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THE HUB

## Congestion an Issue in Coliseum Property Plan

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UNIONDALE

DEVELOPERS selected to build on 77 acres here, including the Nassau Veterans Memorial Coliseum site, began a publicity blitz nearly two weeks ago to announce that they would file their latest plan, along with a request for a zoning change, with the Town of Hempstead last Wednesday.

But the developers, Scott H. Rechler and [Charles B. Wang](#), offered few details to address some of the issues that have emerged in discussions among local officials, civic groups and the developers' own consultants.

Among the most critical is traffic congestion. The conceptual plan the developers filed for the \$2 billion project, called the Lighthouse at Long Island, includes 2,000 housing units, a million square feet of offices, a half-million square feet of retail shops, 250,000 square feet of convention space, concert and sports facilities, and two towers of more than 30 stories with luxury hotel rooms and condominiums.

But there has been no public study yet of the impact that such a dense development would have on existing roads and transportation systems.

"The issue that people will want to look at most closely is the traffic analysis," said Neal Lewis, executive director of the Neighborhood Network, a nonprofit energy-conservation organization in Farmingdale. "You should get the transportation plan in place first, but I suspect the builders don't want to wait for that."

There is little question on that point. The developers have filed plans months ahead of the deadline established in their agreement with Nassau County, which owns the site and would provide a 99-year lease. And RexCorp Realty, the development firm of which Mr. Rechler is chairman, announced on Monday that it would start a \$40 million renovation of the 11-story Marriott Hotel next to the coliseum in December.

A 2006 county report on its transportation requirements analyzed current traffic conditions but did not take into account the Lighthouse project, said Patricia Bourne, the county planning department commissioner.

The report recommended connecting a future transportation system between the coliseum site and the Mineola train station. It could be either light rail (passenger cars running on a simple rail); buses with signals that give them right of way at intersections; or a monorail like the AirTrain from Jamaica station to Kennedy International Airport, Ms. Bourne said.

Since then, the Federal Transit Administration has given Nassau a \$20 million grant for a more detailed traffic study to include the Lighthouse project. Ms. Bourne said that such an analysis would begin next year but declined to say how long it would take.

Mr. Lewis and others say that without the results, residents and town officials will have a hard time assessing the impact of the project on the vicinity.

“This information is needed in order for the public to see how this large project integrates into our transportation system,” said Eric Alexander, executive director of Vision Long Island, a nonprofit organization that advocates what it calls smart growth.

Mr. Alexander is one of dozens of planning advocates, civic leaders, government officials and others whom Mr. Wang and Mr. Rechler appointed to an advisory committee to look at these and other issues. Mr. Rechler said they also had hired a traffic engineering firm and a parking consultant.

But without a county traffic study, efforts to gain approvals for the development as proposed could be hindered.

“There are people who would support a higher-density project if there were a transit plan connected to it,” Mr. Alexander said.

Mr. Wang, the founder of Computer Associates, owns the New York Islanders hockey team and the New York Dragons arena football team, both based at the coliseum. Speaking at Islanders headquarters in Plainview a week before filing their plans, he and Mr. Rechler described what they envision.

Mr. Rechler talked about smart growth development and the pedestrian-friendly design of the project they want to build. Both lauded its “grand canal,” which in renderings looks like a modernized Venetian waterway flowing under pedestrian bridges.

THE canal, bordered on each side by wide sidewalks and retail shops, is the project's Main Street, leading to a plaza outside the coliseum.

The coliseum would be gutted, renovated and expanded to nearly twice its current 435,000 square feet. The new sports center would have four ice rinks, several basketball courts and a two-level concourse with shops, restaurants and additional sports facilities, Mr. Wang said. The arena would seat 20,000 for concerts and basketball games and 17,500 for hockey games.

The roughly triangular piece of real estate adjoins 75 acres owned by Mr. Rechler. Across Hempstead Turnpike is RexCorp Plaza, an office complex with two glassy oval-shaped towers. On the north side is Omni, another office building. The area is also flanked by [Hofstra University](#), itself undergoing change as it prepares to expand with a medical school, and by Nassau Community College.

The development would add parking underneath all housing and retail developments. Pedestrian bridges would span the major highways that sports fans now scamper across, aided only by traffic lights, when they park in lots at the office towers. A trolley to circle the development is proposed, as well as a people mover for the circular bridge over Hempstead Turnpike.

The developers said little about what kind of housing would be built — only that there would be 2,000 units, some would be priced below market rates, and many would be luxury condominiums.

In addition to preparing traffic studies, the developers will be required to assess the project's economic impact and its effect on water quality and sewage flows. The developers have committed \$50 million for road improvements, Mr. Rechler said.

Mr. Rechler and Mr. Wang will have to come up with details about transportation and housing during the approval process. And that is where many will find out where the conceptual model ends and the real project begins.

“A lot of civic groups and residents are realizing that this is a multiyear process,” Kate Murray, the Hempstead supervisor, said, “and they're just like the Town of Hempstead, waiting to see what the details of the plan are.”

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