



August 5, 2008

## **Lakewood developer signs deal to buy former Lucent site**

By Sametta M. Thompson

HOLMDEL — A residential and commercial developer based in Lakewood has signed a deal with Alcatel-Lucent to purchase its historic 473-acre former Lucent Technologies' Bell Labs site off Crawfords Corner Road.

The contract has not been closed yet, and the terms and conditions of the agreement are confidential, said Ralph Zucker, president of Somerset Development.

"In terms of what our plans are, it's clear that no matter how the uses are mixed, the main use, hopefully, will remain office," Zucker said. "Right now, we're in the listening stage. We have ideas, but we'll like to hear ideas from the community and the governing body."

Patrick Morrison, vice president of real estate for Alcatel-Lucent for the Americas, said he is optimistic about the arrangement.

"We are pleased we were able to find a buyer genuinely interested in this special building and who is willing to work with the community and consider some creative ideas in how to use this building," Morrison said.

Somerset Development currently is working with Aberdeen town officials to redevelop a 50-acre site there as a mixed-use project.

Zucker said his company drew interest in the 2 million-square-foot Lucent building after 38 seasoned designers, architects, engineers and scholars brainstormed for a weekend in April and released a report concluding that there are at least six different ways the giant glass and aluminum building can be reused.

That collaborative planning process, called a charrette, was organized by members of national and regional preservation groups working to save the Lucent site and address preservation challenges facing it.

Among the proposals to reuse the building, designed by Finnish architect Eero Saarinen, are:

as a health care center.

as a multiuniversity graduate center.

as a research and development production facility.

as residential apartments or condos.

as a new urbanist community.

by finding another high-tech owner.

"We feel we can follow a lot of the ideas that came out of the charrette," Zucker said.

"What we're going to do for the next few months is explore and hopefully come up with the correct mix that works for everybody — that has the right fiscal impact, that works with the structure that's there," he said. "We think it's an incredible structure that can adapt itself to many uses."

Michael Calafati, historic resources chairman of the American Institute of Architects, who was instrumental in the reuse brainstorming initiative, said it's hopeful that a developer supports reusing the property.

But the question is, Calafati said, how they will propose to manipulate the building?

"The building is so large, but it's flexible," he said. "There are modifications that can be made that will allow it to adapt to a number of different uses, including residential."

Zucker said he is largely depending on feedback from the Holmdel community.

"We like to design our projects in a collaborative process," he said.

Deputy Mayor Alan Bateman said he's anxious to see what the developer's proposal will be.

"We'll evaluate that proposal against the recommendations made by the Lucent Advisory Committee," he said.

The developer is going to have to be willing to work within the goals and objective of the town, Bateman said.

"Certainly we want to have the right type of ratables there, and we want minimal impact on our infrastructure and traffic."

In 2006, Preferred Real Estate Investments of Conshohocken, Pa., agreed to purchase the Lucent property. The private developer wanted to break down the colossal structure and

turn the property into a mix of commercial and age-restricted residential development. Officials from Preferred had said reusing the building was not a good option.

The housing component of that plan was criticized by Holmdel residents, concerned it would put a dent in the township's quality of life and raise taxes. That plan, however, fell through.

Last November, a purchase agreement between Lucent and Preferred was terminated. Officials from the development company did not say why they bowed out of the deal. The Bell Labs building was erected in 1962 and was expanded in 1966 and 1982. In 1964, cosmic microwave background radiation, a form of electromagnetic radiation, was discovered by a physicist and astronomer working at Bells Labs.

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