

# Relief, frustration in

Mix of emotions permeate over Amazon plan

BY TED PHILLIPS  
AND JAMES T. MADORE  
ted.phillips@newsday.com  
james.madore@newsday.com

Leafy green bushes and trees have long obscured the former Cerro Wire site where decades of controversy have idled 39 acres of land behind a chain-link and barbed-wire fence in Syosset.

With the announcement Thursday by Oyster Bay officials that internet giant Amazon wants to build a warehouse on one of the most centrally located vacant parcels of land in town, the long saga of acrimony may be coming to an end.

Supervisor Joseph Saladino said last week that he had seen plans for a 200,000-square-foot warehouse on the site, though Amazon officials declined to comment on whether they were looking at the site.

Hints of such a plan emerged last year when town officials said they were negotiating changes with owner Syosset Park Development LLC, a partnership between Indianapolis-based Simon Property Group and Manhasset-based Castagna Realty Co., to develop the site as zoned — for warehouses and office buildings — instead of a proposed mixed-use development. The earlier proposal included an adjacent town-owned property that combined would have been 93 acres.

It was an abrupt turnaround after town officials and the community had fought off a plan to build a mall on the old Cerro Wire site and seemingly embraced a new project that would have built 625 town houses and condominiums, two hotels, a 30-acre park, stores, offices and restaurants.

Todd Fabricant, a former Jericho resident who led the Cerro Wire Coalition in opposition to the proposed mall plan, said he was “extremely disappointed” that the “smart growth” plan was abandoned.

“It would have been great for the economy, great for the community,” Fabricant said. He



Plans over the years for the Cerro Wire site have ranged from a luxury mall project to the latest proposal of an Amazon warehouse.

## SPECIAL REPORT

added that he had no opinion on the warehouse and wished the developer “good luck.”

Henry Mo, who testified against the mixed-use plan at a 2018 public hearing, said an Amazon warehouse was a “much better use” of the land.

“Two years ago when we talked about Syosset Park, there’s a lot of concern — health concern and also potential burden on the school district,” Mo said. “But a warehouse, we have less concern on this.”

Mo, an insurance analyst from Syosset, said the Cerro Wire site cannot be “abandoned forever” and that a warehouse would create less traffic than a mall or residential development.

Laura Schultz, president of Residents for a More Beautiful Syosset, a 200-member civic

group, said its members have “always favored for the site a light industrial development that generates tax revenue for the Syosset Central School District.”

The site’s informal name comes from Alabama-based Cerrowire, a manufacturer of cables and copper that operated on the site for decades. The company, which has gone through several name changes, vacated the Syosset site in 1987 and it was bought in 1990 by Chicago-based Tribune Company, *Newsday* reported.

After years of environmental cleanup, plans emerged for the property to be developed into a mall, raising concerns about traffic from residents and town officials. Michigan-based Taubman Centers Inc., which later bought the property from Tribune, began developing plans for the mall in the 1990s.

Then-Town Supervisor

Lewis Yevoli said such a plan would require an exhaustive traffic study, according to a 1993 *Newsday* article. That launched a fight over plans to build a mall on the site that would span two decades.

### Decades-long debate

Taubman submitted an application to the town in 1998 to build a 960,000-square foot mall on the site. In the face of fierce community opposition, Taubman reduced the proposed size. But when the town board, led by Yevoli’s successor John Venditto, voted against issuing a special-use permit for the mall in 2001, the company sued Oyster Bay, launching years of litigation.

The town repeatedly lost in court until 2009, when a state appellate court ruled in Oyster Bay’s favor. The decision meant Taubman had to restart its application.

In 2012, the town decided to sell its property at 150 Miller Place, adjacent to the Cerro Wire site, to fill a budget gap. The town board voted to sell the property, where about half of the town’s employees worked. After a public referendum, the town sold it to a group led by Simon Properties in an unusual real estate transaction that provided an immediate infusion of \$30 million to the cash-strapped town but postponed the closing of the sale for up to eight years. The arrangement would let the developer work on its plans without paying property taxes on the town-owned property, while Oyster Bay had time to relocate its workers.

