

## Commercial Property/Westchester

# Sleepy Hollow Awaiting Plans for Ex-G.M. Plant

## Developer is chosen for a mixed-use project on the Hudson River.

By ELSA BRENNER

**T**ODAY, almost five years since General Motors stopped making autos in Sleepy Hollow, the largest buildable parcel in Westchester still looks like just another abandoned manufacturing site along the Hudson River. And although the automaker recently chose the Roseland Property Company of Short Hills, N.J., to design and build a mixed-use development on the 97 acres, specific plans for reusing the property are still months away.

It could be three more years before the first shovel goes into the ground and six years before the first occupants move in, the developer has said.

Yet few officials in the village of 9,212 residents are inclined to be hasty in deciding on the best reincarnation for the land — even though the local tax rate soared after G.M. left and they are eager to expand the tax rolls.

The choice of Roseland as a development partner had been longer in coming than most had expected in part because G.M. scuttled plans with previous concerns, among them Collins Enterprises, a major Connecticut developer, and a company controlled by Donald J. Trump.

"G.M. couldn't square the circle with the previous developers," said Philip E. Zegarelli, mayor of Sleepy Hollow. "They had to start over, and time was lost."

Gerry Holmes, a spokesman for G.M., would not elaborate on why the previous deals fell through. He would say only, "We wanted to make sure the community would be happy." General Motors and Roseland said that input from the community would be critical in developing a plan.

Pleased that the needs of Sleepy Hollow itself are being considered and that different interest groups will be consulted, the mayor said: "The idea is that it will be a collaborative effort. Having it this way is worth the wait."

It is also worth a higher tax rate for a while longer, Mr. Zegarelli said. Sleepy Hollow suffered from the loss of tax income, a shortfall that led to an infusion of state aid and eventually led the village to raise property taxes by 20 percent in 1999.

G.M. pays only \$175,000 a year to the village now, and about 40 percent of the two-



Jonathan Stein of the Roseland Property Company looks over the General Motors site in Sleepy Hollow, N.Y.

square-mile municipality is made up of tax-exempt property, most notably the Rockefeller estate. In the late 1980's, the automaker's annual payments to Sleepy Hollow exceeded \$1 million.

In planning for the future, many parties are eager for the site — which had been continuously used since 1899 to produce autos — not only to continue generating taxes but also to provide public access to the river.

In particular, Scenic Hudson, an environmental organization in Poughkeepsie, is lobbying for public esplanades along the river that would link up to trails in the area.

**T**HE developers and General Motors clearly have an objective of earning a profit," said Ned Sullivan, the president of Scenic Hudson. "Our goal is to see that it's also a community resource. There are plenty of bad developments already on the Hudson; we don't want another."

Mr. Sullivan said he wanted to avoid a repeat of Half Moon Bay in Croton-on-Hudson, a development of apartments and town houses that limits Hudson River access to residents living in the complex.

In Yonkers during the 1980's, Scenic Hudson won a legal battle opposing the construction of six apartment towers on the basis that they would have blocked river views.

"We think development that's exclusively



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for those who own real estate along the water is inappropriate," Mr. Sullivan said, noting that in the late 1990's, Congress designated the river and the Hudson Valley as a National Heritage Area.

While Mayor Zegarelli also wants access to the river for all citizens, he has other concerns on his mind as well — not the least of which is the additional traffic generated

by a large new development in the village.

The site is at the end of Beekman Avenue, the main thoroughfare in the village, and except for some small back roads, that street is the only access to the site. Current zoning allows up to 1,900 housing units, but the mayor said more than 1,000 units would overburden the road.

"You can't just plop down a development and worry about the roads later," he said.

Mayor Zegarelli, the village and the developers have asked the Metro-North Railroad to consider building a train station at Sleepy Hollow, between the stops at Tarrytown to the south and Philipse Manor to the north, to serve as many as 1,200 new Manhattan-bound commuters from the development. Scenic Hudson is also encouraging ferry service to and from New York City and shuttle buses between villages.

Appropriate housing for a variety of income groups is another issue concerning elected officials. If older residents, for example, have housing alternatives in the village that they can afford, they might consider placing their homes on the market — which, in turn, would help to satisfy some of the intense demand for homes in the village, Mr. Zegarelli said.

"There are generations of families who want to be able to stay here," said the mayor, 53, who grew up in the village and whose grandparents are buried in the local cemetery. He said many of the village's

older residents formerly worked on G.M.'s assembly lines.

In addition to consulting various interest groups before drawing up plans, General Motors and Roseland are hashing out details for their working partnership.

After final plans for the property are approved, General Motors may sell the property to Roseland, both parties said, although neither would discuss price.

The automaker may also retain some ownership rights to the Sleepy Hollow land, said Mr. Holmes, who explained that G.M. often "keeps its fingers in the pie" after it stops using properties.

In Detroit, at the site of a former Cadillac plant, G.M. oversaw the development of an 80-acre technology park that provided jobs for residents in an area of high unemployment. It sold the land only in sections after developers completed work. In Clark, N.J., where a golf course replaced an auto plant, G.M. still owns the land and leases it to the township, which maintains it.

At the very least, the automaker retains ownership until the future use is determined, Mr. Holmes said.

In considering future uses for the property at Sleepy Hollow, which will be called Lighthouse Landing, Jonathan Stein, a vice president at Roseland, said it could be used for all or some of the following: single-family and multifamily residential units, retail shops, offices and a hotel conference center.

**R**OSELAND has declined to disclose estimates on rental or sale prices at the site, but the company's property in Weehawken, N.J., is offering apartments starting at \$1,710 a month.

Roseland's Port Imperial there is a \$1.7 billion planned community being developed along two miles of the Hudson River waterfront on more than 200 acres facing Midtown Manhattan. Port Imperial will include 6,500 residential units and approximately two million square feet of commercial space including offices, retail stores, entertainment and a hotel.

Lighthouse Landing is Roseland's first foray into Westchester, Mr. Stein said, calling the G.M. property "a jewel reaching into the water" with views of the Tappan Zee Bridge, Manhattan and Haverstraw Bay. The property is also unusual in that 75 of the 97 acres are on the river side of the railroad tracks. In most sections of the river, the tracks are laid close to the water's edge.

Lighthouse Landing will probably be privately financed without state tax credits or assistance, though the terms of the project's financing are still being worked out, company spokesmen have said.