

ST. JAMES

# A PUSH FOR PRESERVATION

Flowerfield development plan has residents, lawmakers worried about environmental impact

BY JEAN-PAUL SALAMANCA

jeanpaul.salamanca@newsday.com

A plan to build on Flowerfield Fairgrounds in St. James has renewed a push to preserve the land, and some critics are urging Suffolk County to block development there.

A proposal to turn 49 acres of vacant land into medical offices, an assisted living facility and hotel has prompted concern about its impact on nearby Stony Brook Harbor and traffic on State Route 25A.

Gyrodyne, a former defense contractor, has owned the 63-acre tract of land for decades. Part of the property includes a catering hall used for wedding venues as well as office space. There are plans to preserve 40% of the property as open space, Gyrodyne officials have said. In August, a subsidiary of Gyrodyne LLC announced it had agreed to sell the vacant land to the developer behind the Bristol Assisted Living facilities chain. The buyer is B2K Smithtown LLC, of Jericho, according to the announcement.

Suffolk Legis. Steven Englebright (D-Setauket) has asked county officials to eventually deny tax breaks and a permit for a wastewater treatment system.

"The development that is proposed at Gyrodyne is excessive and extreme," he said in a recent interview.

Englebright referenced the August 2024 storm that dropped 10 inches of rain and caused flooding in Smithtown and parts of Suffolk's North Shore.

A development could exacerbate flooding issues, and paving the property could result in chemicals and stormwater runoff polluting the harbor, he said. The project calls for a 100,000 gallon per day sewage treatment plant, according to a county document.

Chris Gobler, a professor of coastal ecology at Stony Brook University, said developing the St. James property could send more nitrogen into the harbor.

"Even with wastewater treat-



One Suffolk legislator is urging the county to turn down a proposal to develop 49 acres of vacant land.

## Flowerfield's future

■ B2K Development plans to develop 49 acres of vacant land at Flowerfield Fairgrounds in St. James into medical offices, an assisted living facility and a hotel.

■ Critics, including civic groups, environmental experts and local legislators, say they are concerned about the project's impact on the environment, particularly Stony Brook Harbor and the local watershed.

ment, there's still additional nitrogen going into the watershed and eventually into Stony Brook Harbor," Gobler said. "It pushes everything in the wrong direction, or the opposite direction of what's called for."

## More approvals needed

B2K must file a final subdivision application with Smithtown's planning board, town officials said. The planning board must review the application and hold a hearing on it.

Suffolk's only role would be to approve the wastewater permits, according to county



A former defense contractor has owned the property for decades.

spokesman Michael Martino.

Officials from B2K declined to comment, said Gary Lewi, a spokesman for the company.

Suffolk County Executive Edward P. Romaine said in a recent interview that the state should preserve the property. However, Romaine said he does not plan to intervene.

"The county executive should not be the one that determines... which developers

move ahead and don't," Romaine said. "That's up to the permitting process, and I am not involved in that process."

When he was Brookhaven Town supervisor, Romaine spoke out against the project during a Smithtown planning board meeting in 2020.

Romaine told Newsday he was concerned the development could hurt the harbor and jam up traffic.

"As county executive, I am going to use all the power I have appropriately to try and acquire this property for fair market price. I want to work with the state... because we don't need further overdevelopment along 25A," he said.

He said he still wants to work with the state to preserve the Flowerfield property. In a June 2023 letter, the state's Department of Environmental Conservation told Smithtown officials they were interested in acquiring the land, Newsday has reported.

## Preservation push

In a letter to Gov. Kathy Hochul last year, Romaine called on the state to help preserve the land.

"This property is of the utmost importance to Suffolk County, and I would welcome your assistance to strategize and assist with this important preservation effort," Romaine wrote.

A DEC spokeswoman said the department is in talks about a possible preservation effort.

"New York State is committed to the conservation and protection of the state's natural resources and recognizes the significant conservation values of the Gyrodyne (Flowerfields) property," the statement said. The DEC "is continuing discussions with the property owner and stakeholders on the possibility of a future conservation outcome."

The Flowerfield property has been the subject of a protracted legal battle. In 2022, Head of the Harbor Village residents sued Smithtown and the developer after the town's planning board subdivided the property into eight lots.

A Suffolk judge dismissed the lawsuit in October 2024. The Saint James — Head of the Harbor Neighborhood Preservation Coalition, a local civic group, appealed.

Joseph Bollhofer, a spokesman for the civic group, echoed Englebright's call. He said in a statement that "Flowerfield Fairgrounds is the wrong place for a massive development."