Taubman unsuccessfully sued to try to stop the deal, and then sold the Cerro Wire site to the group led by Simon Properties, which planned to build a mixed-use development over the two properties.

# Syosset

## CERRO WIRE TIMELINE

- **1920** Hyman Cohn opens the Circle Flexible Conduit Co., a factory on the site, to make armored cable and flexible steel conduits.
- **1951** Circle adds a copper and steel rolling mill.
- **1955** Circle is purchased by Cerro de Pasco Corp. and is re-named Cerro Wire & Cable Co.
- **1987** Cerro vacates the site.
- **1990** Newspaper publisher Tribune Co. buys the site for a printing plant for the Daily News.
- **1998** Mall developer Taubman Centers Inc. proposes building a 960,000-square-foot luxury mall.
- **2000** Taubman reduces the project to 750,000 square feet, but the Oyster Bay Town Board denies a special-use permit, sparking litigation.
- **2001-08** Four court decisions support Taubman's contention that the town's action was arbitrary.
- **2009** The Appellate Division overturns a court ruling, saying the town board must issue the permit and approve a site plan.
- **2013** Oyster Bay, facing budget problems, sells its Syosset public works complex, which is next to the Cerro site, to Taubman rival Simon Property Group for \$32.5 million. Taubman sues and forces a public referendum; residents approved the sale 2-1.
- **2014** Taubman throws in the towel and sells the Cerro site to Simon Property Group.
- **2018** Syosset Park Development, comprising Simon Property and Castagna Realty Co. in Manhasset, proposes building 625 town houses and condominiums, two hotels, a 30-acre park, stores, offices and restaurants; 700 people attend a public hearing to oppose the project.
- **2019** Syosset Park terminates an agreement to purchase the Department of Public Works site and demands Oyster Bay refund the developers' \$30 million down payment.
- **2020** Oyster Bay agrees to repay Syosset Park from its reserves and then issue taxable bonds for \$30 million. Amazon proposes to build a 200,000-square-foot warehouse, employing 550 people.

SOURCES: NEWSDAY RESEARCH, COMPANY REPORTS

COMPILED BY DOROTHY LEVIN, CAROLINE CURTIN,  
NYASIA DRAPER AND JUDY WEINBERG

# Virtual Pride event likens riotous roots

## Pride organizers say that police brutality protests are familiar story

BY MATTHEW CHAYES  
matthew.chayes@newsday.com



Bricks, trash cans and fists hurled at the cops. Crowds refusing orders to disperse. Protests and unrest lasting days over long-standing abuse by society and the police.

Long Island's livestreamed Virtual Pride event on Sunday afternoon hinted at the riotous roots that helped grow America's modern gay-rights movement — likening what happened beginning June 28, 1969, at Manhattan's Stonewall Inn to the protests and unrest globally sparked by viral video of George Floyd's death.

"Pride started as a riot. Pride started because of police brutality against the LGBTQ community. And it was the few brave trans women of color who threw that first brick when they said, 'you know what, we're not going to take it anymore' and fought back," said David Kilmnick, event organizer and president of the LGBT Network. "And so here we are, half a century later, with the Black Lives Matter movement fighting for racial justice against police brutality."

Sunday's event, coming at the start of nearly the third week of such protests, was streamed online and telecast instead of a parade and related celebrations at Jones Beach as planned. Kilmnick in April canceled the in-person gathering because of the coronavirus pandemic restrictions.

Politicians, singers, actors, schoolchildren and other ordinary Long Islanders celebrated the cause and shared stories of those who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer or those who just offer support.

Huntington is where Long Island's Pride originated. In 1991, the town initially refused to issue a permit.

"We were denied the right to

march in every single township that we applied to," Kilmnick recalled Sunday, but the town relented under pressure from a federal judge and allowed the Island's first gay and lesbian pride parade. That was 22 years after Stonewall, when patrons fought back during an NYPD raid of that bar.

Kilmnick was one of the organizers for the 1991 parade.

"There were snipers on the roofs. There were the hateful signs, you know, the Jesus signs against LGBT folks," he said.

