

Magic Sports, rejected in Hamilton Township, wants to build \$200 million complex in Vineland

By THOMAS BARLAS Staff Writer | Posted: Tuesday, October 23, 2012 12:00 am

Developer Ronald Nametko ended eight years of planning in March 2010 by scuttling his \$200 million Magic Sports & Health Complex proposal in Hamilton Township.

Nametko dropped the project — which residents said would ruin their community and construction workers said would provide needed jobs — after claiming in part that its future was targeted for failure by officials in that Atlantic County municipality.

Now, Nametko is back, this time proposing his project for an almost 289-acre site near Route 55 and Lincoln and Sheridan avenues in Vineland.

Project officials said Nametko's plan is essentially the same one he proposed for the Mays Landing section of Hamilton: a complex featuring hotels, an indoor water park, playing fields, bunk houses and training facilities that would attract hundreds of young athletes each year. The facility would be built in phases.

The official plans will be filed with the city's Zoning Board this week. Officials with Magic Sports Complex of NJ have scheduled a press conference at City Hall on Thursday to officially unveil their project.

But while the proposal is essentially the same as the one planned for Hamilton, project spokeswoman Teddie O'Keefe said Nametko has learned some lessons.

The Vineland project will have a master developer — Gloucester County-based Sora Northeast Development — to oversee the process, she said. The Vineland site is not near any residential neighborhoods, and its proximity to Route 55 gives it better access with less intrusion on local streets, she said.

“They've learned lessons through the Mays Landing location,” O'Keefe said.

Magic Sports never owned the municipally held land in Hamilton. Nametko said he scrapped the project because he did not want to pay at least \$75,000 in land-purchase agreement extensions with the township. That meant Hamilton never got the \$3.3 million for the land, or the estimated \$100,000 in local purpose taxes anticipated annually from the Magic Sports complex.

Magic Sports does not yet own the land in Vineland, O'Keefe said. Nametko has agreements of sale for the land, the bulk of which is owned by South Jersey Industries, and hopes to go to settlement on the

properties in January, she said.

The proposals for both Hamilton and Vineland involve private financing.

“This is all private investment,” said city Economic Development Director Sandra Forosisky. “There is no public-private partnership.”

Despite the project’s history in Hamilton, Vineland officials are excited about its possibilities.

“This is big,” said Mayor Robert Romano. “It’s going to be a significant attraction, not only for Vineland but for Cumberland County.”

Romano said the sports complex will provide needed short-term construction jobs and long-term employment.

The project is not an election-year gimmick, said Romano, who is one of five people running for mayor. He said he started talking with Nametko about the project two years ago.

“We don’t want this looked at as a political project,” O’Keefe said.

The city has already identified the Magic Sports site as an area that it wanted to develop, Forosisky said. The site has public water, and sewer systems will be run there, she said.

The scope of the project Nametko planned for the 112-acre site in Hamilton and the number of people it would have employed changed several times. The version that received preliminary site approval from Hamilton’s Planning Board in 2009 included a 5,000-seat baseball stadium, practice baseball fields, hotel, indoor water park and bunkhouses for athletes attending mostly summer baseball tournaments.

Many Hamilton residents opposed the project, saying it would cause traffic backups, noise and light pollution and overwhelm the Mays Landing area. Backers of the project contended it would provide needed jobs and tax revenue.

Nametko said the project would boost the economies of both Hamilton Township and Atlantic County, at one point saying it would create about 700 jobs.

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