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Developer Changes Course On Stadium
By:Hank Russell

In order to address residents' concerns associated with a part of its Enterprise Park at Calverton project, Rexcorp, a Uniondale-based developer, announced at last week's work session at Riverhead Town Hall that it is scaling back the 20,000-seat automobile racing arena that is included in the project, which would be built upon the 755 acres of recreationally zoned property at EPCAL.

As previously reported in Suffolk Life, the stadium - which would be part of the proposed Raceway Village, located at the southwestern end of the EPCAL property - would consist of a quarter-mile track for visitors and semi-professional drivers, and a three-quarter-mile track for National Association of Stock Car Auto Racing-level competition. Rexcorp's intention was to expand the stadium to 80,000 seats.

On March 9, Rexcorp, which is partnering with Long Island Destination Group, LLC on the project, gave its initial presentation to the town board. The developer told town board members of its plan to quadruple the racing stadium's seating capacity. Matt Frank, Rexcorp's senior vice president of development and design, said his company has reached out to the community to solicit feedback on the project and has established a website so residents can learn more about the project.

Between April and May, Rexcorp representatives met with members of the Riverhead Rotary, the Greater Calverton Civic Association, the Wading River Civic Association and the town board about the proposed expansion. "They made a strong case on how one race a year would have an impact on the traffic," Frank said.

"When we talked about the 80,000-seat race track, we got feedback from the community about the [potential] traffic [problems], and concerns about the noise," Rexcorp Chairman and Chief Executive Officer Scott Rechler added. "We amended it to 10,000 [seats] to be consistent with [the uses at] Riverhead Raceway." According to Riverhead Raceway's website, it features a quarter-mile oval track. The raceway has been part of the NASCAR Winston Racing Series circuit. It features other racing events, including the NASCAR Featherlite Modified Tour. "That's a dramatic change," Riverhead Town Supervisor Phil Cardinale told Rechler. Cardinale also said the reduction plan was "healthy" because "it reflects the community." The track will be "buffered on several sides," according to Frank, and will consist of "the structure, landscaping and earthworks to mitigate noise." In addition, an "earth burying" technique will be used, in which the track will be built 50 feet below the ground to cut down on noise. According to Frank, Raceway Village will be located on the opposite side of the property from the proposed 150-acre equestrian center so that it will not be subject to noise.

The stadium will be the only design change, according to Frank. The rest of the project includes the equestrian center; the 87-acre Towne Square, with a 400-room resort hotel, a 250-room luxury hotel and a 100,000-square-foot convention center; an 84-acre sports and recreation center with seven outdoor multi-purpose fields; a 109-acre cultural arts and entertainment center complete with a visitor center, Long Island Motor Sports and Long Island Veterans Museums, an 8,000-seat arena and 15,000-seat outdoor amphitheater; and a motorsports country club for car enthusiasts, which covers 140 acres and features a 2.5-mile road course. The development also will have 100 luxury condominiums and 588 fractional-interest townhouses.

If the town board approves the project, the Spector Group in North Hills will be the design architect. J. Petrocelli Contracting in Ronkonkoma, which built Atlantis Marine World, will be in charge of constructing EPCAL Centre. Rexcorp has offered a \$100 million purchase price for the property, and estimated construction costs to be \$1 billion. "We have the financial wherewithal," Rechler said, adding that Rexcorp has \$3 billion in assets. "We'll be glad to sit down and [talk] with [the town board] on how we can up our purchase price." Both Rechler and Frank emphasized the 650 hotel rooms, 100 luxury condominiums and 588 fractional-interest townhouses would entice visitors to stay for extended periods of time without putting a dent into the school tax base. Rechler said the project will bring in \$15 million in real estate tax revenue annually to the Riverhead and Shoreham-Wading River school districts. "We're not building something where the people get on the bus, spend the day there and then leave," Rechler said. "When they [come] here, they'll stay here for the summer, spend money in the town and use the [local] golf courses." According to Frank, the fractional-interest townhouses allow visitors to stay for "a limited time," which is four to 13 weeks. "Therefore, the children [who stay with their families] would not be residents and would not be enrolled into the school tax rolls," he said.

Cardinale pointed out that the competing bidder, Riverhead Resorts LLC, offered the same purchase price, adding that the projects "are not dissimilar." As previously reported in Suffolk Life, Riverhead Resorts proposed a destination entertainment center with eight separately themed resorts, all of which consist of a village square, lake, indoor ski slope and snow play area, spa, convention center, campgrounds and a fitness and recreation center. According to Riverhead Resorts, there will be hotel rooms and 2,500 timeshare units on the property, meaning there will be no permanent housing to impact the town's school tax base. Although he considers the purchase price to be a major factor, Cardinale said that "it's not the only factor and may not be the most critical factor." He said the other details to be considered include jobs, sustaining the town's tax revenue base and sensitivity to the environment. According to Rechler, the Rexcorp project will provide 2,000 construction jobs and 2,500 permanent jobs. Town Councilman John Dunleavy asked how the project will be constructed. "It's a phased project," Rechler said. "That's the essence of the entire project." Rechler added that the project will be completed "five years from final approval." The project meets all requirements for the Planned Recreational Park District as directed in the town code, according to Frank. "All uses [in the project] are permitted [according to the town code]," he said. According to Rexcorp, 34% of the total area will be developed.