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Developer Duets

By [VALERIE COTSALAS](#)

NOT only does he come from a family of developers, but these days it also seems that Scott H. Rechler is the developer's developer.

He and his company, Rexcorp Realty, have recently been in the news across [Long Island](#) — even as far afield as [Westchester](#) and [New Jersey](#) — for being brought into projects by fellow developers. Apparently, several of them have been convinced that Mr. Rechler's involvement in a project may improve its chances of approval.

Some of these projects involve erecting whole communities, with high densities of homes, main-street shopping, sports arenas and the like. Others are less packed, offering hotels, condominiums, or cavernous office buildings with trees growing in glassy atriums. And each of their developers appears to be treating Rexcorp as a sort of superhero coming to the rescue.

The most recent news came in mid-November, when [Charles B. Wang](#), owner of the New York Islanders hockey team and founder of the software company Computer Associates, and Mr. Rechler filed a zoning-change request for an altered version of the \$2 billion Lighthouse project, envisioned for 77 acres of mostly parking lots near the Nassau Coliseum in Uniondale.

In their application to the town of Hempstead, the biggest alteration they propose is to have the project “evolve into the community,” Mr. Rechler said recently. In the decade it will take to build, he added, the project will “grow just like a community grows.”

For practical purposes, this translates, in part, to mean that there will not be a 60-story lighthouse-like tower as proposed in Mr. Wang's pre-Rexcorp plan (though current renderings show two 30-plus-story towers).

The developers have also established a panel of local planners and civic leaders. They hired Development Design Group, a Baltimore firm known for its pedestrian-friendly designs, and Spector Group, the Long Island architecture firm that designed Rexcorp Plaza, Mr. Rechler's headquarters, which is a 10-minute walk from the coliseum, and the Islandia headquarters of

Computer Associates.

Following in the footsteps of his grandfather, William, who in the 1950s and '60s built large industrial parks in [Queens](#) and in Hauppauge, Mr. Rechler recently sold the family's commercial firm, Reckson Associates, to the SL Green Realty Corporation, a real estate investment trust in [Manhattan](#), and formed Rexcorp Realty after buying back some of Reckson's suburban portfolio.

Since then he has proposed or is a partner in mixed-use, commercial and hotel ventures not only on Long Island, but in Westchester, [Connecticut](#) and New Jersey. In White Plains, Rexcorp is on the short list of developers for 4.6 acres near the Metro North station, said Matthew Frank, a Rexcorp vice president.

In New Jersey, he added, the company is planning a mixed-use development on 130 acres it owns in Chatham and Madison. Rexcorp's other developments there have been office buildings.

Last month in the city of Glen Cove, Glen Isle Development announced a partnership with Rexcorp on a project envisioning 860 condos and a luxury hotel; before Mr. Rechler's involvement it was mostly retail and office space. The mayor, Ralph V. Suozzi, said the city had been "in a stalemate" with Glen Isle before Mr. Rechler got involved.

Now, "we're talking about a new design team," Mr. Suozzi said, citing a "dialogue where we're really re-establishing the spirit in word and action of the public-private partnership."

Richard V. Guardino of the Breslin Center for Real Estate Studies at [Hofstra University](#) described Mr. Rechler as "very good at dealing with people," adding, "He can talk to the average guy in the street, whether it's about traffic or parking, and at the same time to people on Wall Street about investing."

But not all are taken with him. At a recent conference on smart growth, community advocates were among those who asserted that Mr. Rechler would have to work harder.

One advocate, Diana Coleman of Roosevelt, a hamlet near Uniondale with a large minority population that would be affected by the Lighthouse project, questioned Mr. Rechler's commitment to local residents. She raised concerns about what kinds of jobs would be available, how many minority contractors would be involved in construction and whether there were provisions for affordable housing.

“He’s a pitchman,” Ms. Coleman said a few days later, unimpressed by Mr. Rechler’s response that the county mandates 15 percent of construction jobs be given to minority contractors.

“He’s young, he’s energetic, he’s smooth, he’s white and he has connections,” she said. “But the majority of the citizens don’t know what this project is about.”

Mr. Rechler naturally has a different view. “We call it the power of local,” he said, when asked why so many developers seek him out as a partner. “It’s the deepness in the markets, our relationships, and we also have the capital to invest in these things.”

But approval for the Lighthouse plan still has a long way to go. It will most likely take years for municipal review of the project’s impact on traffic, water quality and other concerns.

In wealthy North Hills, Mr. Rechler’s firm is moving further into residential work. Rexcorp recently joined Midtown Equities, a Manhattan luxury developer, to build a 244-unit Ritz-Carlton condo there. Midtown Equities paid the village \$21 million to help get the plan approved last year.

The partners, now operating as Rex Midtown, are completing another Ritz-Carlton condo in Baltimore, and plan to move on to Bridgeport, Conn., to build another waterfront project.

Back on Long Island, the Riverhead town council recently turned down Rexcorp’s solo proposal for a motor sports and equestrian resort on 755 acres on former Northrop-Grumman land in the hamlet of Calverton. The resort would have included 688 fractional-ownership units, racetracks and a country club.

Mr. Rechler initially offered the town \$75 million for the land, but increased that to \$152 million in a bidding war with Riverhead Resorts, a developer proposing a 300-foot indoor [ski](#) mountain.

Phil Cardinale, the recently re-elected Riverhead supervisor, said of Mr. Rechler, “We were impressed by his hands-on, take-charge, involved attitude.” The town selected the Riverhead Resorts project because it was year-round, rather than event-driven.

Still, Mr. Cardinale added, if the Riverhead Resorts proposal “does not go to contract by the end of the year, then we would go back to Mr. Rechler and ask him to sit down with us to negotiate.”

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