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Marlboro seeks partner to build sports complex

Town would own it, lease to developer

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FREEHOLD BUREAU

The township is looking to partner with a private developer in a proposal to build an 80,000-square-foot sports complex off Tennent Road.

Mayor Jonathan Hornik said the township is negotiating with Eclipse Indoor Sports of Freehold Township to lease a 5- to 6-acre township-owned tract to the developer. Eclipse would build and pay for the facility, he said.

As proposed, the project features enough open gym space for three full-sized high school basketball courts. It also includes two indoor turf fields suitable for soccer, lacrosse and football, and designated areas for volleyball and wrestling, Leonard "Lenny" Toto of Freehold Township confirmed Tuesday. Toto is a longtime local sports volunteer and a project principal.

The proposal would bring the township revenue through taxes and rent, as well as a set amount of access to the facility still to be negotiated, the mayor said. The time allotted would be deducted from the rent in the public-private partnership, he said.

The Township Council last week voted to allow the mayor to assemble a "deal team" to handle negotiations. The team includes Council President Steven Rosenthal, Deputy Mayor Larry Rosen and Township Attorney Jonathan Williams.

Hornik said the proposal would be "a great way to add sorely needed recreation improvements to town without burdening the taxpayer." Once negotiations are complete, the developer would bring the proposal before the Planning Board.

The mayor said the township is far from sealing the deal, particularly in a fluctuating economic climate. But he said he was "cautiously optimistic" an agreement could be reached.

Rosenthal also said the plan would be a win for a township in need of recreation expansion, where local groups are sometimes denied use of fields and facilities because of lack of space.

"This would give an opportunity for the residents who may not be in the recreation program to participate (in sports) at a place they don't have to travel 20 miles to get to," Rosenthal said.

The township in 2006 also had looked to create a domed, indoor basketball facility, which could have cost up to \$2 million. But that project was stalled after residents protested the cost. Mayor Robert Kleinberg, who spearheaded the proposal, was voted out of office before it came to fruition.

The Township Council in January sought recreation proposals for the Tennent Road land. The tract is a developable portion of about 60 township-owned acres behind the Marlboro Township Municipal Utilities Authority solar farm and water tower. The council last year designated the property, largely wetlands, as an area in need of redevelopment.

