

Nonprofit rallies to squash Tesla land sale

by David Winzelberg

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Supporters for creating a science center at Nikola Tesla's former laboratory in Shoreham will rally at the site next week to save the property from being sold privately.

The 16-acre parcel on Route 25A where Tesla made many of his electrical discoveries is up for sale, but a campaign to save it by a group called Tesla Science Center at Wardenclyffe has gained steam among elected officials, including state Sen. Ken LaValle, Assemblyman Marc Alessi, Suffolk County Legis. Dan Losquadro, Suffolk County Legis. Ed Romaine and Brookhaven Supervisor Mark Lesko, all expected to attend the event on Saturday, May 30 at 10 a.m.

Suffolk County is currently conducting an appraisal of the property, which is owned by Belgian photo giant AGFA Gevaert and is available for \$1.65 million.

Leo Farrell, of Hauppauge-based Corporate Realty Services, which is marketing the site, said there have been lots of interest and several offers.

An unnamed developer had offered to buy the Tesla parcel and donate seven acres for a science center if he was allowed to build 48 condominiums on the remaining nine acres. The Town of Brookhaven changed the former photo-finishing facility from industrial to residential two-acre zoning in 2003.

Before Tesla built his laboratory on the property in 1901, it was a resort community owned by banker John Warden called Wardenclyffe-on-Sound. Deep in debt, Tesla lost the land in 1915. Peerless Photo Products, which AGFA bought in 1979, leased the site in 1939 and gained ownership several years later.

After AGFA ceased operations in 1994, the Environmental Protection Agency declared the Shoreham property a Superfund site, which has since been cleaned up. An underground cadmium plume from Tesla's demolished radio tower was encased in concrete as part of the remediation.

The Tesla Science Center at Wardenclyffe is an incorporated nonprofit group that's working toward the preservation of the Tesla laboratory, its restoration and its reuse as a science center and museum.

"This site should be saved as part of the legacy Tesla left to the world," said Gene Genova, vice president of the science center group.

Tesla is known for pioneering the technology to create AC power, television, robotics and radar.

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