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SMALL NEWS IS BIG NEWS

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FASNY Pushes for Community Support

By Andrew Vitelli

With the White Plains Common Council in deliberation on the future of the French-American School of New York, FASNY officials have stepped up their effort to build public support for the project. Last month, post cards were sent to 35,000 households across the city and this weekend the school will hold a seven-hour open house at the site to teach city residents about the proposal for what was the Ridgeway Country Club.

FASNY officials say the recent advocacy efforts are just a continuation on what they've been doing since January 2011, when the school first purchased the 128-acre property.

"We've really tried to reach into the fabric of White Plains and let them know what the plans are," said Mischa Zabolin, chairman of the FASNY Board of Directors. "I think it's natural for us

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FASNY Seeks Community Support

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to continue the outreach. It just sort of makes sense, in a sense, to do that now."

On Friday, beginning at 10 a.m., school officials will be on hand at the golf club's former clubhouse to outline and answer questions about their plans. They've also launched a website - greenstogreen.org - to help in their advocacy.

"I think we've reached a lot of folks," Zabolin said. "I think for the vast majority of people, this seems like a pretty good idea for White Plains."

FASNY's certainly won over some supporters - the Westchester County Association, for one, endorsed the plan -

but whether or not a majority of citizens in the city back the proposal remains a point of dispute. Residents of the Gedney neighborhood remain strongly opposed to project, fearing it will increase the traffic burden, lead to flooding and - because schools are tax-exempt - add to the rest of the city's tax burden.

"It's clear that they are spending a lot of time and money trying to convince people that they're going to be a benefit, and perhaps they try too hard," said Gedney Association President Terence Guerriere, who has long been an outspoken critic of the proposal. "We have wide support from a variety of people all over the city. We'll

demonstrate that at the appropriate times, at the public hearings, when it's supposed to be done."

The French-American School, which promotes bi-lingual and bi-cultural education for children from nursery school through 12th grade, currently has campuses in Scarsdale, Larchmont and Mamaroneck. In purchasing Ridgeway Country Club, the school was hoping to create a unified campus on 46 acres of the property while turning the rest into a conservancy.

For FASNY, winning over the hearts of the public is only half the battle. The school recently submitted its Draft

Environmental Impact Statement, and the Common Council will now deliberate whether the DEIS is complete. Once it is, the city will hold a series of public hearings before the school submits its Final Environmental Impact Statement.

Ultimately, it will be up to Common Council to decide whether FASNY's plan should be approved. Another obstacle FASNY faces is a moratorium on land-use approvals originally passed on April 4, 2011 and extended twice since, most recently on May 14 of this year. The moratorium is now set to expire Sept. 17.