

'Won't Sell' - Site Owners

College Facing Thorny Path

By JAMES T. PRIOR
Staff Writer

The selection of a 265-acre tract in Saddle River as the site for the State College of North Jersey is far from settled.

While six of the college's eight trustees approved locating the main campus of the four-year liberal arts institution in the southwest corner of the junction of Route 17 and Allendale Avenue, near the Allendale and Waldwick borders, no one has approached the owners of the property to buy it.

Additionally, the State Board of Higher Education must approve the site selection; some owners are reluctant to sell at the indicated price of \$10,000 an acre; an engineering study of the land is yet to be undertaken; and a public hearing is to be held on the selection.

Previous Rebuff

Moreover, six years ago Seton Hall University, which still owns 184 acres to the east and at the northeast section of Allendale-Route 17, was rebuffed when it proposed building a similar campus.

At that time residents and officials opposed it and pointed to an amendment of a zoning ordinance prohibiting institutions of higher learning in the borough. That amendment, by the way, was adopted when Seton Hall bought the land in 1960.

A spokesman at Keller Realty Associates Inc., Rutherford, said yesterday that his firm had made the study of the site for the college trustees. The trustees, in voting Wednesday night in favor of the tract, said the land might be purchased for as low as \$10,000 an acre, based on preliminary conclusions of expert real estate appraisers.

The board said the two-acre residentially-zoned undeveloped property is owned by 16 persons or companies.

A check of the properties disclosed that the owners were not informed of the decision to purchase their land.

Other houses in the area were taken down or are in the process of coming down to make room for the interchange. The interchange will take about 12 of the 277 acres in the tract, resulting in the 265-acre parcel.

The remainder of the acreage is owned by real estate developers who want to build homes.

Lachto Enterprise owns 68.6 acres and a sister firm, S. R. Seventeen Corp. owns 18 acres. The rest is owned by Modern Rural Homes.

Keller Realty Associates es-

Even if the State Board of Higher Education approves the Saddle River site for the State College of North Jersey, there are still many obstacles to overcome before the campus becomes a reality.

estimates the 277-acre tract, assessed at \$1.4 million (minus the 12 acres taken by the state for the interchange) has a market value of \$2,350,000. The trustees feel it can be acquired at \$10,000 an acre.

A poll of real estate brokers and appraisers in the Saddle River area revealed mixed opinions. Some said the price tag should be \$10,000 to \$12,000 an acre. Others say this is much too low.

Expert Speaks

Alexander Summer Jr. of Alexander Summer Companies, Tenauck and Newark real estate brokers and mortgage bankers, lives in Saddle River. Speaking as a resident yesterday, he said he thought the land was underpriced at \$10,000 an acre. He said some land recently changed hands for about \$25,000 an acre.

But he points out that residential properties have septic tanks and their own wells. Thus to develop land for residential use he said it would require curbing, sidewalks, and utilities such as electricity, gas, and telephone. But sewer lines and water piping are not needed, he added.

Those who claim the \$10,000 figure is realistic point out the parcel is virgin land and another \$10,000 an acre may have to be spent to make the land usable. They say the land at \$25,000 an acre is for

the site on improved locations.

There are similarities and differences between this case and the purchase of land for construction of The Bergen Community College in Paramus.

That 165-acre site was acquired for \$3 million, but it was an improved parcel — in fact it was the Orchard Hills golf course. The price was almost \$19,000 an acre. And the sewer connections and a secondary access road cost an added \$421,600.

A college on the Saddle River site would increase traffic problems on Route 17 because of the lack of east-west roads.

There has been talk in recent years of constructing a marginal road directly through the Saddle River property, parallel to Route 17. This would also help to increase the price of land adjacent to the marginal road.

If the State Board of Higher Education approves the decision of the trustees of the State College of North Jersey, the state could condemn the property and make a "fair" settlement on the land — regardless of the property owners' reluctance to sell. Saddle River itself owns about two acres of the land.

But in this case, the matter would most assuredly go to court. The state would present expert real estate testimony on how much it thought the property was worth, and the owners would present their own battery of experts. Then an equitable price would be determined.

A spokesman at Seton Hall said yesterday the institution

has no immediate plans to develop its 184.6-acre tract. He pointed out that his was a private institution and was turned down by Saddle River on its campus plans, but that the State College of North Jersey is state-owned and would not have to go through local officials. Seton Hall pays taxes yearly on the vacant land.

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