

Riverhead Town Board members raise concerns on EPCAL housing

by [Kelly Zegers](#) |

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In what Riverhead Town Supervisor Sean Walter called a “long overdue” discussion on workforce housing Thursday morning, three town board members questioned the idea of housing at the Enterprise Park at Calverton before a group of experts who spoke about its benefits.

EPCAL’s zoning allows for up to 300 housing units built specifically for industrial users at the park, which some residents have called to be removed in sale negotiations with [Luminati Aerospace](#) for the town’s remaining land there.

Sammy Chu, chairman of Long Island’s U.S. Green Building Council chapter, called the residential zoning at EPCAL a “grand opportunity” to address the island’s need for economic growth and need to retain people and businesses. Mr. Walter referenced studies that showed there is a desire for a live-work-play environment at EPCAL.

“The zoning process lays the palate and to stunt the palate or to limit it in a way that can really be a deterrent to potential very large anchor employers really, I think, would be a shame,” Mr. Chu said.

He added that it’s natural for people to have concerns, but there’s an opportunity to inform them of success stories in other places. Zoning is just the beginning of the process toward developing an economic generator, he said.

Kevin Moran of the Long Island Builders Institute read a letter on behalf of CEO Mitch Pally, supporting the zoning to allow housing for employees at the park. “We do not believe that eliminating the option completely is in the best interest of the town,” the letter states.

John Damianos of the Real Estate Institute of Stony Brook University’s College of Business said his organization supports the current zoning and housing alternative.

“Employers go where the employees are — it’s not the reverse,” said David Pennetta of Cushman & Wakefield, the real estate brokers hired by the town to market EPCAL.

“We’ve got a window here to get something done and the reason why I’m involved in the particular aspect of it is I don’t want anything tripping it up,” he said. “You’re the board members, you know everything that’s going on with the town — I don’t. This process is just to educate you on some different viewpoints from different organizations on the island ... to stay the course to what you laid.”

But council members Jodi Giglio, John Dunleavy and Tim Hubbard each raised concerns.

Ms. Giglio pointed to housing projects in downtown Riverhead that are already in the works. The workforce belongs downtown, with its restaurants, shops and nightlife, and that wouldn’t be found at EPCAL, she said. A model in which employees are bused from downtown to the industrial park on a regular basis would work better, she said.

“I think that model works more than residential housing right smack in the middle of an industrial park where there’s cranes being operated, there’s noise, all the other factors that come into an industrial park and I have always felt that way,” she said.

Mr. Dunleavy, who previously supported housing at the park, but has since changed his position, concerned it would impact the town’s taxpayers.

“I cannot be for permanent housing out in EPCAL for people to live in condos because I don’t want to put the rest of the Town of Riverhead resident picking up the taxes that they’re not going to be paying for,” he said.

He said he spoke to Luminati CEO Daniel Preston, who told him he doesn’t want to put housing at the park, instead opting to buy houses outside the park. He said the CEO wants to keep the zoning so that if he sells, whoever buys the property can build housing if they choose to.

Councilman Jim Wooten said the whole idea behind the housing component was more for marketability when the land is for sale and losing that would be short-sighted.

“We’re looking at the trends that are happening not only on the East End but nationally, where these type of big developments are marrying different types of uses to make it more marketable, make it more desirable,” he said. “They’re bringing a whole host of different types of developers and investors that might want to come into that area.”

Mr. Hubbard said his concern is a school district that is “bursting at the seams.” More residential housing means expanding the school district and much higher taxes, he said.

He said the industrial park is the wrong place for residential housing. While there are trends that show similar housing situations, Riverhead is a “different puzzle,” he said.

Earlier this year, a group of residents formed the [Coalition Against EPCAL Housing](#) to protest the permitted use under the zoning. Coalition member John McAuliff asked whether the town would hear from experts with a different point of view than Thursday’s visitors and would raise the kinds of questions other board members did.

The supervisor said if there was a panel of experts on no workforce housing on Long Island, he would be “dumbfounded” but he would have them.

Catherine Kent, a Democratic candidate for Town Board, said housing at EPCAL is not what Riverhead residents want.

“We have all this other housing coming in, so why would we want housing brought to EPCAL,” she said.

Photo caption: Riverhead Town Board members discuss EPCAL housing Thursday morning. (Credit: Kelly Zegers)

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Comments