

News

[Home](#) / [Amblergazette](#) / [News](#)

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Upper Dublin Township poised to buy building in Fort Washington Office Park

Library could move to office park

By Linda Finarelli lfinarelli@21st-centurymedia.com @lkfinarelli on Twitter Sep 25, 2017 Updated Sep 25, 2017



The front of 520 Virginia Drive. The front of 520 Virginia Drive.

Bob Graham Jr. Photography

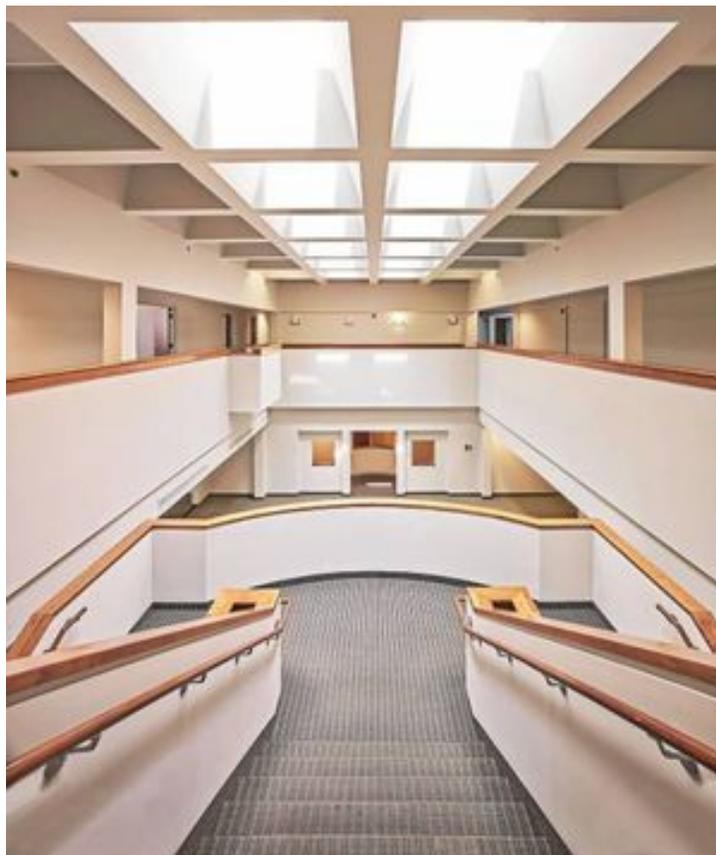
UPPER DUBLIN >> Upper Dublin Township is poised to spend \$5 million to purchase a two-story office building in the Fort Washington Office Park and “repurpose” it, in part, as a new home for the township library.

An agreement of sale has been negotiated for the former Rorer pharmaceutical research facility — the maker of Maalox — at 520 Virginia Drive, according to Township Manager Paul Leonard. Settlement is expected within 45 days, he said Sept. 20.

The board of commissioners voted 5-2 on Sept. 12 to authorize the purchase of the 7.12-acre property from Brookwood Philadelphia LLC in an amount not to exceed \$5,080,960, according to the resolution approved.

Township staff is charged with reviewing “options for the sale of any under-utilized township asset” to offset the acquisition costs and recommend ways to obtain public input “to assist with the design and repurposing of the building,” the resolution says.

According to Montgomery County tax records, Brookwood purchased the 65,400-square-foot building — 56,120 square feet of office space, a 6,400-square-foot auditorium/theater, and 2,800-square-foot support area — in 2015 for \$4.8 million. In 2007, it sold for \$7 million.



A view of the atrium.A view of the atrium.

Bob Graham Jr. Photography



A corner view of the main, large area on the second floor.A corner view of the main, large area on the second floor.

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Built in 1987, the building, vacant for 18 months, “has good bones,” Leonard said, during a Sept. 15 tour. The current vision is for the library to move, possibly to the second floor of the building, along with some township offices, he said.

