

Rechler has tie to site plan in East End

The prominent real estate owner has partnered in proposal to develop recreational property in Calverton


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If Riverhead officials are confused about who will be presenting a comprehensive plan Friday for 755 acres of town-owned recreational land in Calverton, it's hard to blame them. Although technically presented by a new partnership provisionally called EPCAL Centre, the proposal retains strong ties to a motor sports-oriented proposal that provoked strong civic opposition last year.

A town hall media advisory Monday said the presentation would be from Long Island Destination Group Llc, but failed to mention RexCorp Realty, a dominant Long Island commercial real estate owner that is an equal partner in the proposal. And when asked last week about Friday's meeting, town community development chief Andrea Lohneiss said, "You mean [Scott Rechler's] participation in the Top Gun proposal?"

But Rechler said Top Gun - a company that has proposed motor sports-focused attractions on the Calverton site and in Yaphank - is not involved with Friday's proposal, details of which are not yet available. And Long Island Destination Group partner Jim Petrocelli, of J. Petrocelli Contracting Inc. in Ronkonkoma, said he was unaware of Top Gun's interest in Calverton's Enterprise Park before he approached Top Gun president Peter Scalise III in late 2006 to suggest they form a new group and ask Rechler for backing.

"As all builders on Long Island have, we've monitored [the site] and kept our eye on it," he said.

But Riverhead Deputy Supervisor Chris Kent said Petrocelli had attended earlier meetings with town officials about the Top Gun proposal, which never progressed beyond a letter of intent and a map. Published reports about the proposal provoked strong opposition from Calverton civic leaders, who were concerned about noise, traffic and the economic payoff of a motor sports-focused development.

Scalise, who has twice before tried to build racing attractions in Calverton, said he would share any proceeds from his participation in the new venture with his Top Gun shareholders. And the group presenting Friday has retained consultants who worked on the Top Gun deal.

Regardless, Rechler said, the new proposal merely "incorporates elements" of the earlier plan. After a meeting set up by a consultant who worked for Rechler for many years, Rechler said that he told the former Top Gun team he "liked the site, liked the concept, but thought their plan was not consistent with what we wanted to do."

At that point, he engaged the master-planning services of the Spector Group architecture firm, based in North Hills, to rework the plan in a way that would "meet the character of what Riverhead is after."

This is not the first time Rechler has joined forces with relative real estate neophytes to help advance their proposals.

In 2005, when RexCorp was called Reckson Associates, he partnered with Computer Associates founder and Islanders owner Charles Wang on a controversial plan to redevelop the Nassau Coliseum area known as the Hub. He has since expanded the scope of that relationship, and is now half-owner of Old Plainview, a proposed 166-acre mixed-use development Wang first discussed in 2004.

Although Rechler's current focus on large, mixed-use developments is relatively new, many observers agree that his brand - and deep pockets - can only help EPCAL Centre's chances for approval.

"It makes sense for anyone looking to have a viable project on Long Island to get [Rechler] involved," said Bram Weber, a lawyer with Weber Law Group Llp, which is representing a competing proposal for the site.