



Jessica Nicosia/For the Recorder

The World Peace and Health Organization has built a separate access road, which it calls "Friendship Road" as required in the purchase agreement for what is now the Buddhist group's headquarters. A surveying stick installed by the Shrine of Our Lady of Martyrs marks where the road crosses onto the shrine property, and a barricade blocks the other access road to the WPHO building.

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"We fell in love [with the building] at first sight," said Wong. "The reason for being here is to invest. It is a place that should attract tourism and also prosper the economy."

The purchase agreement included an addendum that required the WPHO to build its own access road to the property by 2007, according to Father George Belgarde, director of the shrine. The leader of WPHO, Holy Master Ziguang Shang Shi, speaking through a translator, said that the road was finished by 2009.

The new access road was named "Friendship Road" by the WPHO. After it was built, the WPHO and tourists visiting the shrine continued to use both roads to access the former retreat house, now the headquarters of the Western Supreme Buddha Temple and the WPHO.

According to Wong and Holy Master Shi, there was a friendly relationship between the WPHO and the former Shrine Director Father Murray. He allowed a portion of "Friendship Road" to be built a few feet onto the shrine property and did not oppose the continued use of the shrine's road to access the temple.

There has been little communication between the WPHO members and Father Belgarde since he became the shrine director, according to both parties.

On April 1, shrine employees erected a blockade on the Shrine Road just before the Buddha Temple, preventing anyone from accessing the it using the road.

Signs installed by the shrine mark the barricade as the "End of Shrine Road" and warn drivers "No Driving on [the] Lawn" to go around the barricade.

The WPHO has since erected a sign behind the barricade that reads "Welcome to Western Shrine. Please enter via Friendship Road. Thank you," with an accompanying map to access to Friendship Road.

The Shrine Road that used to lead to the temple also leads to Father Belgarde's personal residence and the shrine offices. Signs at the bottom of that road

now read "dead end".

Father Belgarde's lawyers also sent a letter to the WPHO on April 1, which indicated that the blockade was built because of "tremendous traffic" on the shrine's road leading to the temple.

When asked about the blockade and the property dispute, Father Belgarde declined to comment extensively because the issue has been brought to court, beyond saying that there is "no dispute."

Elise Miao, a preacher and member of the WPHO, claims that Father Belgarde once blocked the access road with a riding lawnmower when she was driving on it, making angry gestures at her.

"In the time when we first bought this property, we knew that we had to build our own road," said Wong. "Nothing had been mentioned that after we build our own road they would block the road. It is an isolation not only physically but also spiritually. And also it is a very bad impression ... having confrontations in this tourism spot."

In response to the question of "tremendous traffic" mentioned in the letter, Wong said, "I think that is maybe an excuse."

After the blockade was put in place, a member of the WPHO tried to contact the shrine to resolve the issue, but was unsuccessful according to Wong. Member Yik Cheng then filed a lawsuit against the shrine, Father Belgarde, and maintenance worker Larry Steiger for erecting the blockade.

The crux of the dispute is in the interpretation of the addendum to the sale of the former retreat. The shrine employees apparently thought that the construction of the new access road meant the WPHO would no longer use the shrine's road for any reason, and the WPHO seem to have believed that both roads would continue to provide access to the temple.

Montgomery County Judge Felix Catena presided over the first court appearance by Father Belgarde and the WPHO representatives on June 19, where he

adjourned until July 18, during which time the two groups were supposed to meet privately to come to an agreement.

A meeting date was scheduled for June 25 at 10:30 am. Father Belgarde was present with his lawyer, and six members of the WPHO planned to attend the meeting. When they arrived, there was a verbal argument, according to Wong and other witnesses.

"[Father Belgarde] just yelled at us to get out of his property. They shut the door and then kept every one of us out of there," said Wong.

"We tried but it didn't work," said Belgarde of the meeting, citing the fact that there were six members with "no authority" as the reason the meeting did not take place.

On July 3, a surveying stick was placed in the middle of Friendship Road where it crosses into the shrine's property, according to Maio. The WPHO has left it in place and driven around it to avoid confrontations.

