

Racetrack makes bid

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RexCorp offers \$100 million for EPCAL recreation complex

[By Tim Gannon](#)

EPCAL Centre was back before the Town Board Tuesday, this time with a smaller racetrack but the same offer — \$100 million for the town-owned land in Calverton.

A little more than a week after Riverhead Resorts made a revised proposal to the Town Board to buy 755 acres of recreational land at the Calverton Enterprise Park for \$100 million, EPCAL Centre, a group headed by RexCorp and Long Island Destination Group, made its revised proposal for the same land.

But they didn't revise much. The only major difference from the proposal made in March was a reduction in the number of seats slated for a proposed auto racetrack on the property.

The earlier proposal called for 40,000 seats, with a possible expansion to 80,000. The new proposal limits the racetrack seating to 10,000, with no plans for expansion.

Scott Rechler, the chairman and chief executive officer of RexCorp, said the racetrack was reduced in size in response to feedback from the community. Noise and traffic were two of the community's concerns, he said Tuesday.

The 10,000-seat track would be slightly larger than Riverhead Raceway, and would run the same type of cars as Riverhead Raceway, Mr. Rechler said.

EPCAL Centre, like Riverhead Resorts, is offering \$100 million for the 755 acres, although Supervisor Phil Cardinale said Riverhead Resorts is expected to increase its offer. In the recent sale of about 300 acres of industrial land at EPCAL, a bidding war between prospective buyers caused the price to double over a few months.

The town eventually sold the land to Rechler Equity Partners, a group headed by members of Scott Rechler's family, including his brother. For many years, the Rechlers ran Reckson Associates.

When Mr. Cardinale suggested that EPCAL Centre might want to increase its offer, Scott Rechler didn't bite, saying there's a difference between industrial and recreational projects.

"Industrial properties are industrial properties," he said. "There's not a lot of difference between one and the other. Here, we have two very different plans."

He said the Town Board needs to consider which proposal is best for the community and which applicant has the financial wherewithal and experience to carry out plans. Money, he said, should not be the only issue the town considers. If the town chooses his proposal as the most promising, Mr. Rechler said, then they can discuss price.



Rendering of EPCAL Centre.
News-Review photo courtesy of
RexCorp

The rest of the EPCAL Centre proposal calls for an Equestrian Center, a 400-room resort hotel, a 250-room hotel and conference center, an animal rescue shelter, a family entertainment park, seven outdoor multipurpose fields, a Long Island Motorsports Museum and a Veterans Museum, an 8,000-seat indoor arena and a 15,000-seat outdoor amphitheater, a "Motor Sports Country Club" with a 2.5-mile road course for honing driving skills, and the oval racetrack, including both quarter-mile and three-quarter-mile tracks.

In addition, the proposal calls for 160 fractional-interest townhouses in the equestrian center, and 428 fractional-interest townhouses in the Motor Sport Country Club. There also would be 100 luxury corporate condominiums in the Raceway Village. The homes would not be occupied by permanent residents, and thus would not impact the school system, Mr. Rechler said.

The project would cost \$1 billion to complete, would generate about \$15 million a year in property taxes, and would create 2,000 construction jobs and 2,500 permanent jobs, Mr. Rechler said.

Riverhead Resorts, the other proposal, also calls for an equestrian area, a hotel and conference center, and both indoor and outdoor recreation facilities. But its centerpiece is an indoor mountain for skiing.

Matthew Frank, a vice president at RexCorp, said EPCAL Centre meets the town's zoning for the Planned Recreation Park district in EPCAL. The only area it doesn't comply with is the code requirement for the hotel subdistrict to be a single, contiguous piece of land, he said. Mr. Cardinale asked that the EPCAL Centre applicants meet with town planning director Rick Hanley on the zoning issues. He said the proposed uses may comply with zoning, but there are other zoning issues that must be looked at as well.

The supervisor also said afterward that he disagrees with Mr. Rechler's assessment that the sales price should be determined after the town selects a developer. "This is not the land of Oz and money is a very substantial part of the equation that the board is required

to balance," he said. "I don't think it is wise to defer a discussion of price until after the selection of a project proponent."

Mr. Cardinale said more specifics are needed, including the amount of square footage involved and whether or not subdivision approvals will be needed prior to the closing.

"This project, like the other one, is clearly a project of landmark significance for the region, but it also comes with intense impacts," Mr. Cardinale said.

Despite the reduction of the raceway's seating capacity, some Calverton residents who attended the presentation still oppose the proposal.

Hal Lindstrom is concerned about the noise and traffic generated by the racetrack. He said he has spoken to many Calverton residents who favor the Riverhead Resorts proposal over EPCAL Centre's.

Mr. Lindstrom also contested Mr. Rechler's statement that the Greater Calverton Civic Association has had "very positive responses" to the proposal. Many of the people at that particular meeting were not Calverton residents and had never been to the civic association's meetings before, Mr. Lindstrom said.

Ann Miloski of Calverton also remains opposed to the EPCAL Centre proposal.

"We don't need four racetracks," she said. Residents would be willing to go along with other aspects of the proposal, but not the racetracks, she said.

Vic Prusinowski, a former councilman who is working as a consultant for EPCAL Centre, said the type of race cars proposed for the track are the same type used at Riverhead Raceway.

Councilman Ed Densieski, himself a former race-car driver at Riverhead Raceway, said he supports the proposal.

When Ms. Miloski said he just likes it because it involves racing, Mr. Densieski replied, "That's because I know the economic benefits of racing."

EPCAL Centre proposes bringing traffic to the site from the Long Island Expressway, via Shultz Road in Manorville, which is off Exit 69, Mr. Frank said. He acknowledged that a significant traffic study would be needed, however