But 29 years later, as at other Pride events across the country, Sunday's livestream was a who's who of the region's politicians, including the executives of both counties, Suffolk's Steve Bellone and Nassau's Laura Curran; U.S. Reps. Kathleen Rice and Tom Suozzi; state Attorney General Letitia James; and both U.S. Sens. Kirsten Gillibrand and Chuck Schumer.

Among the reasons there's conservative-driven opposition: It would prohibit discrimination in sports and at places such as bathrooms and locker rooms, based on gender identity — an inner sense of male, female or a hybrid of both or none at all — not just what's on one's birth certificate.

Whether current federal law from 1964 — outlawing discrimination on the basis of sex — already covers LGBT people was argued last year before the U.S. Supreme Court, with a decision expected imminently.

Pete Buttigieg, former mayor of South Bend, Ind., and the first openly gay person to be a major presidential contender, said at the virtual Pride event that "every struggle is different, but every struggle is connected."

## Newsday

**Long Island Office**  
6 Corporate Center Drive,  
Melville, NY 11747

### On the Web

For a list of Newsday departments, their emails and telephone numbers, go to [newsday.com/contact](http://newsday.com/contact)

### For Reprints, Rights & Permissions

[NewsdayReprints.com](mailto:NewsdayReprints.com)

### Home Delivery

800-NEWSDAY  
(800-639-7329)  
[helpme@newsday.com](mailto:helpme@newsday.com)

**Newsroom** 631-843-2700

**Place an Ad/Change an Ad**  
631-843-SOLD (7653)

### Letters to the Editor

[Emailletters@newsday.com](mailto:Emailletters@newsday.com)

### CORRECTIONS

*Newsday strives for the highest level of accuracy and fairness and is committed to promptly correcting errors. Readers can report problems or concerns about content in the paper or on Newsday.com by emailing [ND-Editor@newsday.com](mailto:ND-Editor@newsday.com), calling 631-843-2700 or writing to 6 Corporate Center Drive, Melville, NY 11747, Attention: Corrections.*

### THIS DATE IN HISTORY

**1775** The Second Continental Congress voted unanimously to appoint George Washington head of the Continental Army.

**1864** Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton signed an order establishing a military burial ground that became Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia.

**1904** More than 1,000 people died when fire erupted aboard steamboat General Slocum in New York City's East River.

**1934** President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed an act making the National Guard part of the U.S. Army in event of war or national emergency.

**1944** American forces began their successful invasion of Saipan during World War II.

B-29 Superfortresses carried out their first raids on Japan.

**1955** The United States and Britain signed an agreement concerning atomic info for "mutual defense purposes."

**2015** Rachel Dolezal resigned as president of the NAACP's Spokane, Washington, chapter days after her parents said she was a white woman posing as black.

**2019** Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris held its first Mass since the devastating April 15 fire that ravaged its roof.

As Syosset Park Development's plan began going through the approval process, new community opposition arose, and after a contentious 2018 hearing the town and developer reassessed their options. Saladino had already put a pause on relocating town offices and personnel. In 2019, the developer terminated the sale of the town property and sued Oyster Bay, alleging it had violated the terms of the deal and demanded its money back, plus interest and damages.

At the beginning of 2020 the town settled the lawsuit, borrowing \$30 million to repay the developer and setting the stage for new development on the Cerro Wire site.

Kevin Law, president of the Long Island Association, said the decades-long debate over the Cerro site illustrates the difficulty of moving projects forward here.

ward here.

"The Cerro Wire saga is emblematic of the antiquated and burdensome land-use process on Long Island that often empowers opponents, scares investors and chases away transformative projects for our region," he said.

The developers' group Association for a Better Long Island last week praised Amazon's warehouse plan, saying the Cerro Wire site has been vacant for too long.

The retailer's proposal "puts a property that has been vacant and contested for decades back on the tax rolls and allows additional environmental remediation to take place on what had been an industrial complex," said Kyle Strober, the group's executive director. He also said the project "will jumpstart an economy that has been dormant during the pandemic shutdown."