BROOKLYN

Controversial project involving Kristal Auto Mall owner Lilaahar (Sammy) Bical quietly breaks ground on Mill Basin site

FBI investigating whether state Sen. John Sampson broke laws for taking $10,000 to assist car dealer's acquisition of parcel near Four Sparrow Marsh and Belt Pkwy.

BY REUVEN BLAU / NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

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In April, the Bloomberg administration announced it had sold the 110,000-square-foot parcel near the Four Sparrow Marsh and the Belt Parkway to Brooklyn auto dealer Lilaahar (Sammy) Bical, owner of Kristal Auto Mall, one of the biggest Cadillac dealers on the East Coast, who Bical paid state Sen. John Sampson $10,000 to help put deal in motion.

Construction on a project that includes a major car dealership has quietly started on a controversial piece of land in Mill Basin twice tied to scandal-scarred politicians who have tried to help developers buy the land from the city.

In April, the Bloomberg administration announced it had sold the 110,000-square-foot parcel near the Four Sparrow Marsh and the Belt Parkway to Brooklyn auto dealer Lilaahar (Sammy) Bical, owner of Kristal Auto Mall, one of the biggest

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Cadillac dealers on the East Coast.

Bical was helped in his bid to obtain the land after paying tainted state Sen. John Sampson (D-Canarsie) a $10,000 "retainer fee" to help arrange a sit-down with Bloomberg administration officials, the News reported last month.

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Those meetings occurred in early 2012, and this past March the city sold him the land for $4.2 million.

Sampson and his lawyer, Zachary Carter, did not respond to calls seeking comment.

The FBI is investigating whether Sampson broke the law by seeking and receiving retainer fees from Bical, and another businessman, in an unrelated case, who sought his assistance in dealing with the government, sources said.

Originally, the city planned to sell the land to Forest City Ratner to build a mini mall. That plan was scuttled in September 2011 after a Forest City Ratner official was revealed to have asked disgraced former state Sen. Carl Kruger for state funds, according to a criminal complaint.

As part of the new deal, the city also sold Toys R Us the land it currently occupies for $13 million.

The first part of construction, which has just begun, entails carving out a spot for a new parking lot for the toy store, which park advocates charge is being built on protected marsh land. The expanded car dealership will later be built on the old Toys R Us parking lot, city officials said.

Conservation groups and park advocates plan to sue to block the city's sale of the land on the grounds that it lacked proper state approval.

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The Bloomberg administration maintains the area is not park land and insists the project will help create new jobs at a long-underused location near the southern end of Flatbush Ave.

"This project will lead to a $30 million private investment, as well as new construction jobs and additional permanent jobs for the Mill Basin community," said Economic Development Corporation spokesman Patrick Muncie.

He added that all aspects of the project have gone through the public review process. Critics of the plan point out that the review occurred before the Sampson ties surfaced.

Park advocates also contend that entire area is protected park land.

They cite an official Parks Department "Four Sparrow Marsh Preserve 66.5 acres" sign that used to hang where the Toys R Us parking lot is now being built, as well as several old city park maps.

There are also records showing the land was transferred to the Parks Department in 1994 and dedicated as Wildlife Forever in 1997, according to Geoffrey Croft, president of New York City Park Advocates.

"How much lower can these guys get? Destroying part of a bird sanctuary for an auto mall? And on top of that now they are trying to claim it's not park land?" Croft said.

Still, a key local city lawmaker backs the project, noting it went through a long public approval process.

"The car dealership is not on Four Sparrow Marsh, the marshland itself is not being touched," said City Councilman Lew Fidler (D-Mill Basin).

But that has done little to allay environmentalist's concerns.

"They keep giving away public parks to private developers, and the public knows little to nothing about it, and they just pretend it wasn't park land," fumed Brooklyn Bird Club President Rob Jett.

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