Hempstead Village Revitalization: Back on Track

Aisha Al-Muslim
Hempstead Village's $2.5 billion downtown redevelopment project is getting back on track after a year of disputes over the LIRR parking lot, a vacant community development leadership position and tensions about where the project would start.

The Main Street makeover includes residences, a hotel, shops, open space, parking and entertainment venues. Federal and state grants and private investments will fund the project, which is to be built over 10 years, developers and village officials said.

Progress slowed as the village negotiated an agreement with the developer for community benefits, including jobs for residents and upgraded sewers. The board last year approved an agreement with the master developer, Renaissance Downtowns UrbanAmerica, despite opposition from residents and business owners worried that the development would push them out of downtown.

The revitalization plan would create 10,000 construction jobs and 3,500 permanent jobs, with 25 percent going to village residents, developers and officials have said. The project also would strengthen the tax base in a community where properties composing nearly a third of the village's assessed value do not pay taxes, officials said.

LIRR lease a hurdle

Another delay came in February when village officials and developers said they discovered Hempstead has a 198-year lease with the Long Island Rail Road for a 200-space parking lot next to the Rosa Parks Hempstead Transit Center off Main Street.

The lease agreement, started Feb. 1, 1994, continues to Feb. 28, 2093, and includes a 99-year extension unless the contract is terminated.

The LIRR lot is critical to the transit-oriented project that targets about two dozen blocks around the train station. The contract was not recorded with the village clerk's office and failed to be found during a title search, village attorney Debra Urbano-Disalvo said.

LIRR representatives have met with village officials and the developers to find a solution, including building multi-level parking in a nearby lot.

"We are supportive of efforts to create transit-oriented development near the LIRR station," agency spokesman Salvatore Arena said in a statement. "However, any new development must also recognize the importance of expanding existing LIRR commuter parking rather than diminishing nearby parking resources."

Longtime village resident Doris Sharp criticized officials' failure to know about the long-term lease.

"It took the developers three years to find out that we don't have that parcel of land and the mayor has been there for 12 years," Sharp said. "They're not doing their jobs."

Experienced manager hired

Revitalization is expected to speed up with the hiring...
Danielle T. Oglesby last month was commissioner of the Hempstead Village Community Development Agency. Oglesby, a former assistant director at Babylon Town’s Office of Downtown Revitalization, replaces Claude Gooding, who retired almost a year ago.

“Everything is going to take a different dynamic now that they really have a point person,” Monti said. “That’s one of the reasons that things have taken longer than normal.”

Another dust-up about the project has grown over the location of the first construction.

Plans submitted in November called for a 336-unit, five-story rental apartment complex on the site of a heavily used, village-owned parking lot at Washington and Front streets, across from Hempstead Town Hall, about three blocks from the train station and a block from Main Street.

Starting the project away from its core “doesn’t appear to be in the spirit of . . . a vibrant downtown that was advertised,” village trustee Don Ryan said, adding the focus should be Main Street.

Community activist Katherine Garry of Rockville Centre, who leads the committee to save Hempstead, questioned starting the project with housing.

“The people had been led to believe that this development was going to bring in lots of new businesses,” she said.

Two other construction sites are in the early planning stages and include a YMCA community center and a mixed-use restaurant, retail and residential building north of West Columbia Street and Main Street, near the train station, developers said.

By Yankey Roy
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ALBANY — Long Island has rapidly emerged as key to controlling the State Senate this fall, with Republicans and Democrats focusing on three races that have taken shape over the past month.

Republicans and Democrats point to races for the State Senate to fill the Suffolk County-based seat of Sen. Lee Zeldin (R-Shirley), who is running for Congress, and the primarily Nassau County-based seat of ex-Sen. Charles Fuschillo Jr., a Republican, who took a job at a nonprofit. Further, Democrat Adam Haber’s announcement on Thursday that he’ll challenge Sen. Jack M. Martins (R-Mineola) makes another high-profile race in western Nassau.

“Long Island is going to be the main battleground for this year’s elections,” said Sen. Michael Gianaris (D-Queens), head of the Democratic Senate Campaign Committee. “There are certainly other races to watch. But to have so many vacant seats and other competitive seats makes it clear that Long Island will be the center of attention.”

The Island races won’t be the only ones to watch — contests in the Hudson Valley, Capital Region and Western New York will be factors, too. But the Island races have come to stand out more quickly. In the past month:

- Republicans nominated Anthony Senft, a Conservative Party member and Islip Town Board member, to run in Zeldin’s South Shore district. Adrienne Esposito, the executive director of Citizens Campaign Committee, filed to create a campaign committee and many expect her to emerge as the Democratic candidate. Democrat Joseph Fritz also has expressed interest.
- Two Democrats said they want to run for the seat vacated by Fuschillo: Nassau County Legis. David Denenberg and Freeport Deputy Mayor Carmen Pineyro, setting up a possible primary. Republicans have nominated Nassau Legis. Michael Venditto, son of Oyster Bay Town Supervisor John Venditto.
- Haber, an East Hills businessman who self-financed his run for Nassau County executive last year, said he’s jumping into the race against Martins. Every seat counts in the politically split Senate. Currently, there are 32 Democrats and 29 Republicans, with two vacancies. But the Republicans and six breakaway Democrats control the chamber under an unusual power-sharing agreement. Though the coalition led by Senate co-leaders Dean Skelos (R-Rockville Centre) and Jeff Klein (D-Bronx) expects to stick together, mainline Democrats are hoping they can pick up seats and change the dynamic.

Republicans counter that the coalition’s ties are solid, nonpresidential years usually bode well for their legislative candidates, and Island residents historically have voted for GOP senators as a way to balance the State Legislature and keep New York City Democrats from dominating the agenda.

“Every Democrat who runs for the State Senate on Long Island is campaigning to join the same New York City-dominated conference that enacted the job-killing MTA payroll tax, eliminated the [property-tax] rebate check for seniors and homeowners, and shifted important school aid to New York City at Long Island’s expense,” said Lawrence Levy, executive dean of the National Center for Suburban Studies at Hofstra University.

Martins has the incumbency, name recognition and “an image of being very accessible to local officials, Democrats and Republicans alike,” Levy said.

“The only thing that gives Adam Haber a chance is that, if he wants, he can match Martins dollar for dollar,” Levy said.

Senft is in a district that traditionally favors Republicans — Democrat Brian Foley won it in 2008 but lost to Zeldin in 2010. But Levy said Esposito has name recognition through her environmental work.

Levy said the battle to replace Fuschillo could be the most intrguing. The Democrats have to settle on a candidate, but if it’s Denenberg, he’s “performed spectacularly well” in county elections. On the GOP side, “Venditto has a name that’s very well known and respected in much of the district,” Levy said.