

Long Island Business NEWS

Where Business Gets Down to Business

 [Print this article](#)

Hub plans finally filed in Nassau

By David Winzelberg

Friday, November 16, 2007

Developers Scott Rechler and Charles Wang filed plans for their sweeping redevelopment of 150 acres of prized Nassau County property this week, setting into motion a laborious approval process that could take as long as two years.

The \$2 billion project, which is almost certain to raise the hue and cry from anti-development quarters, must pass muster with zoning and planning officials, environmental experts and elected leaders. Ultimately, the town board of Hempstead will decide if the ambitious project gets built.

It already has at least one fan: Nassau County Executive Thomas Suozzi, who calls the project “a paradigm for new suburbia.”

“The rules of the ’40s and ’50s can’t solve our problems today,” Suozzi said. “This is the type of project that can do that. This is very important to everyone’s future on Long Island.”

The plan envisions twin towers of more than 30 stories, 2,300 housing units, 1 million square feet of new office space and 500,000 square feet of retail. A transformed Nassau Veterans Memorial Coliseum would hold up to 20,000 fans for concerts and hockey games, while an indoor sports complex would offer ice rinks, basketball courts and a health club.

Also included: 250,000 square feet of conference and convention space and a park.

The design creates two main north and south boulevards – one with a canal and fountains – and five or six streets intersecting them. Thousands of parking spaces would be built below or partially below ground level throughout the site, providing easy access for residents, shoppers and visitors, the planners said.

In an interview this week, Rechler predicted speedy approval of the project, on which he hopes to break ground in 2009.

“This project is getting the attention it needs,” Rechler said. “We should be in and out of there in 18 months.”

Built in stages over 10 years, the so-called Lighthouse project would be the largest LEEDs-certified “green” development ever on Long Island. It would also be one of Long Island’s largest public-private partnerships: the county owns 77 acres of the Uniondale site, which it has agreed to lease to the developers for 99 years. The finished project is expected to generate \$60 million a year in property tax revenue, 16,000 construction jobs and thousands of permanent jobs.

In preparation for the development, a \$40 million renovation of the developers’ Long Island Marriott is already underway, including redecorated rooms, a spruced up lobby and conference areas and a new facade.

Suozzi sees the development as one part of a broad rethinking of the county, generally considered America’s first suburb, that includes brownfield and downtown redevelopment, with a focus on minority neighborhoods.

The project’s heavy accommodation of the automobile is sure to raise concerns from public transportation officials, and housing advocates will be quick to point out that the plan allows for fewer than 500 lower-cost “next generation” housing units.

Rechler concedes there is still work to be done, including squaring the project’s transportation element with the mayors of the villages of Hempstead and Mineola, which are home to the closest railroad stations. Many elements of the project’s design are also subject to change as the project moves forward.

But, Rechler said, he looks forward to the input.

“Working from the bottom up is better than trying to force-feed people,” Rechler said. “That’s nothing new – it’s always been the way to get things done.”

© 2007 Long Island Business News

