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Winston Farm may soon see some green acres

BY THERESA KEEGAN

Winston Farm, an 800-acre tract of land in Saugerties that at different times has been home to a horse farm and a rock concert, not to mention the near-home to both a county land-fill and casino (the last two concepts successfully opposed by residents) may soon be seeing green. Green, in terms of both development concept – and profits – if a plan being developed under the auspices of the Hudson Valley Economic Development Corporation comes to fruition. The site could be an integrated development that would include green manufacturers, protected open space, retail, recreation and possibly housing components.

“It’s a significant scale we’re talking about but for the future, we need to look ahead,” said Lance Matteson, CEO of the Ulster County Development Agency which recently contributed \$10,000 toward a site study which is expected to be released by the end of the month. “The goal is to make it a thoughtful, sustainable green project – to have a vision rather than just let the lowest common denominator define the planning process.”

Winston Farm – one of the largest tracts of undeveloped, privately held lands in Ulster County, was declared a top potential development site in



the Hudson Valley last year, when the regional Hudson Valley Economic Development Corporation reviewed nine potential sites throughout the valley, said Matteson.

In January, Saugerties started holding meetings about developing the scenic tract of land at the intersection of Routes 32 and 212 and CH2M Hill was hired to oversee the effort. The Colorado-based consulting firm has overseen other projects that promote manufacturing.

“They also have manufacturing clients, so they have a good finger on the pulse of the marketplace,” said Matteson. “Their exposure to things like solar manufacturing and biopharmaceuticals means they know what’s

needed in the way of these facilities.” He says that although TechCity, the former IBM plant in the town of Ulster, is considered a top spot for development, the site is constrained by existing structures. Winston Farm could cater construction to specific manufacturing and research needs.

“What we really find throughout the Hudson Valley is an array of real estate choices that give some alternatives and options, but we tend to not have ready-to-go sites,” said Matteson. “We tend to have sites that need work, and sometimes a lot of work. Modern companies need to have permits, zoning and be as close to buildable as possible, but often you

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can't anticipate what the customer wants until they raise their hand."

No specific manufacturers are named for Winston Farm, but Matteson says the site could employ upwards of 2,000 people in projects that will be phased in over quite a few years.

The completed feasibility study will present three options and could cost upward of "130,000 with the town of Saugerties also contributing \$10,000 to it while the owners, the Schaller family, and HVDEC provide the rest of the funds. Public input has raised concerns over increased traffic, noise and protecting the area's water table and the site's habitats and wetlands.

Farming on the site originated in the 1700s with the Wynkoop family. The land was ultimately bought by James Winston, a contractor and engineer for public projects who oversaw construction of the Ashokan Dam. (He also built three dams on the farm property.) He raised prize-winning horses and cows on the sprawling property, which has views of the Hudson River, Catskill Mountains and is adjacent to the Thruway exit. Stone outcroppings, meadows and woods adorn the land, and the "manor house" built in the 1920s under Winston's direction, features the area's native bluestone.

It was purchased in the 1950s by the Schaller family, who are principals of Winston Farm Limited Partnership. In 1994 a Woodstock

anniversary concert was held on the site. Plans to build a dump and casino have drawn united opposition from many citizens who are still actively involved in plans for the town's gateway site.

Public meetings have drawn dozens of citizens and once the study is completed Matteson expects a more focused discussion can proceed.

"If this vision is implemented, it will be a beautiful space for the community. It's very doable, but at some point you have to get capital and muscle behind this."