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Officials debate impact of proposed development

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Public officials who will have a major say in the approval process for the massive Lighthouse development in central Nassau -- plans for which were filed with Hempstead Town late Tuesday -- took a guarded stance on the project.

"I'd say it's consistent with my vision, but there has to be a portion of it for affordable housing, or workforce housing, connections to the Long Island Rail Road and connections to major activity assets," Nassau County Executive Thomas Suozzi said in an interview.

Town of Hempstead officials said a project of this scope -- with a mix of stores, office space, sports arenas, hotels and residences -- is so unique that a new zoning district would have to be drawn up to accommodate it.

"One of the foremost concerns is the impact on the surrounding community, for any development," said Town Supervisor Kate Murray, who hadn't yet seen the plans. "Among the key concerns are the impact on air quality, water and traffic.

"I'm absolutely going to insist that there's early and frequent public input into the process," she said.

Suozzi said the project should be looked at as a part of an overall plan for the county that includes preservation of open space in other areas, the injection of new life into old downtown districts and investing in minority communities.

"I want to be able to preserve what is good in Nassau County, the single-family home with the baseball field down the street," he said. At the same time, he said, he wanted to bring a walkable experience to the area.

"Here, I want to create this new suburbia, this new suburban experience," he said.

Suozzi sidestepped questions about possible roadblocks in the county Legislature and the town, which must approve the deal.

"I think it requires courage and leadership, but I think most policymakers realize this is where we need to go," he said.

The Republican minority leader of the county legislature, Legis. Peter Schmitt of Massapequa, has expressed reservations about the project, but declined to comment yesterday because he had not seen the

latest proposal.

Officials from the town and the Lighthouse development team would collaborate to create a master plan detailing what would be included in the newly created zone. The new zone and the master plan would need to be approved by the town, and reviewed by the county Planning Commission.

Because of the project's size, Hempstead would most likely contract with a planning expert to review the group's detailed plan. The expert or the town could require revisions.

The county Legislature would have final approval of the deal.

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