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State School panel wants historic and market studies

By RICK GREEN, THE LACONIA DAILY SUN Dec 20, 2018 Updated 20 hrs ago



Part of the former Laconia State School property was used by the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services. (File photo Adam Drapcho/The Laconia Daily Sun)

LACONIA — Before plans can be formalized for the Laconia State School land, leaders want to know more about what's under the land, the site's history and whether there is a market for some of the businesses that could take shape there.

The Lakeshore Redevelopment Planning Commission decided Thursday to formulate three requests for proposals from consultants.

They want a historic review of what took place on the land, which includes 200 acres of prime real estate at Meredith Center Road and North Main Street. Another request would gauge the market potential of a major amateur sports facility. A third would look at the potential for a market to sell locally sourced produce and other goods.



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Also being considered for the state-owned site under a so-called “hybrid option,” are 200 homes, 120 apartment units, 10,000 square feet of retail, 10,000 square feet of office space, a 100,000-square-foot health care facility and a 150-room hotel.

The school for the developmentally disabled was founded in 1901, but Bald said any historic study would extend to well before that.

Such a study would also look into the possibility that there could be human remains below ground.

The school did not have a dedicated cemetery until 1941. A report by the New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources said that before the cemetery was opened, residents were buried in unmarked graves on school grounds, but no paper trail has emerged as to where these unmarked graves may be located.

“There’s been rumor or suggestions that that’s the case, but nobody has said to me, ‘It says here we had to bury somebody at this location,’” said George Bald, commission chairman.

“Due to an abundance of caution, it’s why we’re having an archeologist involved with us while we are digging the test pits and going forward, before doing any digging at all we would alert people that there is a possibility – it may be a very small possibility – that somebody could have been buried on the site.

“I don’t expect that if it did occur that it would have occurred in most of the places we’re going to do development where there are buildings. In the list of things that I have to worry about, we’ll take care of it if we ever found something, but I don’t foresee that is going to be a major issue.”

He said it’s possible that before the school had a designated cemetery in 1941, people were not buried on site, but instead taken to another cemetery and buried in a pauper’s grave.

Meanwhile, test pits and wells have been placed on the property to see if there is any underground pollution. Results should be available in March. Also, ground-penetrating radar is being used to determine if there are underground tanks or other objects.

The commission will draw up a budget request to be considered by the Legislature to fund study and other work necessary at the site.

The next public meeting of the Lakeshore Redevelopment Planning Commission was set for 9 a.m. on Jan. 17 at Rist-Frost-Shumway Engineering, 71 Water St., Laconia.

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