporation, which employs 9,000 doctors among its 34,000 employees in its 11 acute care hospitals, including the one in New Brunswick. Johnson first mentioned the possible sale during an event to celebrate the official opening of the P-TECH program at the Van Dyke Avenue facility.



In June, RWJBarnabas Health and Rutgers Cancer Institute of New Jersey, in partnership with DEVCO, announced plans to build a state-of-the-art, free-standing cancer pavilion in New Brunswick. The estimated cost of the project is

\$750 million.

Officials said the cancer pavilion will be located on the property immediately adjacent to the existing Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital and Rutgers Cancer Institute of New Jersey campus, although its exact location was not identified at the press conference to announce the project.

The Lincoln Annex School is just yards away from RWJ.

DEVCO President Chris Paladino responded to a question about the project at a press conference last month to announce the refurbishing and repairing of the city's train station - a press conference attended by Gov. Phil Murphy.

When asked if it was true that the Lincoln Annex School would be destroyed to make way for the cancer pavilion, Murphy deferred to Paladino.

Paladino stepped forward and said, "The Cancer Institute needs to be directly connected to the existing hospital facility by a bridge. We can't cross the train tracks. We have to be able to move the patients back and forth."

Paladino has announced on his Facebook page that the plan is to start construction on the cancer pavilion in 2020.

John Gantner, the President and CEO of RWJ, fielded questions about the hospital's possible purchase of the Lincoln Annex School during the hospital's annual public meeting last week.

"If we were to choose that site, there would be arrangements made so that students wouldn't be displaced and there would be a new facility for them that would probably be superior to the facilities that they're in today," Gantner.

Gantner, in a video viewed by TAPinto New Brunswick, declined to say where the students would go while a new facility was built.

Attendance at Monday's Fifth and Sixth Ward Neighborhood Association meeting was about half of October's meeting, where several parents voiced their concerns that their students would be sent to the school district's space in what is called the 40 Building or the Warehouse - where the classrooms would be overcrowded.

"It would be sad," said Yadira Garcia, a parent. "If you were to send students from that building to another, it could turn out that there's more than 25 students in a classroom. They would lose some enthusiasm and their grades will be lower."

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