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Embankment vote on agenda

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The Jersey City City Council will vote tonight on whether to apply for a \$4.9 million state loan to help buy and develop as open space the Sixth Street Embankment - land a private developer owns and has shown no intention of selling.

In July 2005, Steve Hyman purchased the eight-block elevated old railroad embankment and plans to build two-family homes.

But almost immediately, city officials challenged the sale, claiming the previous owner, Conrail, had no right to sell the property without first giving the city the option to buy it for the same \$3 million price Hyman reportedly paid.

This case is pending before the federal Surface Transportation Board in Washington.

In the meantime, Jersey City Mayor Jerramiah Healy has announced he wants the embankment to be used for an extension of the Hudson-Bergen Light Rail tracks and environmental activists have continued their campaign to preserve the land as open space. Healy envisions an extension of the Light Rail through the Bergen Arches into Secaucus.

Assistant Business Administrator Gregory J. Corrado told council members at their Monday caucus that the city's plan is to use half the embankment for the Light Rail tracks and the other half for open space.

The resolution up for a vote is to file the loan application, Corrado said. The council would have to vote again to accept the loan, which would come in November.

Ward A Councilman Michael Sottolano objected to the city taking on added debt for a property it doesn't own. Ward B Councilwoman Mary Spinello said she hadn't seen "diddly" from the more than \$30,000 the city has spent pursuing the Surface Transportation Board case.

Corrado said the loan wouldn't add much to the city's debt load.

Maureen Crowley, volunteer coordinator of the Embankment Preservation Coalition, said 75 percent of the loan, which would come from the state Environmental Infrastructure Trust, would be interest-free, while interest on the rest of the money would be less than 2 percent.

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