

## **Proposed New Site for Fitch Academy: Office Building Across Post Rd from Cemetery**

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With the agreement to house Fitch Academy at Darien Library expiring at the end of the school year, the school district has an agreement with the owner of a commercial building at [1540 Post Road](#) to move the program there, as long as the Planning and Zoning Commission agrees.

A school district official, Facilities Director Michael Lynch, appeared before the P&Z on Tuesday as the first step in getting approval. The P&Z voted unanimously to let the proposal for use of part of the building proceed. In March, the district plans to provide a detailed plan for use of the space, where as many as 30 high school students would spend their school day.

Fitch Academy is an alternative program for high schoolers who find it emotionally difficult to attend regular school — a problem that can lead to absences, district officials have said. The program now has about 13 students, and the Board of Education would like to see the program expand, initially with 15 to 20 students, and eventually up to 24 to 30, Lynch said.

The Board of Education is considering allowing students from other school districts to use the program, as long as those students don't replace Darien students who need to go to Fitch, he said. (That might lower the cost of the program, since out-of-town students would pay to attend it, district officials have said.)

The owner of the building, located across the Post Road from Spring Grove Cemetery would provide a space

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of about 2,400 square feet, with two classrooms, a break room or break area for students, an room where a counselor could meet with a student and an office for teachers. The full-time equivalent of four teachers and other staff will use the building at any one time, Lynch said.

For a space where students would be educated, the district needs to get approvals from fire marshals and other officials from both the town and state, Lynch said, and stricter building requirements are needed, he said.

The landlord has agreed to install sprinklers and an elevator in the two-story building to meet those requirements, Lynch said. Handicapped access to the building will also be improved, he said.

Only smaller school buses and some cars would be used to transport the students, Lynch said.