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Empire Zone status sought

Lombardi plan seeks status from state for three sites to produce pharmaceuticals.

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By **Debra J. Groom**
Staff writer

A former state senator from Syracuse and his brother want to help Central New York become a key player in the pharmaceutical and biotechnology industries.

But first, Tarky Lombardi Jr. and Francis Lombardi want something in return: Empire Zone designation, which would provide benefits and incentives to any companies locating on more than 1,000 acres of land they own in Onondaga, Madison and Oswego counties.

The three parcels of land targeted by the Lombardis - in Cicero, Sullivan and Schroepfel

- would be developed into industrial parks for pharmaceutical and biotech companies.

Tarky Lombardi said he is a co-owner of the properties but is not intimately involved in the development plans.

"Francis has been handling the project," Lombardi said, referring to his brother, who could not be reached for comment.

Tarky Lombardi, a registered lobbyist, is chair of the government relations and legislative service group for the Devorsetz, Stinziano, Gilberti, Heintz and Smith law firm and a was state senator from 1966 through 1992.

He said that he has nothing to do with the state's Empire Zone program and would not use his political influence to obtain Empire Zones for the parcels he owns.

"I would never, ever get into that," Lombardi said.

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Project manager Gary Knapp, who is working for the Lombardis through his G.O. Knapp and Associates consulting firm, said there is a growing "corporate presence in New York state in the pharmaceutical industry sector" and the proposed parks would expand on that presence.

There's already a pharmaceutical presence Upstate. Bristol-Myers Squibb Co. has operated a plant in DeWitt for years. Outsourcing Services Group has a pharmaceutical plant in North Norwich, and Mallinckrodt has a pharmaceutical plant in Hobart.

Knapp also said the \$80 million biotechnology research facility proposed by Upstate Medical University and the State University College of Environmental Science and Forestry in Syracuse is part of the equation. That site would do the research and development of new drugs and vaccines.

The proposed sites are:

About 250 acres on Northern Boulevard in Cicero, just southeast of Thompson Road.

About 700 acres on Lakeport Road in Sullivan, about three miles south of Route 31 near North Chittenango.

About 200 acres in Schroepfel, near an already developed industrial park.

All three sites are owned by the Lombardis.

The proposals are early in the planning process. Knapp said no discussions have been made yet with officials in Schroepfel and Cicero, although officials in those two areas have heard of the plans.

"I've got some very sketchy, incomplete information on the concept," said L. Michael Treadwell, director of Operation Oswego County, that county's economic development agency.

Cicero Supervisor Frances Kip said she has heard "a little bit" about the proposal. Cicero Codes Enforcement Officer Jay Seitz said he had seen a "brief outlined proposal."

In Sullivan, Supervisor John Gladney said Knapp has met with him and county officials, especially concerning Madison County's application for an Empire Zone.

Knapp said Empire Zone designations for the three sites are vital. He said without Empire Zones, the sites lose their competitiveness in attracting companies and businesses to locate in the parks.

There appear to be many obstacles to the plan. The Upstate Medical University and SUNY ESF proposal for a biotechnology research facility did not receive money this year from the state.

Donald Western, Onondaga County economic development director, said Onondaga County does have more than 120 unallocated acres for Empire Zones. He said there is a possibility the Cicero site could get an Empire Zone designation.

Treadwell said Oswego County has no more acres available through the Empire Zone program that it can designate as a zone. It is not applying for more Empire Zone designations.

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Madison County has no Empire Zone, but is applying for one of the six new zones that were part of the 2002-03 state budget. Madison County officials say the county has lost development opportunities and jobs to neighboring counties that do have the zones.

"In Madison County, we have the infrastructure and the educational facilities like SUNY Morrisville," Knapp said. "What is lacking is incentive. Without an Empire Zone, Madison County is strategically out of the economic development game."

Another issue facing the proposal is utilities at the sites.

"You've got to have the appropriate infrastructure to do this," Treadwell said. The Schroepel site "would need major, major infrastructure improvements. It's currently farmland with no improvements and no road access."

Seitz said the Cicero site has access to water, electric and gas, but no sewers. In Sullivan, the site has sewers and water nearby, but not on the site.

Knapp said the sites have good access to transportation, another key part of the plan. The Cicero site is close to Interstate 481, the Schroepel site is next to an existing industrial park, and there is rail service next to the Sullivan site.

Knapp said the Sullivan proposal also would be enhanced by a new Thruway interchange at Lakeport Road. Knapp has contacted the state Thruway Authority concerning this, but no meetings have been set up, said Terry O'Brien, a Thruway Authority spokesman.

"Before we would consider any new interchange, there has to be a financial feasibility study done," O'Brien said. He said such a study must show that if the interchange cost \$40 million to build, that it would bring in at least \$40 million in tolls.

"Most of the time, these requests don't pass this first hurdle," O'Brien said. If the authority did see that the interchange was financially feasible, then it would be about four years before the interchange would be completed, he said.

While there may be issues that need to be overcome concerning the sites, some officials are happy to see these development plans in the works.

"We're always open to any type of potential relative to development in Oswego County," Treadwell said. "If he wants to actively pursue developing a private industrial park adjacent to our industrial park, we would be happy to work, to the extent that we can, to help facilitate that."

"It would be quite a coup for us to have it here," Cicero Supervisor Kip said of the proposed Cicero park.

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