

## **French-American School plan wins backing from environmental, open-space advocates as White Plains weighs rezoning**

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WHITE PLAINS — As the city contemplates restrictive open-space zoning that would make it virtually impossible to build, a host of environmental and open-space advocates on Thursday announced their support for the creation of a \$60 million campus and conservancy on the former Ridgeway Country Club property by the French-American School of New York.

“Turning two-thirds of this defunct private golf course into an 84-acre public nature preserve — at no cost to the city in acquiring, developing or maintaining the facility — will deliver significant social, environmental, educational and economic benefits to White Plains and its citizens,” advocates said in a letter delivered to the Common Council on Wednesday.

The letter was signed by representatives from a broad cross-section of environmental organizations from the Lower Hudson Valley.

The first public hearing on FASNY’s application, which has been vigorously opposed by neighbors, is scheduled for Wednesday.

Last week, the city held the first of two public hearings on the proposed creation of an Open Space Recreational Zoning District, which would affect the FASNY property along with the Fenway, Westchester Hills and Maple Moor golf courses, the Hutchinson River Parkway Reservation and the Mamaroneck River East Branch.

If adopted by the Common Council, the new zoning would require 100- to 300-foot buffers and allow construction on just 5 percent of those properties. FASNY has argued that its application accomplishes the proposed zoning’s main goal of preserving open space.

FASNY hopes to build academic buildings and athletic fields for 1,200 students and 200 to 250 staff members, along with parking, on 46 acres clustered along the Ridgeway side of the 129-acre property. The remainder of the site would be devoted to the “Greens to Green Conservancy,” a public nature preserve that would include walking trails and be maintained by the school.

FASNY board President Mischa Zabotin described the school’s plan as “a triple win for White Plains,” in terms of educational, economic and environmental benefits, at a news conference Thursday.

Asked why FASNY’s proposal is better than leaving the land undeveloped, as some White Plains residents have suggested, Ned Sullivan of Scenic Hudson described it as “a model of good urban planning” that will revive native wildlife, allow groundwater to “heal” and “bring the land back to its natural state.”