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TOP STORY

Extra scrutiny sought for warehouse at Grand Island Amazon site

Stephen T. Watson

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2780 Long Road in Grand Island, where Acquest Development seeks to build a 1.1 million-square-foot warehouse, is shown in his file aerial photo. (Derek Gee/Buffalo News)

By Derek Gee/Buffalo News

Stephen T. Watson

The large warehouse proposed for a Grand Island property previously coveted by Amazon should undergo a higher level of scrutiny because of the new project's significant environmental effects, the town Planning Board found.

If the Town Board agrees with the Planning Board's recommendation, the town would conduct a full and lengthy review of the \$80 million-plus warehouse project's impact on traffic, air quality, water runoff and other environmental factors.

Opponents of the project - including some who led the fight against the Amazon mega-warehouse - celebrated last week's vote.

“We are grateful to the members of the Planning Board who are taking a deliberate and cautious approach to this project,” Cathy Rayhill, a spokeswoman for CRED4GI, or the Coalition for Responsible Economic Development for Grand Island, said in a statement.

Acquest Development wants permission to build a 1.1 million-square-foot warehouse on its undeveloped, 145-acre property at 2780 Long Road. The high-bay warehouse facility doesn't have a future tenant in place yet but Acquest CEO Michael Huntress said such space is in high demand in the region.

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The planned structure is less than one-third the size of the massive, 3.8 million-square-foot warehouse Amazon had planned to build at the site, a \$300 million proposal code-named Project Olive that stirred considerable debate on the island before the company pulled the plug in August.

But that's not the only difference. The proposed Amazon warehouse had five floors, each boasting a footprint of 823,000 square feet. Acquest's one-story spec warehouse has a 31% larger footprint.

The new warehouse is half the height - 45 feet tall instead of 87 feet tall - but it would cover more of the property, 138 acres instead of 123; it would pave over more of the site; and have more tractor trailer parking stalls. There would be 560 fewer car parking spaces, however.

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The property doesn't need a rezoning to make way for this warehouse, as it did for Project Olive - a key stumbling block for that development.

But the changes made by Acquest to the project haven't satisfied the group of residents who coordinated opposition to Project Olive, saying it was out of scale for the island, and who have similar objections to the new development.

At the Dec. 12 Planning Board meeting, members voted to recommend the Town Board declare this project a Type I action under the state's environmental quality review law.

If the Town Board concurs and issues a positive declaration, it would trigger a full study into the project's environmental impacts, including on wetlands, noise and light pollution and endangered species.

The Planning Board also began its review of the project site plan. Planning Board Chairman David Bruno asked his fellow members to approve the site plan, but his motion failed.

Planning Board members then passed a motion that will delay any such site plan approval until after the Town Board makes a decision on the review of the project's environmental effects.

Huntress did not respond to a message seeking comment Friday. Rayhill, in her email, urged the town's Economic Development Advisory Board to independently assess the project's costs and benefits to the community.

"Development should reflect the town's comprehensive plan and resident surveys about preferred land use for the community, which does not include warehouses of this size," she wrote, repeating an observation from the Planning Board meeting that the warehouse would be the largest facility built on the island.

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Grand Island Supervisor John Whitney said the town will thoroughly vet the project no matter which way it moves forward under the state environmental review process.

"It is a different project, so it has to be weighed on its own merits," Whitney said.

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