The WPHO has had members write letters to the head of the New York Jesuit province, President Obama, the Pope, and local mayors for support, according to Wong and Maio. "[The blockade] is an action of confrontation. An action to arouse a dispute between neighbors," said Holy Master Shi. "We understand that the whole district is Catholic people, but we are being friendly to them, we are not going to have any conflict with them."

"There is no dispute," contends Father Belgarde. "[The road] is the shrine's property."

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announcement.

Critics say local prosecutors and the standing state ethics panel already have authority to investigate lobbying violations and prosecute crimes, but the recent criminal cases against state legislators have all come from federal prosecutors.

David Grandeau, New York's former lobbying enforcer, questioned whether this new temporary group will be any more effective than the state Commission on Public Integrity established with both ethics and lobbying oversight in 2007 under then-Gov. Eliot Spitzer and its successor, the Joint Commission on Public Ethics, that took over under Cuomo, both with some fanfare.

They collectively have had dozens of commissioners with sterling resumes and reputations, he said.

Grandeau compared the commissions to the Peanuts character Charlie Brown — always having the football pulled away at the last minute.

"It's one ethics reform after another," he said.

The Green Party, whose agenda includes environmental and social activism, said it's doubtful this commission will do much to prosecute elected officials, calling it a bully pulpit for Cuomo to talk about ethics and campaign finance reform in the Legislature but not get anything done.

Cuomo said he fell back on appointing a commission, whose mandate includes investigating campaign finance enforcement at the Board of Elections, after efforts failed to get campaign finance reform through the Legislature.

He said the new mandatory public disclosures of state officials' outside financial interests by JCOPE, combined with this new Moreland Commission, create a powerful combination.

"It turns out Gov. Cuomo is much more flexible than he wanted anybody to know," said ex-Assemblyman Richard Brodsky, noting the cooperation here between Cuomo's office and Schneiderman's. The key commission powers come from the referral to the attorney general, he said.

Commission chief counsel is Kelly Donovan, in charge of

Schneiderman's criminal division since November.

John Amodeo from the attorney general's senior staff is the commission's legislative director.

The commission's chief of investigations, Danya Perry, was an assistant U.S. attorney in Manhattan for 11 years and deputy chief of the criminal division when she left in April.

"I think it's great news to have someone like her in a position like that where there's such an obvious need for investigating," said Neil Barofsky, who tried cases with Perry and was later inspector general of the federal bailout program for troubled financial institutions. "She has all the ability and all the talent to do the job she's being asked to do. A lot of that depends on what the resource allocation is, how much support it has."

Commission Executive Director Regina Calcaterra, a former corporate attorney, directed Cuomo's special commission that investigated the Long Island Power Authority's response to Hurricane Sandy with a report forwarded recently to federal prosecutors.

She ran for state Senate on Long Island in 2010 but was kicked off the ballot by a judge when her opponent challenged her eligibility as a resident.

Calcaterra said the staff will be expanding and work from offices in New York City and Albany. She declined to discuss details and said internal commission deliberations are confidential.

Cuomo said the commission will have whatever funding it deems necessary — a significant problem for the last Moreland Commission.

John Feerick, who headed the special seven-member Commission on Government Integrity established by then-Gov. Mario Cuomo in 1987, wrote in 1990 that the Legislature funded it but specified no money could be used to investigate its management or affairs.

The commission, whose main mission was fact-finding, negotiated the ability to examine legislative party committees and revealed "the enormous sums of money" given by corporations, political committees and individuals, he wrote.

Lottery numbers

ALBANY (AP) — Here are the New York Lottery numbers selected Monday:

MIDDAY DAILY: 9-5-4

LUCKY SUM: 18

MIDDAY WINFOUR: 7-9-3-4

LUCKY SUM: 23

EVENING DAILY: 1-1-4

LUCKY SUM: 6

EVENING WINFOUR: 5-1-6-8

LUCKY SUM: 20

PICK 10: 9-11-16-26-34-37-38-39-45-46-47-52-56-58-60-62-65-70-75-77

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