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Project Olive, widely believed to be Amazon, 'on pause' on Grand Island

Stephen T. Watson
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Some Grand Island residents are urging people to oppose the Amazon "Project Olive" development in the town.

James P. McCoy

A massive, 3.8 million-square-foot distribution center for a tenant widely believed to be Amazon won't come to Grand Island anytime soon – if it ever does.

The developer behind what is code-named Project Olive, Texas-based Trammell Crow Co., informed Supervisor John Whitney on Monday that it had "placed the project 'on pause,' that was their words," Whitney said during a Town Board work session.

One of the property owners, Michael Huntress, confirmed the project is "on hold" but urged the Town Board to approve the development because of its economic benefits and because it is an acceptable use for the 145-acre site on Long Road.

Representatives of the developer had planned to speak at Monday's work session but canceled earlier in the day, Whitney said. Kimberly Nason, an attorney with Phillips Lytle, who represents Trammell Crow, did not respond to a request for comment late Monday.

Whitney's announcement leaves the fate of the controversial mega project, which is large enough to hold two Walden Gallerias, up in the air and comes one week after the development suffered a major setback.

On July 13, Planning Board members voted against Trammell Crow's request to rezone the property from light industrial use to a planned development district. This would make it easier to proceed with project components that don't conform with town code, such as a building height of 87 feet that exceeds the island's 45-foot limit.

The Planning Board makes recommendations to the Town Board, which could overrule the Planning Board. Last week, in a statement to The Buffalo News following the no vote, Nason said "the development team remains very excited" about the project.

The News reported in May 2019 that **Amazon was eyeing the site** at 2780 Long Road for a major distribution and warehouse center. Trammell Crow in February filed a 2,202-page application for a five-story building that would employ at least 1,000 working in two shifts and produce nearly 500 daily truck trips.

Project Olive has stirred up considerable opposition from some islanders who worry it would create additional traffic congestion, particularly at the North and South Grand Island Bridges, and build over valuable green space.

But proponents point to the new jobs – including during the construction phase – and the tax revenue the project would generate on the island.

Huntress, who owns the property with his father, William, said current zoning allows for the construction of up to a 10 million-square-foot industrial facility that would dwarf the Project Olive proposal. The height of the building is the main stumbling block for Project Olive, which is less than half this permitted size, he said.

He also pointed to the windfall the town would derive from an estimated \$2.5 million in new annual revenue.

"It would seem to me that it's an absolute no-brainer," Huntress said at the work session.

So is Project Olive dead?

"Pause, to me, does not mean it has gone away," said Sandra Nelson, one of several residents who spoke during Monday's Town Board meeting. She urged the town to seek out a different business promising better, higher-paying jobs.

One official familiar with the project deliberations said the developer is negotiating an agreement that would include a commitment to use a certain percentage of union labor on the building's construction. If a deal is struck, the official said, unions could pressure the Town Board to approve Project Olive.

Whitney, in an interview before the meeting, declined to comment on the project's status.

"Whatever their position is on it, bring it to a vote and let the people know where they stand," said Nate McMurray, Whitney's Democratic predecessor, referring to the all-Republican Town Board.

 17 comments

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