

## Dozens urge Board of Ed to preserve Clifton Park wild space

By [Stephen Williams](#) October 12, 2016



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Clifton Park residents line up to speak about preserving open land at a meeting of the Shenendehowa Board of Education on Tuesday.

Dozens of residents on Tuesday turned out to urge the Shenendehowa Board of Education to preserve 34 acres of district-owned vacant land as a future park.

Ten people spoke at the board meeting, all urging some kind of deal with the town of Clifton Park to preserve the property, which the district is contemplating selling.

"As the town center itself becomes more dense, open space becomes more valuable," said Susan Burton, a leader of Friends of Clifton Park Open Space who spoke at the meeting. "Unless the town acquires it first, it will be lost forever for a public purpose."

About 50 people attended the meeting, nearly all brought out by the land issue.

Located between the school campus's Moe Road border and the town's commercial zone, the school district acquired it in 1970 during a period of expansion, but has never made use of it. It is primarily wooded, but borders commercial development on the east. It has frontage on Clifton Park Center Road.

The school district, having determined it no longer has any use for the land, has put it up for sale through a sealed request for proposal process. The responses are due back by Oct. 31.

The district went through a similar process earlier this year, and received one bid, from DCG Development, the downtown area's major commercial developer. DCG, however, later withdrew its \$1.7 million bid, leading to the new request for proposals.

Open space advocates have been pressuring both the school district and the town to strike a deal that would move it into town ownership and allow it to remain open space and perhaps a public park.

Advocates said they have collected more than 800 signatures on a petition calling the district to preserve the land, rather than take the highest bid.

"If you decide to sell to commercial development, we will see more traffic, more macadam parking lot, possibly more hotels and stores," said resident Joe Niall. "We won't see what we need downtown, which is open space."

The district could sell the property to the town or even donate it under state rules that allow transfers of land, as long as it will continue to be for as public use.

"We had discussions with the school district in the spring and again into the summer," said Town Supervisor Phil Barrett. "We've made two very attractive offers to the district, but we have been unsuccessful."

Barring an unexpected last-minute agreement, Barrett said the town will submit a response to the RFP. He wouldn't disclose how much the town will offer.

"My concern from the beginning was competing with large developers," Barrett said. "It's a much different situation with a private entity buying it for a profit and the town buying for public purposes."

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