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## Mensch Capital: Proposal fits scope of comprehensive plan

by KEATON T. DEPRIEST Associate Editor

Andrew Shaevel, managing partner of Mensch Capital Partners, said that while he is open to discussing proposals by town officials for the former [Westwood Country Club](#) property, the firm continues to move forward in planning its redevelopment of the site.

In July 2014, Mensch Capital submitted official plans to the town for the \$238 million redevelopment of the Westwood site, located at [772 N. Forest Road](#).

According to the firm's officials, design plans feature pedestrian-friendly, mixed-use development patterns combining residential homes and a senior living facility with shops and restaurants.

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Nearly 40 percent of the overall acreage would be dedicated to public green and open space, featuring recreational areas for pedestrians and bicycling trails.

In November, Supervisor Barry Weinstein detailed a different town proposal that would lead to the purchase of Glen Oak Golf Course for approximately \$4.6 million.

According to his plan, Weinstein said the cost of the transaction could be paid for by reconfiguring Audubon Golf Course and selling — for the purposes of development — approximately 25 to 75 acres of land adjacent to [Millersport Highway](#) and the University at [Buffalo](#).

Weinstein said some of the extra revenue from the Audubon property transaction could potentially be used to acquire all or part of the former [Westwood Country Club](#). He said the goal would be for the property to become a state park.

Shaevel said the firm has been “responsive” to discussing the town's ideas; however, Mensch is going ahead in planning the redevelopment of its property.

“We have made it clear that we are happy to have a conversation, but we are not stopping our proposal from

moving forward,” Shaevel said.

In addition, Shaevel said the installation of the fence surrounding a majority of Westwood’s perimeter was “not a spite fence by any means.”

He said due to the knowledge of contamination as a result of the past use of arsenic-enhanced fertilizers on the property when it was used as a golf course, the firm was compelled to install the fence.

“We had a prudent responsibility to make sure the site was clearly delineated,” Shaevel said, adding that prior to the fence’s installation there were cases of vandalism on the property.

“After we put up that fence, the vandalism stopped,” he said.

On Monday, Mensch Capital representatives said they recently submitted a draft sampling report to the state Department of Environmental Conservation, providing updated soil sampling test results pursuant to the Brownfield Cleanup Agreement the firm entered into with the state.

According to Mensch officials, the updated tests confirmed the presence of arsenic and found a number of additional metals not previously detected.

The firm said as a result, it intends to implement a cleanup and remediation plan in cooperation with the DEC. Shaevel said remediation of the site will be “completed to the satisfaction and standards of the appropriate state regulator.”

“To be clear, the redevelopment of the site is the only viable catalyst that enables a successful remediation of the site, resulting in a clean site, as meeting its rigorous regulatory standards for residential and/or recreational uses,” Shaevel said.

In answering public concerns about the development causing high volumes of storm-water runoff, Shaevel said the system will be designed to keep water from entering impacted areas of town in flooding situations.

Shaevel said Westwood’s plans call for water to be collected faster and ahead of flooding waters at area creeks.

He said Westwood will be able to control the level of water within its planned lake system and can release water “well in advance” of when a creek crests in a flood.

Shaevel said traffic concerns could be alleviated by a creating a street that would run parallel with North Forest.

He said the street would be owned and maintained by Westwood and could be “promoted as a pass through” for vehicles seeking to head north or south.

“Traffic is an existing problem,” he said. “If you solve the underlying problem, then Westwood isn’t a problem anymore.”

Shaevel said the plans to prevent sanitary sewage overflow could not be outlined as of yet, but he said additional mitigation will be made to absorb the heightened possibility of sewage discharge.

Additionally, Shaevel said benefits of Westwood include an increase in the tax base of the town and the development would also include neighborhood stores, boutiques and local restaurants within the site.

“We want things at Westwood that help add to a walkable community,” Shaevel said.

He added that the goal in creating Westwood is to “integrate it with the community so that there is collaboration” among all of the residents.

“We want to find the right level of integration and development of property,” he added.

Mensch’s Draft Generic Environmental Impact Statement, which was accepted as complete by town officials in December, is available at town libraries; on the town’s website, [www.amherst.ny.us](http://www.amherst.ny.us); and on Westwood’s website, [www.westwoodamherst.com](http://www.westwoodamherst.com).

Shaevel said the document, which was revised twice upon the request of town officials, includes information regarding the Westwood proposal and how it fits within the scope of the town’s Bicentennial Comprehensive Plan.

A copy of the draft sampling report involving the recent soil testing is also available on the Westwood website.

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**[Return to top](#)**

