

Northern New York

Meeting Creates Several Ideas for Use of Land in Sackets

By Greg Smith

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SACKETS HARBOR — A golf course, condominiums, townhouses and a mini industrial park were some of the uses a Colorado-based company suggested for 111 acres in the village at an invitation-only meeting Tuesday.

The land mainly consists of an old oil storage site.

While residents tossed around ideas and asked questions, representatives from Land Bank, a Lakewood, Colo., company that specializes in rehabilitating and developing environmentally damaged property, stressed the project is "pre-preliminary," and that concerns of residents pertaining to any project are important.

"We want to develop this property responsibly," Land Bank director of real estate acquisitions Kyle R. Cascioli told residents at the meeting, which was held at the Sackets Harbor Brewing Co. "If you come to me as one collective voice and tell me what you want, I, along with my development partners, will try and design a project which works to try and satisfy everyone's interests."

Those interests were somewhat divergent. Most of the people present seemed interested in some sort of housing, which village leaders have said would be preferable because it would expand the property-tax base. But one voice advocated some sort of memorial for men who died on part of the property in the second Battle of Sackets Harbor in 1813.

"That's a battlefield that no one really even knows about," said local historian Robert E. Brennan. "Men have been killed right there, and now you want to use the land for a golf course. I'm not against development, but I would like to see some of the area preserved."

Mr. Cascioli answered that the men who died did so for freedom.

"The men who were killed there were dying, fighting for their land, so they could use it. I don't know they fought and died so that it could be dedicated to them," he said. "To the extent that we can honor and respect their memory while incorporating the use of this land for their descendants, I know I would feel good about that."

The property in question includes three

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parcels: 1.5 acres between Ontario Street and Lake Ontario; 77.5 acres between Ontario and Ambrose streets; and 32 acres on the southeast side of Ambrose Street. The site has not been used in more than a decade.

The state Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, Mr. Cascioli said, has approached Land Bank about purchasing the land, but he seemed to rule that out based on input from village leaders.

"I will say the last thing I want to see is any of that land in the state's hands because of the poor job they do managing what they already have," said village Trustee James B. Edmonson, who is also executive director of the Jefferson County Industrial Development Agency.

Syracuse developer Paul M. Fowler said the property could bring a significant boost to the village.

"A good development could bring 200 quality people here and up to \$14 million on the tax rolls, if it's done in a quality way," Mr. Fowler said.

Land Bank has identified two areas that contain oil spills on the former tank farm. Mr. Cascioli said those sites contain about 300 cubic meters of oil-contaminated soil, which will be removed sometime this summer. He said the company believes it could have a letter from the state Department of Environmental Conservation stating the land has been rehabilitated by the end of the year.

Mayor-elect Jon P. Constance, Chamber of Commerce President Michael W. Campbell and most others at the meeting were in favor of more extensive development.

"It's an excellent project, we all know it's a superior site, and these are the right people to do a development here," Mr. Campbell said.

Merle K. Boulton, who has a farm down the road from the site, said he thinks if the land is developed, his farm will not be able to remain.

"Farms and houses right next to each other don't really work well," Mr. Boulton said. He farms part of the land included in the parcel. He

said in the mid-1960s, he tilled up a grave marker for British soldiers.

"The marker was sent down to the Smithsonian, and they figured out the stone had been quarried in Kingston, Ontario," Mr. Boulton said. He has never revealed where the marker was found, to prevent anyone from digging up graves.

"A project here bothers me to a degree, because these men are on this property," Mr. Boulton said. "If they were to start construction maybe I would reveal where they are and they could be exhumed and given a decent burial."

Other proposals for the site included a small marina and lakeshore housing with sports fields on the 77.5-acre parcel. But none of those plans are set.

"We want to digest what people said here tonight and look at the market for the different possible uses," said Katie G. Paris, an associate in the real estate acquisitions department of Land Bank. "Right now, we're not committed to doing any of the projects we presented. But I think we kind of covered the universe of possibilities."

Mr. Cascioli said the next step will probably be to put together a committee of residents to help shape a plan.

"Then we will put together a development team to take all of the sensitive considerations into account and comes up with a plan that is both palatable to the community and economically acceptable to developers and Land Bank," he said.

The meeting broke up at around 9 p.m., but much of the give and take, mainly in favor of development, did not. Alison D. Edmonson, Trustee Edmonson's wife, and Mr. Brennan lightly debated progress versus history.

"History won't change, no matter what we do," said Mrs. Edmonson, who favors development. "I look forward to the future; it's called 'progress.'"

"It's progress, but is it right?" Mr. Brennan asked.