

# Galesi seeks approval for Niskayuna business park

NISKAYUNA — A long-dormant business park proposal in Niskayuna could finally get off the ground under a developer's plan to attract technology companies and light industry to 100 acres of mostly vacant land between Aqueduct and Balltown roads.

The Galesi Group, of Rotterdam, is seeking approval from the town Planning Board to subdivide the acreage into three lots and construct a nearly 30,000-square-foot building on one of the lots that would house two tenants. The board voted Monday to schedule a public hearing on the project for Sept. 22 at 7:30 p.m. at Town Hall, where as lead agency in the State Environmental Quality Review process it is expected to issue a negative declaration, meaning it finds the project would have no negative environmental impact.

If the project is approved, construction could begin before snow hits the ground, said Galesi Group COO David Buicko.

"We've had successful parks in Rotterdam, Glenville, Schenectady and now hopefully Niskayuna," he said. "There's a good team in place in Niskayuna. I know they've got a lot of residential going on, but to diversify their tax base is a good thing."

The park, long known as Hillside Commerce Park, would undergo a name change to either Niskayuna Business and Technology Park or Niskayuna Commerce Park. Buicko is leaning toward the latter. Officials said Tuesday that their goal is really to get rid of the "Hillside" part of the title.

"Hillside is not a good name because nobody wants to build on a hill," said Schenectady County Metroplex Development Authority Chairman Ray Gillen.

The actual developable portion of the 100-acre site is largely flat, he said. Still, because the nearby roads — Balltown and Aqueduct roads and Hillside Drive — have such steep grade changes, the park is not an ideal location for distribution businesses or other industry involving a significant amount of truck traffic.

"It's more ideal for tech companies," Gillen said. "We've got two very serious companies interested in the park right now."

One of them is TransTech Systems, a Schenectady business that makes technology used to measure and test asphalt and other materials on construction sites. It employs more than 20 people and currently has offices at 1594 State St. in the city's Woodlawn neighborhood.

TransTech would occupy more than 16,000 square feet of space inside the nearly 30,000-square-foot building Galesi is proposing to build at the site. The facility would go up on about 4.8 acres. Buicko said the company has outgrown its space in Schenectady and has begun looking at sites around the Capital Region.

"We want to keep them in the community," he said. "If we get approvals for the site, we'll see if we can make them a deal. They're a first-class company."

He declined to identify the second interested tenant.

A second subdivided lot would measure about 3.9 acres and house a stormwater management system. The remaining 91 acres would be subdivided down the road as future development opportunities materialize, Buicko said.

The town has had high hopes over the years for the site, once used as a test track for tanks during the Korean War. In 1998, it offered a 240-acre site that included the Commerce Park as a potential chip manufacturing plant location. General Electric even looked at the site for the battery plant it ultimately built at its Schenectady/Rotterdam campus, Gillen said.

A Quebec-based company had a bus assembly plant on site that employed as many as 200 people, but it shut the facility down in 2002.

The big plot of land between Aqueduct and Balltown roads was whittled down over the years as parcels were sold off — some of it to Ellis Medicine for additional employee parking, some of it to the Niskayuna School District for a bus garage and some of it to the U.S. Army for a more than \$18 million Army Reserve Center that should wrap up construction this fall.

Last fall, the Galesi Group snatched up the remaining acreage after the previous owner, Hillside Venture LLC, failed to stay current on its property taxes. Buicko purchased more than 100 acres at the county's annual foreclosure sale in two separate bids — a 99-acre tract assessed at \$1.2 million for \$55,000 and a 13-acre parcel assessed at \$464,300 for \$8,000.

"We had worked with the prior owners to try to develop that area to no avail," said Town Supervisor Joe Landry. "So we were very pleased that Galesi ended up buying it. They're a very aggressive developer, so we look forward to seeing that area developed."

The town has made a few infrastructure improvements in the area, including a new water main along Hillside Avenue, in anticipation of future development at the site, he said.

Landry expects even more interest in the site once the state secures funding for a new Rexford Bridge it plans to build just down the road. The new bridge would have four lanes, a roundabout on the Niskayuna side and a widened intersection on the Rexford side to accommodate the growing traffic between Schenectady and Saratoga counties.