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### Wang unveils bold vision for Nassau

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For starters, Islanders owner Charles Wang and his Lighthouse Development Group want to build a newer, bigger, better Nassau Coliseum topped with billowing white sails that call to mind the nearby Atlantic Ocean.

Then, he will to turn its bleak asphalt parking lot into a lively urban center, where twin towers 31-stories tall will house Long Island's first five-star hotel, overlooking a conference center, offices, homes and a "Celebration Plaza" larger than New York's Bryant Park.

And that's just phase one.

Wang's 5.5-million-square-foot application for a planned development district, filed late Tuesday with the Town of Hempstead, aims to transform the Coliseum and its surrounding 150 acres of county-owned land into "a state-of-the-art venue which will serve as an economic and socioeconomic engine," bringing new jobs and tax revenues, higher property values and a focal point for the Island. It will also, they say, keep the Islanders from leaving.

"We kid around that the cockroaches and the rats [in the Coliseum] are so old, even they have Stanley Cup rings," Islanders General Manager Garth Snow said.

The development proposal, copies of which were given to Newsday and some other media outlets in advance, is being viewed as a watershed moment for Nassau County.

Will its residents embrace a new vision of development that accepts urban scale and density on the promise that it will deliver vibrant, walkable communities where the next generation can afford to live?

Or will they see it as just another attempt to jam too many buildings onto too small a piece of land, with too much traffic and not enough parking?

The Lighthouse project, originally named for a now-scraped 60-story tower that was to be its centerpiece, is the keystone of Thomas Suozzi's "New Suburbia" land-use plan for central Nassau, and the filing is expected to focus new energy on the county's proposed new transit network that still has yet to settle on a mode or route.

Wang and his partner, RexCorp Realty chairman Scott Rechler, promise to follow green-building and smart-growth neighborhood development principles and include bicycle and jogging trails that connect with Hofstra University, Nassau Community College, Museum Mile and wind all the way to Eisenhower Park.

"This is not just sprawling big-box development, it's something distinctive and special," Rechler said. "It'll be the best of the city and the best of the suburbs."

The developers want to navigate the complex zoning, planning and environmental reviews within the next 18 months. That would allow them to finalize a 99-year lease for the county-owned property and break ground for the Coliseum's long-awaited renovation by July 2009. The rest of their vision would take form over the following five to 10 years.

It will be up to Hempstead Town to decide whether the site and its surrounding neighborhoods can handle the traffic and parking demands this development would place upon it.

"Anyone who has driven along Meadowbrook Parkway or Hempstead Turnpike during rush hour in the facility of the Hub knows that traffic is already a very serious issue," Supervisor Kate Murray said. "There's no reason to expect that it won't be an even greater concern as we consider any new development proposal."

The proposed conceptual master plan covers a swath of county-owned land allocated by the federal government in 1963 from the former Mitchel Field Air Force Base. The land, which is now zoned mostly for office and hotel development, includes the county's 77-acre Coliseum parcel, which is leased by SMG Management, as well as RexCorp Plaza, the Marriott Hotel and the Omni Building, are leased from the county by a joint venture between Wang and RexCorp.

The first phase, the mixed-use core subdistrict, includes a transformed Coliseum that could hold up to 17,500 hockey fans or 20,000 concert goers with an additional concourse and new suites, seats, electronics, restaurants and shops. Next door are a sports technology center and an athletic complex with four sheets of ice to host local, regional and national events. The Lighthouse design provides for more than 250,000 square feet of convention, conference and exhibition space, up from the 60,000 square feet the Coliseum holds.

This first phase would also include the site's two 31-story signature towers up to 450 feet tall, housing a five-star hotel with 300 rooms, including luxury full-service condominiums. The hotel would overlook the plaza and down a canal lined with shops and restaurants, with loft housing above and a gourmet grocery below. These condominiums would range from just a few stories to 18 stories tall, or up to 275 feet high.

The second, residential village sub-district, the architects envision a neighborhood more or less built on top of parking decks, with each block a circle of multi-story townhouses and condominiums looking out over green courtyards, many of them with swimming pools. Below on street level will be grocery stores and dry cleaners.

Wang and Rechler's overall proposal calls for a blend of next-generation, luxury, active adult and multifamily housing. A multi-screen movie theater will be part of this phase. The typical building in this section is 7 stories; the tallest would be no more than 150 feet tall.

Finally, the developers envision four new office buildings comprising 1 million square feet under the residential subdistrict, with two each to be built on the Coliseum parcel's northwest corner and just west of RexCorp Plaza. The tallest would be no more than 175 feet.

Fitting this many residents, visitors and employees onto a parcel this size depends on intensive, efficient parking development. The Lighthouse proposal features parking decks that may be as much as two

stories under ground and one and a half stories above, with the exception of the Coliseum parking deck, three stories above ground. Spaces associated with the Coliseum and offices are to be shared, used by commuters during the day and by Coliseum visitors at night.

The developers admit that they don't have enough parking to comply with the Town of Hempstead's building code, but if they did, they maintain it would be wasted. They plan to conduct a "shared parking study" to demonstrate that the 17,211 spaces they have planned will be enough.

The Lighthouse Group has dedicated \$55 million toward roadway improvements needed to accommodate the development's added traffic and connect to the larger Hub transit network envisioned by Nassau County planners. They also plan to operate a bus trolley system which will serve the site and its surrounding area.

Matthew Frank, managing director of the Lighthouse group, said the developers also have committed to participate in a pilot program of the U.S. Green Building Council's LEED for Neighborhood Development, to certify the Lighthouse project as a "green" or sustainable development.

Mindful of the feedback they got on early plans comparing the development to Queens, the Lighthouse Group this summer hired Baltimore-based Development Design Group and the Spector Group of Woodbury to overhaul them. DDG scrapped the towers and plazas of the last version in favor of a more "psychologically manageable" streetscape, integrated with the surrounding community.

Approvals for the project can't come too soon, say the long-suffering Islanders, who don't understand why Wang couldn't secure approvals long ago to renovate an arena that is now one of the nation's oldest.

"They should have had it done by now," said team captain Bill Guerin yesterday. "This has been way too long coming."

Staff writer Eden Laikin contributed to this story.

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