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Brenner: Darien School District Shouldn't Buy Pear Tree Point School Property

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Schools Superintendent Dan Brenner in the past two weeks has gone from seeming reservations to outright rejection of the idea to buy the land and buildings of Pear Tree Point School, which is going defunct at the end of the school year.

Brenner explained his reasons to the Board of Education last week: The property, located on a prime piece of real estate in town, is too pricey; and the buildings aren't suited to classroom sizes of Darien Public Schools. Also, there's no cafeteria. Brenner also said that the property doesn't fit in with the master plan for the district's facilities.

"We have taken a look, just because a lot of community members have approached me, saying, 'Did you know? Did you know?' and the truth is, I didn't know" until recently that the school was closing, he told the

board.

Board of Education members didn't respond to Brenner's recommendation. The decision about whether or not to buy the land would be made by First Selectman Jayme Stevenson, the Board of Selectmen, the Board of Finance and the Representative Town Meeting. Any decision for the school district to use the property is ultimately in the hands of the Board of Education.

On Sept. 27, Stevenson [told Darienite.com](http://darienite.com) that she hadn't found any pressing need for the town to have the expensive tract, which is about five acres in size and includes the school buildings. "I don't know that there's anything there for us," she said at the time.

In a separate interview on Sept. 27, Brennan told Darienite.com that he had already visited the school. Headmaster David Trigaux said he announced the closing to parents of students there at a meeting on Sept. 6 that it would close.

Back in September, Brenner wasn't yet closing any options, but he expressed no interest in buying the property and said the town may be facing cuts in state aid, so town officials would be expected to take that into consideration.

At last Tuesday's meeting of the Board of Education, Brenner mentioned that there was an asking price for the property that was higher than the school district should pay.

Here's the rest of Brenner's statement to the board at its Tuesday, Oct. 10 meeting:

"[A]fter some exploration and actually visiting the site, and looking at it in the context, potentially of a larger master plan and the work that we [the Board of Education and district administration] did last year [on it], it becomes very clear to me that the site and school, while in pristine condition and really a nice facility, really does not fit inside the context of items that were talked about as it applies to our master plan."

"And so, while it initially might appear as something that might be very attractive because — potentially, for example, could we move [...] our ELP [Early Learning Program for younger children] there?

"The answer is, it really isn't a good fit: The space itself and the classrooms are very small; there is no cafeteria; there would be a lot of adjustments, and the price point, as you would expect, given the location — what a wonderful spot it is — really doesn't seem to fit, given the context of the master plan, and certainly in the context of the uncertainty in Hartford."

The state fiscal situation is expected to mean cutbacks or even elimination of state education money and other state funds that regularly come to Darien.

"I wanted to say that publicly because people of good intentions were approaching me, indicating that this

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might be something that would work, but I would suggest it would not be our recommendation, given the visit and what we understand the asking price would be."