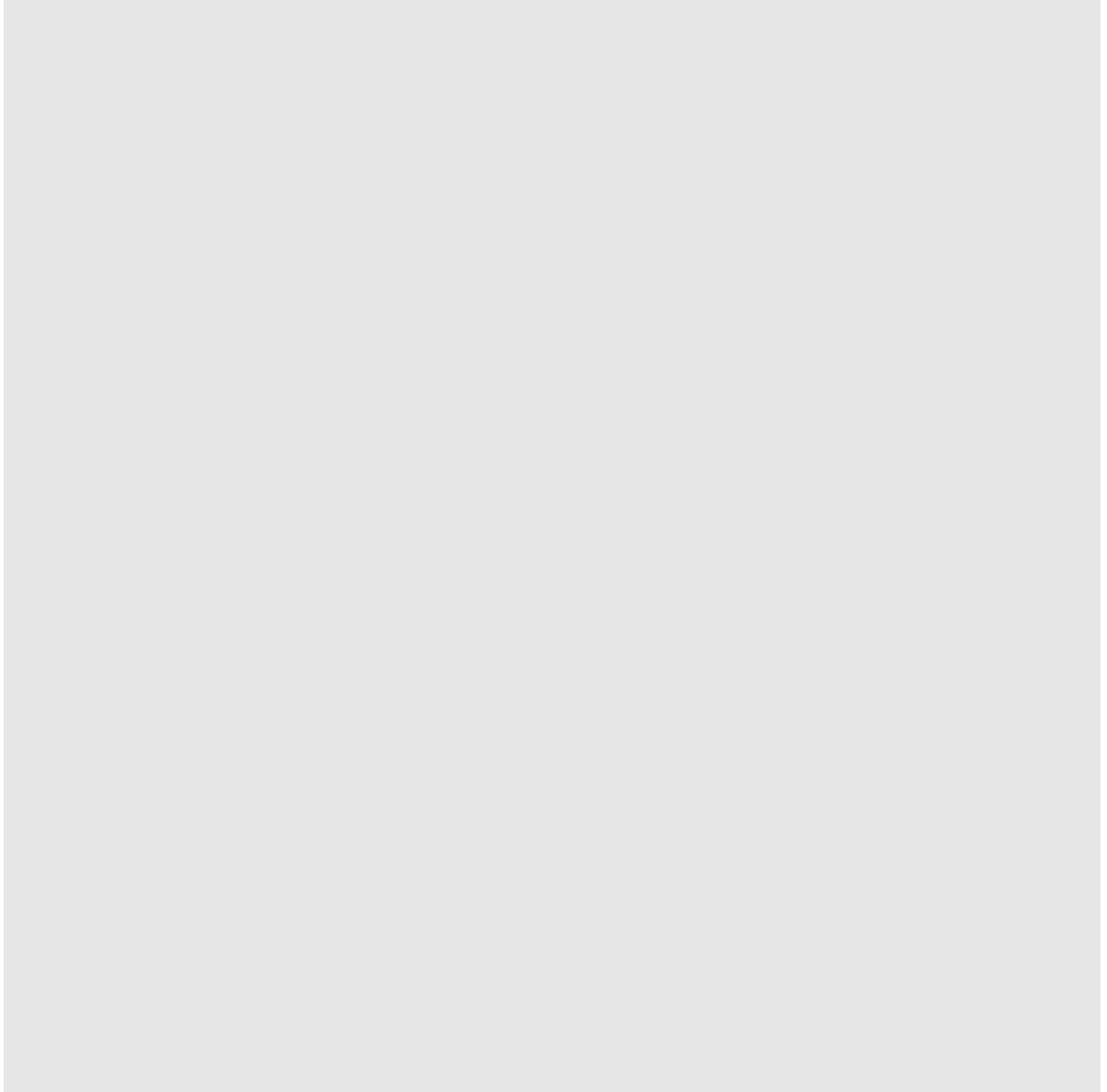
With 307 parking spots and a helipad, the property is adjacent to a 27.5-acre township-owned parkland.

"It's a stretch for the commissioners," Leonard said. "The numbers are big for us, but Upper Dublin is in good financial condition."

A township press release says the project "requires no additional tax burden to cover the projected expense."

"We can pay cash, but would borrow for it," Leonard said, noting the township has an Aa1 bond credit rating.

"Right now we could repurpose it with wraparound debt" — about \$8.9 million to buy and repurpose — "and not have to raise taxes," due to a debt drop-off, Leonard said. "It has to be less money than building new."



The conference room off the atrium at 520 Virginia Drive.The conference room off the atrium at 520 Virginia Drive.

Bob Graham Jr. Photography

A master plan of the municipal complex in 2016 recommended more storage, more meeting space for community and staff interaction, more flexible community meeting space and more library space. Building a free-standing library behind the township building was among the options.

The library, built in the 1980s, had 175,000 visitors last year, Leonard said. Librarians and libraries are “needed even more” today, “due to the amount of information out there.”

A township fact sheet says the library “is not in step with the menu of services — from traditional to new tech — that have become the staple of a modern library.”

Costs to build a new library were about \$300/square foot, he said. The Virginia Drive building comes in at about \$90/square foot and would cost anywhere from \$50 to \$80/square foot to repurpose it, which is “cheaper than building new,” he said.

Leonard estimated \$12,000 to \$13,000 monthly utility, custodial and security costs for the building.

The second-floor space Leonard envisions for the library has high windows and canister-style lights. Preliminary engineering analysis is that “it can handle the weight of the books,” he said.

