

DEER PARK

School's out — it's time for SENIORS

Pupils left 28 years ago — building likely to be razed for 55-plus community

BY RACHEL O'BRIEN
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The shuttered George Washington School in Deer Park is expected to be in the hands of a developer within months, more than four years after school district residents voted to sell the property.

The developer, Engel Berman, plans to build 200 apartments for seniors.

In 2014, school district residents voted to sell the onetime elementary school, now closed more than 28 years ago.

The 10-acre parcel was originally slated for one-bedroom apartments with dens, but the Babylon Town Board changed its code in May to allow two-bedroom units for seniors, in time for this \$30 million development.

The project, the "Seasons at Deer Park," will include 14 residential buildings for residents 55 and older. The rent will be about \$2,000 per month and 40 units will be designated as affordable, according to plans submitted to the town.

It will include a recreational building with a swimming pool and a building to be used for school district offices.

The developer will also build a single-family house to sell on Bowling Lane, which is on the same lot.

After the school closed decades ago, a day care center rented space in the building and the town ran a community center. After the building was sold, the community center was closed and a new program opened at the Memorial School building on Homer Avenue. The day care center, Little Scholars Child Center, left the building in June 2015.

Engel Berman has all the necessary town approvals and is awaiting final approval from the Suffolk County Department of Health Services to dispose of



The George Washington School, more than four years after the town voted to sell it, nears demolition.

its wastewater through Suffolk County Sewer District 3, said the developer's attorney, Chris Kent of Farrell Fritz.

"We're probably a month away or so," he said, adding the school district is looking to close in May or June.

Once the county health department greenlights the plan, Engel Berman will apply for a town building permit, Kent said. Construction is expected to take 18 months once it begins, according to Bram Weber, a Melville-based lawyer for the developer.

That can't come soon enough for some residents, including Lamont Wilson, who leads the group Concerned Citizens of Deer Park.

He lives on Skidmore Road near the school and is one of many to call the property an eyesore.

Look back and ahead

2014 The year that Deer Park voters passed a referendum to sell the George Washington School property.

350 Number of parking spots the new project will have.

200 Number of apartments developer Engel Berman expects to build.

18 Number of months that construction is expected to take.

14 Number of buildings that will house the 55 and older residents.

"Right now, that school's just sitting there, idle," he said. "We need something there."

Wilson is also concerned with vandalism and other potential criminal activity and

had asked the school district to install a fence around the property, a request officials denied.

Speaking through a representative, Superintendent Eva J. Demyen said, "The district has increased security measures during all hours of the day at Washington in partnership with the Suffolk County Police Department. A fence does not deter vandalism."

Another resident, Donnell Cooke, lives on Tell Avenue near the school, and wishes the community center hadn't been closed years ago before the sale was complete.

"It was basically a place for the kids in the neighborhood, they have a place to go," he said.

The district representative said programs left the school when it "was unsafe for any occupancy" but didn't elaborate on what made it unsafe.

Around LI

Demolition of 2 homes on menu

Brookhaven Town officials, at Thursday's town board meeting, are expected to set public hearings to demolish a pair of Mastic Beach homes.

One of the homes is on Connelly Drive, the other on Laurelton Drive. Engineers have deemed both homes unsafe.

Brookhaven officials last month ordered the demolition of four vacant houses that engineers said were unsafe and structurally unsound.

The town board on Feb. 14 voted 7-0 to demolish those houses on Radburn Drive in Farmingville and Huguenot Drive, Lynbrook Drive and Orchid Drive in Mastic Beach.

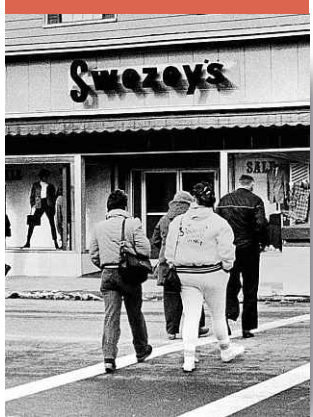
The houses had problems such as damaged roofs, litter and debris, overgrown grass, asbestos and mold, and all had been cited for property maintenance and fire code violations, town officials said.

Thursday's meeting at Brookhaven Town Hall at 1 Independence Hill in Farmingville starts at 5 p.m.

— DEON J. HAMPTON

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