Ideas For Hospital Site Wide-ranging - State Releases Details Of Plans From Six Potential Developers
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Preston –– Developers' plans for the former Norwich Hospital property range from 400 units of housing, golf courses and business complexes to yacht facilities and vacation homes, according to letters of intent submitted last week to the state Office of Policy and Management.

The OPM is overseeing a request-for-proposal process that could secure a developer for the 470-acre parcel by August.

Six parties, ranging from a local real estate agent to a Long Island entertainment firm, are among the qualified candidates moving forward in the process. DeMatteo Industries LLC of Windsor has been disqualified for failing to provide the required information.

The qualified candidates are:

• Evan Blum of New York, N.Y., whose proposal "is intended for residential, office and retail." Blum said new construction would include the creation of a yacht facility. He also said he is prepared to make a $1 million deposit into an escrow account as a show of "good faith."

• Center Development Corp., also of New York, which proposes a four-part concept that includes an affordable housing community, a hotel/resort/retirement community, open space and other related uses. The housing would be a "medium- to high-density complex constructed in a two- to three-story configuration." Four hundred units are estimated on a 30-acre section.

The resort, which would be built in phases, could include boating, fishing, hiking, swimming and other recreation.

• William Cutler, a Mystic real estate agent, who said his "development concept is in the process of formulation." After a follow-up letter from OPM, Cutler provided another letter describing his proposal as one that would "in all likelihood include a combination of offices, entertainment and light industry."

Cutler is looking for a client to develop the property and said the proposal would be "driven by market forces."

• Interactive Development Associates LLC of New York City, which is pitching a full-service resort hotel and conference center, with condominiums, in existing historic buildings, which would be renovated.

A residential community would surround the hotel and include new townhouses and single-family dwellings, which also could be used as vacation homes. A marina, golf course, tennis center, health spa, specialty retail and an activity center for children is included in the hotel package.

• Sentinel Equities of Newington, which has proposed a research development campus with an office park, along with a golf course, hotel and convention center and upscale housing "situated in a manner that takes advantage of the golf course and the water views."

Part of the project would entail historic restoration of some of the hospital campus buildings. A 250,000-square-foot hotel and convention center and a 175-acre golf course are included. The research park would be located on 50 to 60 acres and would have about 400,000 square feet of building space and 100,000 square feet of support office space.

• Utopia Studios of Melville, N.Y., which is proposing a 12-year, three-phase development that would include movie and television studios, a resort with themed attractions, and hotels. It would utilize “no less than” 3.4 million square feet of improved real estate.

Utopia has said it will use the entire 470-acre site for its project and would preserve a cemetery on the parcel.

The list of six bidders was whittled from a total of 20 who attended an April 15 conference on the site. Only the parties that personally attended the conference could continue in the state process.

OPM Undersecretary Michael Cicchetti said Wednesday that DeMatteo Industries LLC was cut from the list of contenders because the firm “didn't adequately respond to what we were looking for.”

DeMatteo's letter of intent stated that the firm would “... propose to purchase the property as part of our futures portfolio. Developing the property when the market has properly matured will greatly enhance the long-term benefits to the state and area host communities.”

Cicchetti said the OPM was not considering such “land banking” of the property.

Thomas A. Kokoska, legal counsel for DeMatteo, declined to comment Wednesday. He referred all comments to John Crane, the firm's spokesman. Crane said the firm received a letter from OPM's Patrick O'Brien on May 6, the day the letters of intent were due, informing DeMatteo of OPM's decision. Crane declined to comment on what steps, if any, the firm would take.

“I don't have anything to say about that,” he said. “I'm not sure what may or may not be under consideration, if anything.”

The qualified bidders have more than two months before the next state-imposed deadline. Detailed plans must be submitted to the state by July 26. A seven-member committee will review the proposals and issue a recommendation by the end of August.
