

EXCERPT from July 2103 RNPC Quarterly Update

Envisioning the Future of the Massive EPCAL Site

It has been 20 years since the Navy gave Riverhead the Grumman's site to stimulate economic development; the site's promise has clearly not yet materialized. Sure, there are some businesses and a recently completely rail spur (which only one of them is using). Yeah, you see an occasional skydiver soaring over EPCAL from 25. Plus the Navy has been studying and cleaning up areas of the property for years. And of course, there was the ill-fated ski mountain (though we made about 8 million dollars on the deal). The latest is that the Town is moving towards subdividing the land so about 40% can be sold for various uses and up to 60% can be preserved in a natural state. They've already contracted a market study and held a public hearing on the Draft Supplemental Generic Environmental Impact Statement, in which the RNPC participated.

Now this could be a big deal. We're talking 800 developable acres (give or take) that could be sold off. The stated goal for all these years has been to attract business that would stimulate the local economy and create good-paying jobs. The Calverton site has long been touted as the future home to industrial and manufacturing companies and possibly some unique recreational opportunities. Unfortunately, that's easier said than done.

The 2011 market analysis conducted by RKG Associates for the Town does not inspire much confidence. There's already a high vacancy rate for office space in Suffolk and most of the competing sites have significant advantages over EPCAL. Many of the uses discussed for years and contemplated in the study do not seem particularly viable, like an airport or NASCAR racetrack. Plus the cost of rehabilitating the existing, and building new, infrastructure including sewers and roads is substantial — and some of these burdens could rest on taxpayers' shoulders.

Still, who knows, several hi-tech or bio-medical companies could move here, and maybe an equestrian center and village. It's also possible that a solar farm or some agricultural production will sprout up. According to preliminary documents, we might also see more homes and stores there. It may take 10, 20 or 50 years but it could happen. That's why we need to be proactive and speak up now to try to help shape the future of this site. If done well, EPCAL could bring much-needed jobs to the area, stimulate the local economy and provide recreational opportunities. And construction and landscaping could be designed in such a way that it does not impose itself on the surrounding areas, and minimizes impacts on our natural resources.

What most of us don't want is more retail, nor do we need McMansions or condos; this land was given to the Town for economic growth. And we certainly don't need more for-profit development that doesn't pay its fair share of taxes.

The RNPC will work on behalf of the long-term interests of taxpaying residents. We will try to secure a mechanism for public input into the approval process of each project because right now, it looks as though the Town Board will have sole discretion when they say the project meets the zoning they create. With an expedited 90-day approval process and a Town Hall that's as business friendly as it gets, it's not hard to imagine projects that fail to conform to the zoning being approved. We've seen it happen before. What's the old saying? Fool me once, shame on you; fool me 100 times... oh wait, that's not how it goes?!

For current EPCAL plans and documents, go to www.townofriverheadny.gov and click on the EPCAL Redevelopment button on the right side of the page. Links and information are also on www.RiverheadNPC.org

Much of the building is likely to occur on the parcels closest to Route 25. As of now, it looks like these could be industrial OR residential or other commercial uses such as retail. They say all these will face the interior road (not 25) and that there shouldn't be any more curb cuts on 25.

